

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to the book of Acts 13

We have been going chapter by chapter and verse by verse through this historical book that the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write detailing the work of the Holy Spirit upon the early church.

We will be studying chapter 13 for the next few weeks – I haven't decided if we are going to break it in two parts or three.

Part of the reason that we are going to divide it is because of the length of the chapter but also because of the significance of the chapter.

You see, in chapter 13, Luke begins a new transition in the book of Acts – we begin to the journeys of Paul as the missionary to the Gentiles.

We also see the transition from the church in Jerusalem being the center of operations of the early church to the church in Antioch.

And finally, we see Paul being the central figure in the early church instead of the Apostle Peter.

In our study this evening, we are going to see the driving force of the church in Antioch – we are going to see the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes you hear me pray that we need to be a church that is led by the Spirit and not the flesh –

The church in Antioch provides an example of a church that did just that.

Let's pray...

[Act 13:1-12 NKJV] 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.

So here in chapter 13, Luke begins by giving us insight on the leadership of the church in Antioch –

These prophets and teachers in Antioch were its leadership.

From our studies that last two weeks, we already know about Barnabas and Saul.

They were teachers in the early church – we saw that back at the end of chapter 11.

However, they were also actively involved in serving the needs of the Church – it was the church in Antioch that sent Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to deliver the offerings that had been collected for them.

They were willing and available to meet the needs of the early church.

And we know from our study last week that they followed through and were faithful.

Simeon was called Niger which means black. That was his Roman name –

It is supposed that he therefore was from Africa.

We know of Lucius only his city, Cyrene – which is present day Libya. He may have been one of the founding members of the early church in Antioch – arriving before Barnabas did.

Manaen was a former rich kid.

He grew up with Herod

He went to the same fancy schools that Herod went to – by the way, this Herod was Herod Antipas, the Herod that put John the Baptist to death.

So I believe what Luke is doing here in verse 1 is that he is demonstrating the diversity of the leadership in the early church.

Even Barnabas and Saul had very distinct backgrounds –

Barnabas was a Levite, Saul was form the tribe of Benjamin.

Some of them were Jews, some of them were Gentiles.

These men served together, each using his gifts to serve the church.

The next verses show us how this vibrant Church was led.

It was led not by these leaders but by the Holy Spirit. Here's how:

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."

The word that Luke uses here for ministered – is an interesting one.

The word that is used here is the word where we get our word liturgy – which means the order of service in a church.

However, it is also the word that is used to describe the work that the Levites did in the Tabernacle and the Temple of the Old Testament.

The early leaders were responsible for the order of service in the Church.

Not just Church services - but for overseeing that everything was done orderly to the glory of God.

They went about their service with the same kind of commitment and zeal a Levite would have in the Lord's Tabernacle or Temple.

But the key word I want us to take note of is that Luke says that they ministered to the Lord.

And the reason that this is significance is because there is a big difference between ministering to the Lord and ministering for the Lord.

When we minister for the Lord, we are doing our work for the Lord – but when we minister to Him, we are doing it to Him, to bring Him the glory.

If I am ministering to Him, my focus is only one thing - pleasing Jesus.

That means, I am not bummed out because someone didn't respond to the gospel I shared with them –

I ministered to Him – that's all that matters.

Turn with me to Hebrews 13 – let's see what the author of Hebrews writes about ministering to the Lord.

[Heb 13:15-16 NKJV] 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of [our] lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of prayer, the sacrifice of walking in obedience – these are all ways in which we can minister to Him.

I had you make a note that these leaders fasted – and again, I want to reiterate that the scriptures never command us to fast – however, it is commended.

Paul was an individual who tells us in his epistles that he fasted often (2 Cor 11:28)

Church, God speaks when we fast.

But in order to hear Him, one of the things we have to do is tune out the flesh.

I remember hearing the illustration of an individual sitting in his living room watching two televisions at the same time – and both tuned to different channels.

One TV is broadcasting what God is telling me and the other one is broadcasting what the flesh desires.

The only way I am going to be able to hear the TV broadcasting God's message is by turning down the other television set.

That is what fasting does – it weakens the flesh and strengthens the spirit.

So as the leaders in the church in Antioch ministered to the Lord and fasted, God spoke to them.

We are not told how God spoke to them - almost certainly the Holy Spirit said this through one of the prophets in the group, either through a vision, dream or direct word from God.

And the message was –

Separate / Set aside Saul and Barnabas, from the rest of the church – notice the time table, “now” – without delay.

The word that Luke uses here is the same word that Jesus used when He was talking about the day when He will judge the nations - when He will separate the sheep and the goats.

And the reason for the separation is because the Holy Spirit is going to clearly define what their special ministry is.

I had you make a note of - for the work to which I have called them

Very important –

The Holy Spirit is the One who is doing the sending – not man.

It has been said that in ministry, there are those who are sent and those who just went.

God equips those that are sent. God meets the needs of those that are sent.

Those who just went – they are the ones that get burned out, they are the ones that experience burdens they are not equipped to carry. They are the ones who sometimes run the risk of harming those within the church.

3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent [them] away.

Notice that after receiving the message from the Holy Spirit, they continued in prayer and fasting –

Question – does this show a lack in faith? No

It shows no lack of faith to confirm the leading of the Holy Spirit.

God speaks perfectly but we hear Him imperfectly.

Continuing to fast and pray for a time gives God opportunity to show us we've really heard Him and not our own will or the will of others.

God gives us confirmation of His message.

However, when He gives us confirmation – we need to be obedient.

We can't just keep asking for confirmation because we do not want to abide by what God is telling us.

The laying of hands here by the church serves two purposes.

The first one is a way of praying for one another – so the men here are sending Barnabas and Saul off with their full support in prayer.

The other purpose of laying of hands is to show a public gesture that you are in agreement.

Before the Lord sent me down here, my pastor and some of the elders laid hands on me.

They were in agreement of the calling but also, they were demonstrating their full support through prayer.

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

Here we see that Saul and Barnabas were obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

They obeyed, they went.

Now, earlier I had stated that there are those who are sent and those who simply went.

In this case went indicates obedience – because they were sent by God.

It's no use finding God's leading if you do not intend to follow it.

If you are sent, you need to went! – makes sense right.

So they go to the coast and then they set sail to Cyprus.

Now, Cyprus was Barnabas' home town.

So it could be that when they got to Seleucia, Barnabas had a conversation with Paul and because Barnabas knew people there – they began their ministry in familiar territory – at home.

I think this provides an important application for all of us – we should never forget our witness at home.

Because if Jesus makes no difference in my home life, then what do I really have to share with others.

5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as [their] assistant.

Here in verse 5, we have a glimpse of the strategy that Saul and Barnabas used in their missionary trips.

When they would come into a city, the first place they would go to was a synagogue – here is the reason why,

The Jews had a custom that they would allow visitors – if they were learned, the opportunity to read from the scriptures and comment.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The gospel does not change.

But we can and should adapt our delivery of the message to our audience.

We should make every effort to know something about them and then meet them where they are at.

And that is something we are going to see Paul do – especially when he gets to Athens.

And we will see that he will present the gospel to them by meeting them where they are at.

6 Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name [was] Bar-Jesus,

Saul and Barnabas make their way from the east side of the island across to the west side of the island, and they encounter this individual by the name of Bar-Jesus.

The name means son of Joshua / son of Jesus.

Luke describes him as a sorcerer – an astrologer. The word that is used here is the word magi like the wiseguys that brought Jesus gifts.

Luke also describes him as a false prophet – meaning that he claimed authority from God he had not received.

7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

This Sergius Paulus was the governor who had been appointed by Rome to govern Cyprus.

The scriptures tell us that the governor was an intelligent man.

It means he liked to reason things out and put things together.

He was hungry for spiritual truth.

Now, BarJesus was the governor's spiritual counselor.

But when he heard about Saul and Barnabas – he was smart enough to see that their message was different than the one that he was hearing from Bar-Jesus.

So he summons them to find out if there was any truth to the message that Saul and Barnabas preached.

In other words, he was hungry for the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withheld them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Elymas – notice that Luke uses BarJesus other name.

It means the enlightened one – make a note of that.

He begins to debate / to oppose the message that Paul was preaching.

He interrupted as Saul and Barnabas delivered the gospel to the governor.

He knew the truth of the Gospel spelled certain doom for the deception he'd told the governor, so he did his best to counter the preaching of Barnabas & Saul.

Remember, he was a Jew – He was a false prophet.

Meaning that he could oppose Saul with the law and also with sorcery mumbo jumbo.

The point was that he was trying to hinder someone from receiving salvation.

And Jesus had a warning to those that did this.

[Mat 18:6-7 NKJV] 6 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

9 Then Saul, who also [is called] Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, [you] son of the devil, [you] enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?

Here at the beginning of verse 9, we see Luke address Saul as Paul for the first time.

Saul was named after the first king of Israel –

Saul in Hebrew means desired.

Paul is Latin – it means “little”

As he embarks on the ministry that he was sent to do – to the Roman world – it was only fitting that he take on his Roman name.

He understood the principle that when taking the Gospel to people, you identify with them.

That's what Jesus did when He was baptized in the Jordan; though sinless, He came to identify with humanity.

What's interesting is that Luke refers to Saul's name change to Paul in the story of Elymas.

Elymas, like I said earlier was a lofty title meaning The Enlightened One. It was a claim to greatness.

Paul means little, small.

Paul made no claim to greatness.

He knew he was just a little guy – but he had a great, big God!

And when it came to a showdown between Elymas & Paul; the Enlightened One versus the little one – it was no contest.

Here's the lesson: Those who are little in the Lord will always be vastly bigger & greater than the great ones of this world.

Paul doesn't lose his cool against Elymas – the scriptures tell us that he was filled with the Holy Spirit during this time as he gets ready to pronounce a curse against Elymas.

11 "And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord [is] upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Paul pronounces a curse – blindness.

However, it was only going to be temporary.

This tells us that it was not a punishment but had a purpose.

And I see two reasons for this.

1. The physical blindness of Elymas could represent to him his spiritual blindness.

He thought he was leading others in the truth but was being shown that he was the one who needed leading.

2. There was another person who was struck with temporary blindness for a time.

Paul had been struck blind on the road to Damascus when he was saved.

Elymas could emerge a saved man!

God is not willing any should perish but that all would come to repentance.

While Paul's words initially seem harsh they were the right words, spoken in the necessary tone, to bring the best result.

We don't know what happened to Elymas after his blindness ended...

But we do know that Sergius Paulus was saved.

12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

He saw what had been done; but what astonished him was not his spiritual advisor going blind - it was the teaching of the Lord.

Hearing the Good News – that God sent His Son to die so that we can have everlasting life in His presence.

He understood what had been done was for him – so that he might believe the Gospel and be saved.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. 25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. 26 May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

