

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #28

Acts 13:1-12

One day, when we were on vacation, I went down near the ocean on a somewhat chilly day and sat on a piece of driftwood located approximately 100 yards from the ocean to look for dolphins, whales or sharks. As I sat there, I prayed that God would send me someone to whom I could witness. Now mind you, I am back 100 yards from the ocean. All I saw was a young man riding a bicycle down by the ocean and some woman who was ¼ mile away walking in the opposite direction. As I sat there praying for an opportunity to witness, that woman suddenly turned around and started walking back toward my direction and eventually walked within a few feet of where I was sitting. I figured this was the person God wanted me to share Christ with so I said to her, “May I ask you a question?” She said yes. I asked her if she had ever heard of the gospel of the grace of God. She said she had heard of the term gospel, but wasn’t sure just exactly what that gospel was. So for the next few minutes I shared with her the truth about Jesus Christ. She listened intently. Then I told her I wanted her to get a Scofield Reference Bible and read it and read his notes. She wrote it down and said she would. Now in the beginning of the course of our conversation, I said to her, “Do you see that ocean right there?” “That gospel of God’s grace came right across that ocean.” The reason why we know about Jesus Christ and the Scriptures is because God sovereignly directed His Word to come right across the Atlantic. And if you want to get more technical than that, that gospel of grace came to us right from this church in Antioch. In many ways, you and I owe a debt to this church of Antioch because the historical roots of the gospel coming to us started out of this church.

THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH WERE DIRECTED BY GOD’S SPIRIT TO SEND TWO GIFTED MEN OUT TO THE GENTILE WORLD TO COMMUNICATE GOD’S GRACE GOSPEL, AND WHEN THEY PRESENTED THAT GOSPEL THEY FOUND THAT IT WAS OPPOSED .

There is no denying the fact that when we come to Acts 13, we come to a major change in church action. The program of God and the gospel of God’s grace moves from Jerusalem to Antioch; from Jews to Gentiles; from Peter to Paul; from Palestine to the world. The church of Antioch takes front and center stage and it begins a missionary outreach that will take the gospel of God’s grace out to the entire Gentile world.

I want you to notice that the key emphasis of this church was preaching and teaching God’s Word. We have already seen in Acts 11:26 that when Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, they taught for one year. This was not a shallow church. It was a church given to serious teaching and preaching. This created the environment in which the Holy Spirit could truly work.

There are three main historical facts brought out in the introduction of the action of this church of Antioch.

HISTORICAL FACT #1 - Key men taught in the church of Antioch. 13:1

Now the numbers of believers in this church of Antioch were huge (Acts 11:24), and so to feed this church God saw to it that there were the proper amount of gifted men who could accurately teach.

I want you to notice that in this church there were two key spiritual gifts that God used:

prophets and teachers. Now all prophets were teachers but not all teachers were prophets. A prophet was one who received direct revelatory messages from God and communicated that prior to the inspired Scriptures being written. Once the Scriptures were written the gift of prophecy ceased (I Corinthians 13:8). A teacher was one who taught the inspired revelation that was already in existence. God saw to it that this key Gentile church was thoroughly and soundly taught. Do not over look this. There is a major emphasis on teaching God's Word. The emphasis of the early church was on serious, systematic teaching of God's Word.

While on vacation, I had an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with three different people. One was a housewife from Alabama; one was a police officer from New York and one was a man who had been in a serious car accident from Reno. In the course of our conversations, all three brought up the fact that they were tired of visiting churches that featured bands, dancing girls and coffee shops. I was hearing this from people of the world. What people need when they go to church is an accurate understanding of God's Word and that is what this church of Antioch was known for.

We know one of the prophets who had been in Antioch was Agabus (11:27) who predicted the famine. Five of the key teachers are named.

- 1) Barnabas taught there and is named first. He apparently functioned as a key minister of this church because it was his decision to go get Saul.
- 2) Simeon taught there. The name Simeon is a Jewish name and he was also called Niger, which means he had a dark complexion. Many believe that this Simeon is the Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross (Mk. 15:21). We don't know much about him, except he was apparently Jewish and had a heart for Gentiles and he was a gifted teacher.
- 3) Lucius taught there. He was from Cyrene (North Africa). Some believe this is the Lucius Paul mentions in Romans 16:21. Many believe that this is a reference to Luke, who many speculate was much involved in the church of Antioch.
- 4) Manaean taught there, who apparently had been very close to Herod the tetrarch, who actually killed John the Baptist. And of course,
- 5) Saul taught there too.

Now what is most interesting about this is that it is very probable that two of the five mentioned in this verse (Simeon and Lucius) are black men who knew God's Word, and were teaching God's church. As we have observed all the way through this book of Acts, what people need are those who know God's Word and doctrines and can teach it regardless of the color of their skin.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 - Key ministry took place in the church of Antioch. 13:1-3

Now the pronoun "they", in my understanding of Greek grammar, refers back to the five leaders just mentioned. There are six main features these leaders had in Antioch:

Leadership Feature #1 - The leaders taught . 13:1

These men were totally focused on teaching God's Word. In fact the word "teacher" (διδασκαλοι) means these men were focused on instructing the church in the Word of God. This was a church given to careful biblical instruction and exposition.

Many believe that Antioch is a true prototype of a missionary church. In fact, Kent Hughes said that Antioch is the "perfect profile for a missionary church" (*Acts*, p. 174). The thing that causes this church to become this is its focus on preaching and teaching God's Word. I find that so amazing because many churches who think they are really mission minded churches focus on evangelism, but Antioch focused on careful instruction in God's Word.

Leadership Feature #2 - The leaders ministered . 13:2a

The word "ministry" (λειτουργουντων) is the Greek word from which we get our English word liturgical. What this means is that these were the leaders who held a public office in the church and were responsible to oversee the worship in their service for God. There apparently was an organized structure to the worship in the church of Antioch. It was not some loose free for all operation. Real ministry takes place in the context of preaching and teaching God's Word.

Leadership Feature #3 - The leaders fasted . 13:2b

It is very possible that these leaders were so focused on teaching and praying about the church and its outreach, that they were not even taking time to eat. These were disciplined men who were willing to go without food for the work of God and the church of God.

Leadership Feature #4 - The leaders prayed . 13:3a

The word for prayer means that these leaders realized that when they prayed they were in the presence of God and that was their perspective of prayer. Part of the responsibility of leaders is to pray for the church.

I love something Kenneth Gangel said about the climate in this church; it was not a frantic activity of programs that were burning out everybody in the congregation, it was an attitude of teaching, worship, fasting and prayer.

Leadership Feature #5 - The leaders submitted to the Holy Spirit. 13:2

It is a wonderful thing when you have leaders who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. That is something we need to consistently pray about. We need to pray that we will always be so sensitive to the Holy Spirit that we will never do things to grieve Him or quench Him. Now the text says that the Holy Spirit "said", which does seem to suggest that there was some audible communication that took place (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 265-266). Keep in mind that there were prophets in this church and prophets did receive direct revelation of God. As they were praying and meditating it is very probable that God's Spirit spoke to the prophets and revealed that they were to separate Barnabas and Saul for God's Gentile expansion ministry. God's Spirit chose two men and the other leaders realized it.

God “calls” specific men to specific ministries. He called two men to go to the mission field. He does not call everyone in the church. He does not call the other prophets and teachers. He calls two men; Saul and Barnabas.

During the time that Saul and Barnabas taught in the church of Antioch for a year (Acts 11:26), the people began to realize that God’s hand was uniquely on these two. The people sensed it and so did the leadership. So when the Holy Spirit singled them out it was no surprise, and so they were commissioned to leave Antioch and take the message to the Gentile world.

Leadership Feature #6 - The leaders sent out Saul and Barnabas. **13:3b**

It is a shame that most churches overlook what happens here. When they knew that the Holy Spirit had really singled out these two men and gifted them, “they sent them away.” They did not say we need to go to the print shop and get a bunch of prayer letters printed so we can get financial support. They did not say we need to put together resume’s for these two so they can go on some deputation work so we can get them offerings. They sent them. **There is not one appeal here for funds for mission work truly orchestrated by God.**

I am convinced if God is truly calling someone to go do a work for Him, He will supply the money and people do not need to go from church to church asking or begging for it. He will supply the needs of those He really calls. Antioch knew these two were sent from God and Antioch supported them and sent them away. This church plays a major role in the gospel moving out to the whole world. Behind this are spiritually minded men who take God’s Word and prayer very seriously.

There are a couple of observations we want to make here. First, only two were selected from a huge number of people. I get very suspicious of churches who claim they support huge numbers of missionaries. Frankly, I wonder how many are truly called and gifted by God.

Second, I want you to notice that they do not tell everyone to leave the church and take the gospel to the world; they tell two. The reason why I say this is that many churches almost seem to lay a guilt trip on people if they are not willing to leave and go someplace. I know of one guy who was in a church and the minister was challenging all the people to go and he did. He quit his job and went and he fell flat on his face. He wasn’t really called by God, but by a minister.

He wasn’t really trained. He didn’t really know God’s Word and he went out and found himself in a big mess. Eventually he went back to his hometown, which he should have never left in the first place.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 - Barnabas and Saul embark on their first missionary journey from Antioch. **13:4-12**

Now notice how **verse 4** begins; this is all directed by the Holy Spirit. So we are looking here at a true Holy Spirit led ministry. I want to point out something interesting from Greek. In **verse 3** we read that the church “sent them away.” In **verse 4** we read that they were “sent by the Holy Spirit.” The Greek words “sent” are different.

The Greek word in **verse 3** (απολυω) means the church “released them” or “freed” them (Ibid., p. 53) and the Greek word in **verse 4** (εκπεμπω) means it was the Holy Spirit who sent them (Ibid., p. 140). What this practically means is that it was the Holy Spirit who was truly sending out these two and the church realized it and supported them and released them for this ministry.

You can certainly support whomever you want with your money. However, your money will probably be used more by the Holy Spirit when it is in harmony with a church that is focused on prayer and preaching God’s Word.

Observation #1 - We learn of their missionary travel itinerary. **13:4**

According to **verse 4**, Saul and Barnabas left Antioch and traveled about sixteen miles north to Seleucia and they got on a boat that was heading to Cyprus, which was Barnabas’ home island (Acts 4:36) located about 130 miles away. There is the first place they will begin.

Cyprus was a Roman province resort island known for its copper mines and shipbuilding. William Barclay says Cyprus was called the “Happy Isle” because of its wonderful climate which offered everything necessary for a happy life (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 99). It was the Bahamas of the Mediterranean. It was a place that desperately needed the gospel of God’s grace. So Barnabas and Saul were directed by God to start there. Obviously the church of Antioch had financially supported them so they could make this trip.

Observation #2 - We learn about their missionary ministry philosophy. **13:5**

According to **verse 5**, they ported at Salamis, which is the closest seaport on the east side of the ocean and the largest city on the east side of Cyprus. Now their missionary plan was very simple but very effective, and ought to be used by every missionary today:

- 1) They went to a city. They did not go to jungles.
- 2) They went to synagogues. They start in Jewish synagogues, but if not welcome, they go to Gentiles.
- 3) They proclaimed the Word of God. The word “proclaim” (καταγγελλω) means they verbally heralded and proclaimed truth in an authoritative manner. They did not go to people and try to trick them into a religious conversation; they heralded truth.
- 4) They worked together as a team. It is interesting that John Mark is mentioned as a helper. What that means is that he assisted Saul and Barnabas any way he could. He was Barnabas’ young cousin (Colossians 4:10).
- 5) They went through the entire island of nearly 100 miles from Salamis to Paphos.

Observation #3 - We learn about their ministry opposition at Paphos. **13:6-12**

About 100 miles to the southwest of Salamis was another port city named Paphos. This was a key island city of provincial government. What happens here is critical.

While there they met a **Jewish false prophet** who is satanic and demonic whose name is “Bar-Jesus”, which means son of Jesus. According to **verse 7**, Bar-Jesus was an attendant of Sergius Paulus who served on the Roman proconsul, and who was a very intelligent man.

The word “intelligent” (συνετός) means this man had a mind that understood things at a high level of intelligence.

Now one of the things that made him intelligent is that he wanted to know truth and he wanted to hear the Word of God taught by Barnabas and Saul. Listen, this is what the most intelligent people in the world need. They need someone gifted by God to teach them the Word of God. Smart intelligent people want to know truth, not a bunch of emotional religious nonsense.

According to **verse 8**, Elymas, which is a Hebrew word meaning sorcerer, opposed Saul and Barnabas because this Roman leader believed the truth and he wanted to turn him away from “the faith”. Saul and Barnabas were teaching him that faith in Jesus Christ would save him.

But now notice **verse 9**, Saul is called Paul for the first time and from this point on his name will be used first because Saul is about to take on this demonic man. Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and he fixed his gaze on the sorcerer and he said six things to him: I want to point out something here. The goal is to present the gospel of the grace of God and there are some who believe you should never say anything that will upset people. Well look at what Paul does here:

- 1) You are full of deceit; 13:10a. He is full of deceptive lies.
- 2) You are a fraud; 13:10b. He was a religious phony.
- 3) You are the son of the Devil; 13:10c. Remember his name is Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus.
- 4) You are full of unrighteousness; 13:10d. You do not conform to God’s Word at all.
- 5) You do not present God’s Word straight; 13:10e.
- 6) You will be made blind; 13:11 - just as soon as Paul said that, God made him blind.

The blindness would be temporary, perhaps like Paul’s own blindness.

Now carefully notice **verse 12**; the intelligent proconsul believed and was saved. He was amazed by the teaching. He saw the miracle, but he was amazed by the teaching of the Word, which was coming from Paul and Barnabas.

It is interesting that archeology has confirmed the fact that inscriptions have been found indicating that Sergius Paulus and his entire family who lived on Cyprus became Christians (Hughes, p. 179). It is Gentiles who are beginning to believe the Word of God and the Jews oppose the Word of God. Some scholars point out that when this man believed on the Lord, there is no mention of any water baptism.

What was the gospel that he believed? What was that gospel that came from Antioch across the Atlantic? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.