

“THE MAKING OF A MISSIONARY” Acts 13:1-5

“Acts” – Action! The more formal title of the book we are studying is: "The Acts of The Apostles." However, it should be quickly recognized that the book does not contain all the acts of all of the Apostles. It is mainly occupied with the personal activities and public addresses of the two principal apostles, Peter and Paul, and does little more than mention the other Apostles. The book is easily divided into two sections: chapters 1 through 12 have been called the Acts of Peter, the Apostle to the Jews. The second section: chapters 13 through 28 have been called the Acts of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

When we come to Chapter 13 we come to the beginning of the Acts of Paul. Here we have the beginning of the first of three missionary journeys of Paul. The great missionary movement which continues to this day was begun with this chapter.

Therefore, let us examine it carefully to see how the missionary movement was launched. The Lord Jesus, prior to His ascension, had given marching orders to the church saying, *“Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”* (Mark 16:15) The church is finally organizing to carry out these marching orders.

In these verses before us there are three principal thoughts that are foundational to the missionary enterprise: the Missionary Church, the Missionary Call and the Missionary Commission. Let us look at each in that order.

I. THE MISSIONARY CHURCH – v. 1

“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

This was the church in Antioch, not the church in Jerusalem. The Antiochian church was born in a missionary atmosphere. Antioch, not Jerusalem, was the cradle of world missions and from Antioch Paul began his three missionary journeys. In chapter 11 we studied the founding of this church in Antioch and in chapter 13 we have the functioning of the church. Notice that it was a:

Gifted church.

We are told that they had within the church *“certain prophets and teachers”* – five of them are named: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul. What a gifted group! Blessed is the church that has mature Christians who share in the leadership and ministry of the church!

Notice also the diversity within the church: Barnabas, *“son of encouragement,”* -- *“A good man, and full of the Holy Spirit in faith”* (Acts 11:24); Simeon, nicknamed "Niger" which is Latin for "dark-skinned" or "black" -- probably an African; Lucius, from Cyrene in North Africa which is modern Libya; Manaen, his name means "comforter," a man who had connections with the aristocrats having *“been brought up with Herod”*; Saul, former persecutor of Christians, a well-educated Jew.

God-focused church.

It is said that *“they ministered to the Lord and fasted.”* How did they “minister” to the Lord? That means that they were worshipping! Out of their worship came their work. We see this repeated throughout the Bible. Two examples will suffice: Moses bowed at the burning bush in worship and God said, *“Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”* (Exodus 3:10) Isaiah was worshipping and God said, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” And He said, “Go....”* (Isa. 6:8, 9) If we do not love God enough to worship Him, we will not love Him enough to work and witness for Him.

Generous church.

“they sent them away.” The gifted church was a generous church in that they gave two of their best members to the new missionary enterprise. I am going to say something here that may offend some church leaders, but that is not my intention. My intention is to clear up a misconception that I have seen throughout my over 50 years of ministry and that is: there is a prevailing attitude in many churches and among even some church leaders that, missionaries are second-class servants.

That is, if one cannot climb the ladder of servanthood success here in the USA, he/she can, as a last resort, be a missionary. I have first-hand knowledge of what I just said. I have served in the pastorate, on Mission Agency Boards, on Christian College Boards, as a Mission Agency Executive and as President of two seminaries and a Christian university.

I repeat, with a burdened soul, the average church is stingy when it comes to giving their most gifted servants to the world-wide missions program! The church body usually follows the church leadership in many churches and the thinking is as follows: “We want to keep so-and-so here in our church to help stimulate growth, contribute to the finances and help build a great work.” This is selfishness multiplied, magnified!

The church that is not a missions-minded church to the extent that it is actively cultivating and encouraging its members to be willing to go cross-culture in ministry is falling far short of the New Testament model. Giving money is necessary to fund the mission’s enterprise, but that does not take the place of giving members. A church that is not partners in the Great Commission is participating in the great omission! The church is a mission agency and if it fails in that respect, it will soon be a missing agency!

II. THE MISSIONARY CALL. – V.2

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Notice the words, *“while they ministered to the Lord”* or *“as they served the Lord”* -- that is while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting. Fasting is denying oneself food for the purpose of giving ourselves to seeking God in prayer.

Notice that the initial call to service did not occur in verse two. We read, *“I have called them.”* That statement indicates that they had already been called sometime in the past. When, we do not know. God had been dealing with those two, Paul and Barnabas, individually no doubt.

Let us look at Jeremiah in the Old Testament for another example of one whom God called. One time God said, "Twenty years from now I need a young man to be my chief prophet to Israel and to the nations -- I will give a baby boy to the wife of a priest in Anathoth, near Jerusalem. This little boy will grow up to be my prophet."

You ask, "Did God say that?" Yes, not in our language, but when Jeremiah, as a young man, was called to God's work, God said to him, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."* (Jer. 1:5)

Did Jeremiah's mother know this when he was born? Did his father know? Probably no one knew until the Lord was ready to call Jeremiah to his work and when God was ready for the boy, the boy was ready for God. Then came the call.

Like Jeremiah, Saul of Tarsus was chosen by God from infancy. Galatians 1:15 reads, *"God had chosen me from the day of my birth."* That day when he was going to Damascus to fight against Christ, but instead saw Christ - that was the day that Paul heard God's call.

To Ananias, God said *"He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and king's and the children of Israel."* (Acts 9:15) God knew what He wanted Paul to be from the day of his birth. And so it is with us.

You ask, "Does God have work for me to do?" Certainly! Else, why were you born and why were you born the second time? John 15:16 reads, *"You have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you...."* Do you know to what work you have been ordained by God?

There is a difference between the call to a ministry and the assignment to a place of ministry - a difference between vocation and location; between appointment and assignment:

**The appointment -- or vocation.*

When God appoints He gives the gifts that confirm the appointment. *"The gifts and callings of God are without repentance."* (Romans 11:29) That is, God does not change his mind about His plan for our lives! The giftedness does not change.

**The assignment -- or location.*

The places where the giftedness is exercised may vary as the following verses indicate:

*"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to **Seleucia**, and from there they sailed to **Cyprus**."* (v.4)

*"And when they arrived in **Salamis**, they preached the word of God."* (v.5)

*"Now when they had gone through the island to **Paphos**...."* (v.6)

*"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to **Perga** in Pamphylia...."* (v.13)

*"But when they departed from Perga, they came to **Antioch** in Pisidia...."* (v.14)

The new missions outreach and the new missionaries are on the move. Here in just a few verses we read of six cities in which they ministered.

"How can I know God's will or plan for my life?" There are three ingredients, from the human perspective, that must be in alignment:

1. God's Word to me - the Scriptures. God reveals His will in His Word.
2. God's witness in me - the Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word.
3. God's work around me - the situation in which God places me. The circumstances of life, the opportunities, etc. these in concert with the Scriptures and the Spirit confirm to us His will.

The church at Antioch along with Barnabas and Saul had this three-fold witness of God's will and they acted in faith, stepped out and the world-wide missionary movement was underway and continues to this day.

III. THE MISSIONARY COMMISSION. v.3

"Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

The call by the Spirit in verse two is not so much to Barnabas and Paul, as it was a call to the church. It was a call to the church to let them go -- to set them free! Consequently, notice that the church *"sent them away"* (v.3) and *"they being sent forth by the holy ghost....."* (v.4)

There were two parties involved in the sending: the Holy Spirit and the church. They had already been called and commissioned by the Holy Spirit and now the church, recognizing their call, had a public commissioning service which was human acknowledgment of divine anointing. I have had many and great blessings in the service of the Lord, but no greater blessing than being part of many Commissioning Services for missionaries being set apart and sent out by local churches. Shades of Acts 13!

Here we see not only two men in the will of God, but a church in the will of God. We see a church cooperating with the Holy Spirit. I give you a quotation from a source that may be quite surprising to you: "Ideally, when Christians meet, as Christians, to take counsel together, their purpose is not -- or should not be -- to ascertain what is the mind of the majority but what is the mind of the Holy Spirit -- something which may be quite different." (England's former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.) Amen! That is a good point! Seven times in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ chapters 2 and 3 we read, *"Hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Finally! At last! Sixteen years had elapsed since the Great Commission was given by the Lord Jesus. But now, at last, a company of Christians had sent forth their first missionaries. We shall follow this movement throughout the remainder of our study in the Book of Acts.

CONCLUSION

I hope you will ask, "How can I help in the work of evangelizing the world?"

First, a word to parents.

What can parents do to help? Below are several things that conscientious Christian parents can do:

- Parents can bring up children in a Christian home, where missionary principles are seen in the home and practiced by the family in their outreach in their community;
- They can attend a missions-minded church where missionary principles are taught and practiced;
- They can teach their children to give to the missionary budget of the church;
- They can entertain missionaries in their home, thus exposing children to them and their ministries;
- They can encourage their children to seek God's will for their lives regarding missions;
- They can correspond with missionaries, sharing letters with their children;
- They can have missionary literature in the home;
- They can pray for missionaries by name in their family devotional time and pray for their children by name, asking God to save them and reveal to them His plan for their lives;
- They can get missionary prayer cards and post them in conspicuous places in the children's rooms;
- They can encourage them to correspond with MK's – missionary kids - on the mission fields of the world;
- They can teach their children the names and fields of the missionaries supported by their church, etc.

Second, a word to young people.

God has a Peace Corps. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace, and the mission of those in the Peace Corps is to publish peace. Verse 49 of Acts chapter 13 reads, "*And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.*"

Young people, get involved in God's publishing business! He wants you. Will you serve the Lord or do you have other interests uppermost in your mind? Remember, God had only one Son and He was a missionary! And it is interesting to note that the only one among the 12 apostles who did not become a missionary was a traitor -- Judas!

Illustration:

The steamship Central America, on a voyage from New York to San Francisco, sprang a leak in mid-ocean. Another ship seeing the distress of the Central America drew near to assist her. The captain of the rescue ship called to the Central America: "What is the trouble?" The answer came back, "We are in bad repair, and we are going down; stand by until morning."

The ship attempting to assist called back saying, "Let us take your passengers on board now." But as it was near nightfall the captain of the Central America did not want to send his passengers to the other ship in the dark, thinking that some may be lost in the exchange and also he kept thinking that they could keep the ship afloat until morning. So he sent the message back to the rescue ship, "Stand by until morning."

Once again, the captain of the rescue ship called out, "You had better let me take your passengers now!" Again the word came back from the Central America, "Stand by until morning." About an hour and a half later the lights of the Central America suddenly disappeared. The ship had gone down and many perished. Because they thought they could be saved at another time, a more convenient time, they were lost.

The citizens of planet Earth are not going to be lost someday -- they are already lost and now is the time to reach them. Tomorrow may be too late! Do not delay! If you are not saved surrender your life to Jesus Christ receiving Him as your Savior -- your Lifesaver!

The song, "Throw Out The Lifeline," has never been more appropriate. Although the song is not sung much today, its warning is perhaps needed more today than ever before. The words are:

*"Throw out the lifeline across the dark wave;
There is a brother whom someone should save;
Somebody's brother! O, who then will dare
To throw out the lifeline, his peril to share?"*

*Throw out the lifeline! Throw out the lifeline!
Someone is drifting away;
Throw out the lifeline! Throw out the lifeline!
Someone is sinking today."*

It is an awesome thought that you may be someone's only connection to Christ! No doubt there is someone within your sphere of influence who is lost and who needs the only Lifesaver, the Lord Jesus Christ!

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