



**"To the Ends of the Earth"**  
**Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"**  
*Acts 13:1-12*  
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**Acts 13:1-12**

*(New International Version 1984, ©1984)*

***Barnabas and Saul Sent Off***

<sup>1</sup> In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

***On Cyprus***

<sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

<sup>6</sup> They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup> who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, <sup>10</sup> "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

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**Introduction.**

Chapter 13 begins a new section in our study of the book of Acts, and it describes what most scholars refer to as the third stage in the expansion of the gospel in the early church. You'll recall from our previous study that at the beginning of Acts, Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit, but then after the Spirit came on them they were to be His witnesses *"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

Chapters 1-7 of the book of Acts cover the first stage of fulfilling this mandate and the preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem. This is where the spiritual foundation for the early church was laid. Chapters 8-12 tell of the second stage and the work in Judea and Samaria, the areas just around and beyond Jerusalem. There we read how God used Philip, Peter and Saul, and



well as the persecution of the early church, to extend the gospel across racial and cultural barriers. Beginning with chapter 13 we read of the third stage and the expansion of the gospel to the entire Roman world. This was the beginning of what is referred to by scholars as the missionary era of the early church to the ends of the earth.

The word “missionary” has to do with the idea of sending. The Latin word *missum* means “to send”, and the words “mission” and “missionary” come from this root word. The mission of the church is the sending of the people of God by the leading and power of the Holy Spirit into the world where the name of Christ is not known and the Lord is not worshiped.

WHPC has been a mission-minded church for many years, but I think reflecting on this 13<sup>th</sup> chapter in Acts will shed even more light on how we can be a missional church with even greater effectiveness in the cause of Christ.

### **I. The Church in Antioch.**

Acts 11, which we studied a few weeks ago, told us how the church in Antioch began. Believers who were scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem in connection with the death of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Some of them, people from Cyprus in the Mediterranean and Cyrene in northern Africa, went to Antioch and began to speak not only to Jews but also to Greeks about the good news of Jesus Christ. The Lord was with them, and a great number of people turned to Christ.

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard about this, and they sent Barnabas, the son of encouragement, to go and check it out, and when he arrived he saw the good things God was doing there. Then he went looking for Saul in Saul’s hometown of Tarsus, and Barnabas persuaded Saul to return to Antioch to help establish this new church. The two of them stayed in Antioch for a whole year, and they taught great numbers of people. It was in Antioch that believers were first called Christians.

Chapter 13 picks up the story as Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem having delivered their gift to the church there which was suffering from a famine. Accompanying them was a young man named John Mark, Barnabas’ cousin. Barnabas and Saul were two of the leaders in the church in Antioch, a congregation which was to play a crucial role in the next step in the progress of the gospel.

The five people who are listed reflect in their names and their descriptions the diverse cosmopolitan character of the church in Antioch. Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean. He came from the priestly tribe of Levi who were responsible for worship in the temple. Simeon, who was also called Niger (which means “black”) was probably a black African, and he may have been the same Simeon who was conscripted to help carry the cross of Jesus when our Lord was crucified (Mk. 15:21). Lucius was from Cyrene, a city in North Africa in what today is known as Libya, and his name was Latin which meant he didn’t come from a Jewish background.

Manaen is the Greek form of a Hebrew name which meant he was a Hellenistic Jew. He grew up with a Herod Antipas, the same Herod who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist and before whom Jesus appeared during His night of trials before His crucifixion. This meant Manaen was a member of the Jewish aristocracy and part of the circle of Roman power in Judea before becoming a Christian. And Saul, who later changed his name to Paul, the Greek version of his name, to make his outreach to Greeks more effective, rounded out the Fab Five



of pastors and elders, or as we would call it today in Presbyterian terms, the Session of the church.

These men, representing the ethnic and cultural diversity of their day, were used by God to lead the church of Jesus Christ out of its geographical and ethnic ghetto into the broader world. They were diverse in their backgrounds and the ways they were brought up, but they were unified in their passion for Christ. God used this unity in their diversity to change the direction of the early church, and the congregation in Antioch continues to be a model for the kind of missional church I hope we strive to become by the power of God's Spirit in the years to come.

## **II. The Sending of Barnabas and Paul.**

One day while these church leaders were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (13:2). There are several things I want you to notice about the selecting and sending of Barnabas and Paul. First, to whom did the Holy Spirit reveal His will? Who is the "they" that is referred to here? It could be the five pastors and elders, or it could be the whole church in Antioch. Regardless, the point is that the Holy Spirit didn't reveal His will to just one individual. Rather, He revealed it to the whole group.

Usually, the best decisions are made in community, and the best vision for the work of God is also developed in community. Whenever I hear someone say, "God told me to do such-and-such," unless I also hear how the Holy Spirit has confirmed that through other believers in the context of community, I am suspicious of the person's declaration. The Holy Spirit doesn't just reveal His will to individuals; He usually works in community, and we see an example of that here.

The second thing I want you to notice about the calling and sending of Barnabas and Paul is what they were doing when the Holy Spirit spoke. They were worshiping God and fasting. If you and I want to hear the Lord speak to us, if we are asking Him to show us what we should do in a given situation, we would do well to remember God often speaks most clearly when we worship and fast. You and I are in the season of Lent right now, and historically fasting has been a discipline many people use to mark their observance of this holy season. It is a negative action, going without something like food, for the sake of a positive result, that we might grow closer to God and hear Him more clearly.

Third, notice what the Holy Spirit said: "*Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (13:2). The nature of the work to which the Spirit called these two men is not really specified; it's rather vague. But there must have been enough clarity to the call to give an awareness that Barnabas and Paul were to go and take the gospel somewhere else. Their time in Antioch had come to an end, and God wanted them to work in another part of His vineyard. There is no evidence that Barnabas and Paul volunteered for this missionary service. Instead, they were sent by the Holy Spirit through the church. It is the responsibility of every local congregation to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God to discern who the Lord is raising up and gifting and calling to be sent out from among us.

Finally, how did they respond? "*So after they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them and sent them off*" (13:3). The passage can also be translated "they let them go" or "they released them," which means the church freed Barnabas and Paul to follow the Lord's



calling in their lives. I think it was probably hard on the church in Antioch to lose two of their best leaders. Every church needs more encouragement, but there goes Barnabas. Every church needs great teachers, but there goes Paul. A healthy church gives away its best resources, and the congregation in Antioch released Barnabas and Paul for a bigger purpose. They laid hands on them in solidarity and sent them off.

### **III. The Work on Cyprus.**

Where did they go for their first missionary journey? They decided to return to Barnabas' home country of Cyprus which is located west of Antioch and south of modern day Turkey. They traveled first to Salamis, a commercial city on the east coast of the island, and they went to the synagogues and shared the gospel with Jews. Then they traveled through the whole island until they reach Paphos, the capital of Cyprus, on the western side of the island about 90 miles away from where they landed.

In Paphos there was a man who was the leading government official, the proconsul, whose name was Sergius Paulus, and he expressed interest in the gospel. But one of his advisors, Bar-Jesus, whose name meant "son of salvation," served as a court wizard or sorts, and he opposed Barnabas and Paul and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, called Bar-Jesus Elymas, a Semitic name for sorcerer, and Paul predicted he would be struck with blindness because of his deceit and the way tried to blind people to the truth of God. Something like a mist or darkness came over Elymas, and he became blind. This dramatic power encounter between light and darkness caused the proconsul to turn to the Lord, and he believed.

However, other than this one convert, we don't read of anyone else coming to faith. Missing in this text are the usual words we have come to expect in the book of Acts: "and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved!" Was the whole trip to Cyprus only for one person, Sergius Paulus? Perhaps so.

Success in ministry is not for us to measure; only heaven knows the true impact of our work. And in the middle of ministry we should not be surprised when we encounter opposition and even failure, like Barnabas and Paul apparently did here. There are no guarantees that even when we send our best people and we are walking in concert with the Lord's leading that everything is going to go well and there won't be any problems. Sometimes opposition and resistance is the surest sign we're doing the right thing because light is encroaching on darkness in the world.

Dr. Christy Wilson was a professor of missions Lorie and I had in seminary. For many years he was a Presbyterian missionary in Afghanistan. For the first 25 years, Dr. and Mrs. Wilson were in that country, they could not point to one Muslim who had come to faith in Christ. Many expressed interest, but no one became a follower of Jesus. Then in the 26<sup>th</sup> year, finally someone believed. Some people suggested Dr. Wilson was in the wrong place, that Afghanistan was an unresponsive field, but he knew God had him there for a reason. And his experience in Afghanistan prepared him to teach a whole generation of pastors and missionaries who have since seen thousands of Muslims become followers of Jesus.

Dr. Wilson taught us by his own example back then that success isn't measured by immediate results, and God only knows the full impact of what we do for Christ. Our calling isn't to be successful, our calling in Christ is to be faithful. And heaven rejoices when one



person returns to the Lord. The Christian life is filled with apparent failure and opposition from time to time, but God isn't finish writing the story yet. In a world that celebrates the bigger and better and a society that encourages upward mobility, it's important to remember Jesus' example of downward mobility whose ministry ended on a cross that led to an empty tomb. Barnabas and Paul learned something of these lessons, too, during their first missionary journey.

### **Conclusion.**

Long before there was *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and *Millionaire Matchmaker*, there was another TV show that used that name. Back in the 1950s, there was an old black-and-white television series called *The Millionaire* which explored the ways unexpected wealth changed life for better or worse. The show centered around the stories of unknown people who were given, seemingly out of nowhere, 1 million dollars from a benefactor who insisted he remain anonymous. Viewers saw only saw the right arm of the millionaire as he reached for a cashier's check and handed it to his executive secretary, a mild-mannered, good-humored, but no-nonsense man named Michael Anthony. Each week we watched the recipient and his/her response. Of course, every once in a while the million dollars would ruin the recipient, and every so often there would even be some, who for reasons I could never understand, refuse the gift!

That series gave way to the Dick Clark and Ed McMahon Sweepstakes, and I haven't seen it since it was aired. But I think of that show as an image for what you and I are invited to do, along with Barnabas and Paul. It's what we have been called and set apart to do, as well. "I have a check for a million dollars. All you have to do is receive it." How similar that is our calling in Christ. We are God's go-betweens, carrying his priceless gift to an unsuspecting and needy world. This joyous privilege is not just the task of a few, like Paul and Barnabas. It's the job of all of us who have come to know Christ.

Will you join the Lord in His mission of love for a lost and broken world? Let's take the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth! Amen.

