

Saul and Barnabas are Sent Out

Text: Acts 12:25-13:3

Introduction:

At the end of Chapter eleven, we saw how Saul (the Apostle Paul) was brought back onto the scene of biblical history. A great work had begun to spring up in Antioch, compelling Barnabas to go and find Saul (at Tarsus), so that he could help establish the work there in Antioch. And they spent a year there, teaching and preaching, and helping to secure that work, which would now become a great missionary base, serving the needs of Asia Minor, Greece and beyond. And last we saw, there were prophets, who had been sent to Antioch, one of which was Agabus, who had prophesied of a coming world wide famine. And this led to the brethren at Antioch, taking up a collection for the people of Judea, which was to be sent to Jerusalem, by the hands of Saul and Barnabas.

Then in chapter twelve, Luke led us to take a short excursion to see how Herod had harassed the church in Jerusalem, at about that same time. He had killed the Apostle James with the sword, and had Peter arrested, with the intention of bringing him out to the Jews, after the commencement of the (week long) Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, the church prayed and God sent his angel to free Peter, who had then escaped the hand of Herod. Following this, the Lord struck Herod dead, when he had accepted worship from the people of Tyre and Sidon, who had claimed that Herod was a god, after he had given a very eloquent speech, while decked in his royal robes. God had avenged His glory, while removing a significant threat to His church.

And now, this morning, we go back to where we left off with Saul and Barnabas, and the remainder of the Book of Acts, will closely follow the life and ministry of Saul/Paul.

I. Saul and Barnabas are Sent Out

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark" (vs. 25).

Here, we fast forward to the conclusion of Barnabas and Saul's mission, of delivering the famine relief aid to Jerusalem, very likely, after the death of Herod (Herod died in 44 AD. The famine probably occurred sometime in 46 AD). And we are also told that when they had

returned to Antioch, they took John Mark with them. Obviously, they believed that he would be useful to them, in helping with the great work up at Antioch.

"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" (vs. 1).

Now brethren, there are two points of interest that I want to bring out, concerning the list of men, given here. First, notice the broad range of ethnic cultures, which God has used to provide leadership for this multi-ethnic church in Antioch. There is a beautiful picture here of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is made up of all ethnic backgrounds, converging together into one body; one culture in Christ. Among the prophets and teachers, first, you had Barnabas, who, although being a Jew, was from the Island of Cyprus (east of Antioch, in the Mediterranean Sea). Then, we are told of a man named Simeon, who was called "Niger." The Latin term, "Niger," actually means "black," and it is very likely that Simeon was a man of dark complexion, probably from somewhere in North Africa. Then, Lucius, we are told, was from Cyrene, which was in Libya, Africa. Following Lucius, we are told of Manaen, "who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch." Herod the tetrarch was the Herod, who ruled during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry (he had had John the Baptist beheaded...etc). He was the uncle of Agrippa, who had just died in the previous chapter. And so, Manaen, would have grown up then, heavily entrenched in the Roman culture, even as Herod the tetrarch was. And then, finally, there is Saul, who though entrenched in Judaism (being a Jew), was actually from Tarsus, which is northwest of Antioch.

And so, brethren, notice how the Lord, by His Spirit, gifts and equips leaders (prophets and teachers) in the church, in such a way that, the various cultures and ethnic backgrounds, are all represented. In other words, brethren, the Lord helps preserve the multi-culture nature of the church, by providing prophets and teachers from each culture. And brethren, I say all of this just to emphasize again, the Lord's intention, of not dividing His church by culture, but rather, of uniting all cultures, into the single culture of Christ. The Word of God is the unifying factor, is it not? Christ is the Head, and we all, together, make up the Body....with white, black, Asian, Spanish, Polish, German, French...etc, body parts. And so, here again, in the Cosmopolitan city of Antioch, this multi-ethnic church, has multi-ethnic leadership, representing the universal

nature and fabric of Christ's church. It is the bridge from Judaism into Christianity. "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch!" (Acts 11:26)

2) Notice something worth noting about Manaen. Again, we are told that he grew up with Herod the tetrarch (Antipas). These men were brought up together, but consider the sovereign hand of God in directing their paths, in two very opposite directions. And looking forward, from the beginning of their lives, one might be very tempted to covet the path of Herod Antipas, far over the path of Manaen. But consider their paths, brethren:

1) We know very very little about Manaen, but what we do know was that he was a Christian, who was either a prophet or teacher in the church at Antioch. His destiny, as it were, was to provide leadership for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, unto the advancement of His invisible kingdom. From the world's standpoint, he was not a man to be coveted. From the standpoint of heaven, he was beyond blessed!

2) Historically and Biblically, we know much about Herod Antipas. For one, he was a ruler over a few portions of Israel, being the son of Herod the Great, who died, when Jesus was in Egypt with Joseph and Mary (Herod the Great was the raging murderer, whose paranoia, led him to kill many, seeking to preserve his throne...including his own wife and some of his children, and all of the young male, Jewish children, following the birth of Jesus). Antipas married his niece, Herodias, who was the wife of Antipas's half brother Philip (John the Baptist called him out on this, calling him to repent of this adultery, which ultimately led to John's beheading). Herodias was the sister of Herod Agrippa (who just died in Acts 12). Agrippa, turned against his uncle, Antipas, convincing the Roman Emperor, that Antipas was planning a rebellion against Rome. This led to the exile of both Antipas and his wife (by adultery) Herodias, to the city of Gaul, which is in modern day France. Agrippa was then given all of his uncle's wealth, property and domain (to rule over). Following his exile, Antipas was no longer heard from, having died sometime after 39AD, the year of his exile.

And brethren, this is the short form of all that had happened with Antipas. The Herods, in general, though given much power at times, were racked with many, many chaotic circumstances and much family dysfunction.

But, here in our text, Manaen is serving a far more glorious and rewarding purpose, isn't he?...while Antipas, whom he grew up with, is very possibly dead at this point, or at best, impoverished and in exile. Two very different paths. Which path would we covet? Temporal

royalty, racked with all manner of family dysfunction and chaos, leading into a stripping of all glory, and eternal judgment soon after? Or, hardly any recognition or wealth in this life, but serving in the invisible but glorious and eternal kingdom of The Lord Jesus Christ!

"As they [the prophets and teachers] 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'" (vs. 2).

As these prophets and teachers were conducting their ministry to the Lord (instructing and edifying the church at Antioch), apparently, they had fasted, with the intention of seeking out the Lord, concerning further direction. It seems as if they were asking, "Lord, where do we go from here? What is Your will, concerning our ongoing labors here at Antioch?" We are not really given any further details, concerning the nature and purpose of the fast, but the "Holy Spirit given" solution, would seem to confirm my assumption. Needless to say, we could easily find warrant here, for fasting in the New Covenant church, and particularly (in this context), among those who are in leadership, especially concerning, seeking divine guidance for the direction of the church.

And in their case, the Holy Spirit responds, presumably through the prophetic utterance of at least one of the prophets, who were present among them. And what does the Holy Spirit say? He tells them to separate (to set apart) Barnabas and Saul for a specific work, unto which He has called them. Barnabas and Saul were called out of the work at Antioch, to extend the kingdom of God further, into unreached territories, ultimately and especially "to the ends of the earth" (to the furthest Gentile regions).

"Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (vs. 3). In obedience to the Spirit's call, they then send Barnabas and Saul out. And this "missions commendation" is itself accompanied by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands. They commend Barnabas and Saul to the safe keeping of God, as they are separated spatially, in keeping with the mission, unto which they were appointed.

Note the following three things:

1) The Holy Spirit equips and calls those who are truly to be set apart for ministry. While we no longer hear the Spirit's voice by way of prophetic utterance, the Spirit is still the One who calls and sets apart unto the ministry. There are, at least, three general parts to this calling: The inward desire ("This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop/overseer, he

desires a good work" -1 Tim. 3:1); the meeting of the Biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9); and an outward confirmation of the calling, given by the church (which, in cooperation with the elders, assesses the giftedness, and whether or not the qualifications have been met--- there are no longer Apostles). [Acts 6:2-7- an established church]

2) The Holy Spirit and the church; the Holy Spirit, by the church, ordains and sends/sets a man into an appointed ministry (vs. 3-4; Rom. 10:14-15). A man does not anoint/ordain himself unto the Gospel ministry. Rather, his gifts being recognized by the church, leads to the setting apart unto the Gospel ministry. [Be here, get involved, minister to people, and God will set His mark in due time; if the desire is known, express it; note: people do not find out their own giftedness, because they are hardly with the brethren...begins with being with the brethren, often, serving...etc]

3) It is very proper to fast and pray, throughout the process of considering and setting apart a man unto the Gospel ministry (Acts 14:23). The worst thing that can happen is for a man, who is not truly called; a man who is not empowered by God the Holy Spirit, to take the office of a minister of the Gospel/Elder/Deacon...etc. A lot can happen with one man, for good or bad.

Amen!!!