

Acts 13 – Sending

Oh my – it is so very good to be back with all of you this morning. I have missed being with you these last few weeks – of course thankful for technology that has allowed us to keep moving forward – but so very glad to be back together in person this morning.

This morning we are in Acts 13 – looking at the church at Antioch. For those of you that tuned in to our Facebook feed while I was home sick, you may recall 2 Sundays ago, in Acts 11, we started looking at this incredible church in the strategic city called Antioch. Antioch, if you remember, was a major city in the Greco-Roman world. A melting pot of cultures, a major hub for business – a strategic city.

But interestingly – The apostles didn't sit down one night, roll out a map, and start looking at cities that needed churches and decide – hey let's go plant a church in Antioch. Maybe let's get a great vocalist, and a dynamic speaker, and a team of people to go to Antioch – we'll spend 6 months in the community do "ministry" and then we'll have some preview services, roll out our social media strategy so we can be on Instachat and Twitbook. Maybe throw some block parties and rent out some bouncy houses. Find a cool warehouse type building to rent somewhere, or maybe a local middle school. No, the church at Antioch wasn't planted that way. Kids – any of you remember how the church at Antioch was planted?

Acts 11:19-20

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks^[a] also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.

Now kids – here's a bonus question – Who was scattered as a result of the persecution? What were their names? Trick question – we don't know their names. Here's what we do know.

Acts 8:1-3

On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. ² Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. ³ Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.

So, what we know, is that unnamed Christians, with the power of the Holy Spirit, went everywhere sharing and showing Jesus, and this church popped up in Antioch. And the church at Antioch, I believe (and I don't think it's a stretch to say this) would send out the greatest mission team (other than Jesus) in the history of the church. And what I want us to consider this morning, as we look to Acts 13, is that Kingdom-Focused Churches will always be Sending Churches. In fact, a pastor that I listen to regularly talks about sending capacity vs. seating

capacity. So many get caught up on seating capacity – while the church’s primary concern always needs to be sending capacity. Not Sinning Churches, Sending Churches. Gotta pronounce the D really careful to pronounce the D.

If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn with me to Acts 13:1-5 – as we look at the Sending Nature of the church at Antioch. Acts 13:1-5

READ

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² As they were worshiping^[a] the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

⁴ So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ Arriving in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant.

PRAY.

I love this story. The story of how the church at Antioch was planted, and then how they sent out Saul, Barnabas and John.

V1 – The church’s leadership

In verse 1, Luke gives us this list of men that were leaders in the church at Antioch; and interestingly (shouldn’t surprise us) – just like the city of Antioch was a melting pot of culture, we see in this leadership group:

- Barnabas (Acts 4 tells us) with a Levite from Cyprus – An island in the Mediterranean Sea about 200 miles or so SW of Antioch
- Simeon called Niger – most believe from Africa
- Lucius from Cyrene – A city on the coast in North Africa (Modern day Libya not too far from Benghazi) – probably 800 miles or so SW of Antioch
- Manaen – Would have been part of the wealthy group – raised in Herod the Great’s home
- And then there was Saul – a converted Pharisee, Super Jew basically

So we have this diverse leadership team – likely serving the church, says as prophets and teachers – likely the elders at the church at Antioch.

V2 – As they fasted and worshiped

Don’t miss this. It wasn’t “as they held their strategic planning session”. If you know me, I have a business background – I am a BIG fan of strategic planning, in fact I’d suggest to you that

more churches need real strategic planning. BUT the non-negotiable here is fasting and worship – signifies a COMPLETE and TOTAL reliance on God to move and to lead.

And as they were fasting and worshipping the Lord – the Spirit of God spoke to them. Now, if you remember when we started several months ago in the book of Acts – one of the principles for understanding the book of Acts is there are some things that happen that are DESCRIPTIVE. There are other things that we read happening that are PRESCRIPTIVE. And we need to know the difference. I think this is one of them – not that the Spirit of God speaking – but How HE speaks. I believe that God has spoken completely and finally through the Word of God. And as we pray and fast and worship and meditate on the Word of God – the Spirit does move in us – but hear me – the Spirit of God works together with the Word of God.

So we are to pray like our lives depend on it, fast, worship and trust the Spirit of God to move in us THROUGH the Word of God.

Because as we've seen already in the early church – PRAYER isn't their last option – PRAYER is their first and BEST option.

V2 – Set Apart for me Saul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them

These are the last 2 guys I'd want to set apart for a different work. Hear me – like You'd want to be reading Saul's blog, and hear Saul preaching on Sundays and Wednesdays. I'd want to be reading his blog and hearing him preach anyway.

Barnabas – he's like the guy that runs the setup and tear down teams; the local outreach team; the mercy ministry team – like the 2nd to last guy you'd want to send out to

Illustration – You guys that know me, know I'm a sports junkie. In fact, when we got really sick, Victoria actually made me turn off ESPN after like 6 hours one day. I love sports. All the major team sports have trade deadlines – when they try and dump players they don't like, or that don't fit, or that don't want to be on their team anymore. Contenders try and get rid of some players and add a couple that may help them make a run in the playoffs. Here's what you don't ever see though – you don't ever see like the Cowboys try and dump a 26 year old Michael Irvin. Or the Chicago Bulls try and dump a 28 year old Michael Jordan. Or the Dodger want to dump Clayton Kershaw. You see no sports team is going to dump their best player in his or her prime. Sports teams – they keep their best so long as they can keep them happy and they can afford to keep paying them.

But hear me – see this in Scripture – the CHURCH – a church that has totally submitted itself to the Spirit of God and the Word of God – this type of church will be willing to send out its very best. Like the 1993 Bulls saying to the Pistons – yeah you guys can have Michael & Scottie. No problem. But because God's Mission, Spirit, Gospel and Church are UNSTOPPABLE – they are willing and eager to send out their very best.

God had prepared a work for them – God had sovereignly called and set them apart – and the Spirit instructs the church to respond.

V3 – They Prayed and Fasted More, Laid Hands, and Sent Out

The early church – the church at Antioch – was totally submitted to the Word of God, the Spirit of God and the Work of God. As they prayed, and fasted – they trusted the Word of God and sent out Saul and Barnabas as missionaries to take the Gospel to the nations.

CLOSING

Many of you know – hopefully all of you know – certainly those that have been a part of RCM from the beginning → our goal is to be a sending church. To reach people, disciple people and send people. Our goal at RCM isn't just to plant a church – but it's to plant a church that plants churches that plant churches until Jesus comes. But how? How will we ever be a sending church? Strategy? Sure. I've got lots of strategies that will hopefully help us in accomplishing this huge goal.

But more than that here are a couple of things I've become convinced of:

- We will never be a sending church until and unless we are absolutely convinced that the Gospel is REAL, TRUE and THE ONLY HOPE for the world.
 - Convinced that hell is real and absolutely horrifying
- Worship, Prayer and Fasting is OUR PRIORITY
 - No amount of talent will overcome prayerlessness
 - Stay tuned for more on these 3
 - Specifically Fasting – In January we will enter a season of fasting as a church
 - Renewed prayer emphasis, including a weekly gathering with no agenda other than to pray for our city, for our neighbors, and for our time of worship
- So captured by the Glory of God in Christ that to NOT share & show Jesus isn't even an option
- Believe that no one and no place are off limits

But hear me now too – these are more the corporate takeaways – but there's a more personal takeaway as well – Being a church that sends – Starts with understanding that every follower of Jesus, personally, is SENT. Has Been Sent → JOHN 20:21 “As the Father has sent me, I also send you”. The question is to whom have you been sent?

How do you answer that question? Let me share with you how I answer that question:

- I've been sent to my neighbors – most there is no indication of faith in Christ from how I know them. My neighbors – Mack and his wife, Tim and Debi, Nancy, Ron & Gloria, Ed & Loretta. God has placed our family – God has sent our family to 6148 41st St E – not because it's a home that meets our needs, but to Share and to Show Jesus to the families that we're surrounded by – to Live Sent

- But that's not the only place God has sent us to. He's also sent us to Rowlett Elementary school where my sons attend, and Rowlett Middle School where Victoria and Alexa are, and Braden River High School → not to get an education but to share and show Jesus to every family we come into contact and develop relationships
- He's also sent us to the Braden River Little League and the Miss Manatee Softball League.

Hopefully you get my point. So my question to you is this – where has God sent you, and to whom have you been sent?

This week – use your journals – map out where you've been sent – start praying – and then make a plan to start sharing and showing Jesus...