

09/18/11

Living Life Together by Properly Fulfilling the Mission

- there's nothing quite like a situation where people immediately sense the urgency of the task, and just do whatever is necessary to address the need at hand...
- that happened recently in Utah...here's what I mean...

- now, would you agree with me this morning that there is a real sense in which the mission of the church of Jesus Christ is very similar to what we've just seen?...
 - the Lord has given us a significant task to perform...to glorify Him by participating in His redemptive plan of rescuing men and women from the consequences of being separated from Him both now and for all eternity...
 - and it is a marvelous thing when a group of people live life together by doing whatever is necessary to fulfill that mission with passion and effectiveness...

- with that in mind, please open your Bible this morning to Acts chapter 13...page 102 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - we're coming to an important transition in our study of the book of Acts in a number of ways...
 - we know that the persecution of the church is growing...and we're about to see how God's people respond to that pressure...
 - we're also going to see a shocking transition in leadership...up until now, Peter has been the leader of the church humanly speaking...but the Lord is going to raise up a new person...and I think it is fair to say that his selection is nothing short of shocking to anyone hearing this story for the first time...
 - then there's the important issue of process – if I've learned anything in ministry...it's that “how to make something happen” is very illusive for some if not many of God's people...
 - even after you figure out – this is where we are, and this is where we need to be (and identifying those two positions accurately is no small feat)...but even then you have to figure out the simplest number of steps to get from here to there...
 - it requires straight-line administration...the ability to craft a plan that uses the smallest amount of resources to accomplish the greatest amount of ministry...
 - that's what the issue of process is all about...and we see that unfold right before our eyes in ways that are very, very beneficial...
 - let's face it – we don't just have a motorcycle on fire – we have a world on fire...
 - how to organize and execute the “redemptive rescue operation” requires the wisdom of Solomon for sure...

- let's see what we can learn from this text...**read Acts 13:1-16**...
 - at that point Paul gives an extended summary of OT history...which by the way, if you are new to studying the Bible—there are several of these in the book of Acts that are just solid gold when it comes to the issue of understanding the overall storyline of Scripture...
 - for our purposes this morning...we're going to skip over that portion of the story...and fast forward to verse 38...**read Acts 13:38-52**...
 - we're talking about **Living Life Together by Properly Fulfilling the Mission**...
 - and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **Three lessons from the way God's people expanded their ministry to a world in need of rescue.**

I. Understand the Church's Place in the Accomplishment of the Plan.

- I mentioned a couple of weeks ago a blog that one of my friends wrote about how congregational government is of the devil...
- this man is a friend of mine and I appreciate him in a lot of ways...but this passage is one of the reasons I would disagree with his view...
- truthfully, the Scripture doesn't lay out precise, narrow principles about the way a church is to be organized and governed...that's why there are so many different approaches...
- clearly there are some general buoys in the Word of God – but there is a lot of room to navigate within those biblical established buoys...so there's not just one right way to do it...
- I also have the view that if the people involved are spirit filled individuals who are really serious about serving God – then all the organizational issues will fall into place – whereas if the character issues aren't there – then whatever form of church government you select is going to end up in power struggles and ineffectiveness...
- but here's the main point we need to see.

A. God uses church families to select and send the rescue team.

- there's no question that when it came time for the first missionaries to be formally sent out into our lost and dying world to proclaim the good news of a divine rescue operation...the decision of who was going to be sent was left up to the local church at Antioch...
- this could have been a decision that the apostles made on their own...but it wasn't...and that fact is very instructive both for what happened in the rest of the book of Acts and also for the way we should be functioning today as we try to carry out the mission God has given us...
- we'll say a lot more about that in a minute, but let's also add this observation...

B. New ministry developments often occur in the crucible of present serving and faithfulness.

- see, what were the people at this great church in Antioch doing when the Holy Spirit chose to use them to launch the first missionary journey?...
- **Acts 13:2 - While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting...**
- rarely does God use people who are just standing still...
- the principle is, get busy doing what God has called you to do and don't be surprised if He selects to reward your faithfulness with greater opportunities...
- that's what Jesus meant at the end of the great stewardship parable in Matthew 25 --
Matthew 25:29 - For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.
- that is exactly what happened in this passage – God found a church family filled with faithful people busily serving Him and gave them a brand new level of responsibility and opportunity on the team...
- now, when you put all of that together...here's what we learn...

C. This is why we believe in the centrality of the local church.

- there is no question about the fact that God is mediating His plan and program in and through the local church...

- and sure leaders have their responsibilities and the church families has theirs...that point is going to come up in several different ways at some of the most pivotal places in the remainder of this book...
 - when a church family is functioning well...when they are living life together like this – tremendous amounts of ministry can be accomplished...
 - and if you understand that principle...a lot of why we do things the way we do them will make a lot more sense to you...the applications go all over the place...
1. for example, we have zero interest in being a staff run church...
 - so when there's a need or an opportunity...our first response isn't – who can we hire, but instead, who can we train?...
 - **Ephesians 4:11-12 - And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;**
 - we've already started talking about the business and operational plans for all the new ministries that could potentially come on line in West Lafayette as a result of our church family's decision last week to buy 6.4 acres right on Northwestern Avenue...
 - and the people in those discussions will tell you – one of the headline principles is – just like our community center, and everything else we do around here – this will be a cluster of ministries where the church body serves the Lord together...it will be lean from a paid staff perspective because we want to invest the bulk of our resources in direct ministry...
 - and I realize that any principle can potentially get out of balance...
 - but churches do things differently because of the power and efficacy of the body...
 - it was interesting when we were talking to some of the officials in West Lafayette about this project and they kept referring to this property as blighted...that was their word...
 - a major entrance to Purdue University being blighted---that's a community problem for sure...
 - and they would also acknowledge that for a variety of reasons, some of the properties in that area have not been maintained very well...
 - and we were talking about the possibility of not only improving the site we are buying...but even providing clean up assistance for some of the others in that area...
 - and the official from the city came back to that comment later in the conversation and he said – you guys have an army of volunteers you're bringing to the table that could be a huge blessing to this area...
 - that's exactly right – the centrality of the church body – the Lord thought this entity was so competent that they were charged with selecting and sending the very first missionaries in the history of the church...
 2. This is also why the missionaries that we send out are involved in some sort of church planting efforts, or strengthening the church in some way...
 - there's all sorts of good things to be involved in all around the world...but our commitment to this principle guides the way we invest our missionary and ministry resources...

3. This also affects the way we do college ministry...
 - I'm not here to be critical of others...but it is possible to be involved in a campus ministry and never step foot inside a church...
 - and then when that person graduates and moves and finds a job somewhere...they have trouble being connected to a local church because what they're really looking for is another campus ministry with people just like them instead of all the variety that comes from being part of a church family...
 - and even if we do ever launch some sort of satellite church in West Lafayette, the goal would not be to have a college church – we would want to transplant the diversity of age and life situation that we have here...
 - all of that is driven philosophically...
 4. That explains our seminary
 5. This explains what we're trying to do with FGM – it's all about putting as much authority/responsibility back into the church...
 6. This also explains why we do counseling training the way we do...
 - we believe if it is a non-organic problem of daily living, that counsel is best given in the setting of a local church...
 - we're not saying that stand alone counseling centers are wrong, they're just hamstrung...
- this is why, by the way – the people in our church are so generous financially... our giving is up 5% this yr – why?...because people believe God is mediating His plan and program through the local church and this is where they want to invest their funds...
 - that's also why people are fired up about giving to the capital campaign – please don't be tokenistic, and please don't be late – look at the gift range chart, and reach as high up as you possibly can --- commit sacrificially and commit now...
- now, something else we need to say about this is...

D. Churches determine ministry call, not individuals.

- I realize that you might say – what should I do if I thought the Lord was calling me into the ministry?
- that happens, you know?...how do you think we got Pastor Aucoin, and Pastor Garner, and Pastor Curtis?...and they didn't turn out so bad—don't you think...
- here's the process in a nutshell...

1. It starts with a God-given desire...

- **1 Timothy 3:1 - It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.**
- admittedly that is subjective – it's individual...the bottom line is that a person should never let a person or group of people talk them into going into full-time vocational ministry if he doesn't want to do it...

2. The local church is then responsible to help a person determine the validity of the call by assessing both character and giftedness.

- cf. Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3.

3. The local church has the additional privilege and responsibility to equip individuals who are called to serve.

- the point is – this is a church family process – not an individual process...
- one other idea we need to point out...

E. In a very real sense, we are all being sent out.

- we need to emphasize the applications of this particular text, but not in a way that inappropriately elevates people in vocational ministry as if that is some special class...that would be the polar opposite of the passage's insistence that the church body is the group God is using as a unified and powerful entity...not just an small, isolated group...
- so please keep in mind the great commission...
- **Matthew 28:19-20 - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**
 - the word go is a participle (a form of speech that usually ends in "ing" in English...)
 - there's nothing wrong with translating them imperatively...as a command...that's the way it reads here – Go therefore...
 - but it could be translated....as you are going...which is certainly true for all of God's people...
 - that's why when God moves someone from our church family to another place in the country – we don't necessarily like that (humanly speaking), but we try to rejoice in the fact that the Lord can use that person in another church...and if we did our job well of living life together, perhaps they will be in a better position to serve Christ even more effectively in that new place...
 - we certainly have to view college ministry that way...
 - you could say – we're about to invest millions of dollars in college ministry for people for the most part who will move away...great – think of the potential impact our church family could have on other churches...
- now, if we try to live life together by properly fulfilling the mission...by recognizing the centrality of the local church....where does that get us?...

II. Be Prepared for Adventure and Challenge.

- this was an exciting time for the early church...what God selected them to do as a body of believers was historic for sure...
- and please note this...

A. Centered on the proclamation of God's Word.

- verse 2 had said -- **Acts 13:2 - While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**
- well, what was the work?...
- **Acts 13:5 - When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.**
- that's why our approach to ministry around here is pretty simple...try to find ways to connect men and women to a more vibrant relationship to the Lord using His powerful and sufficient Word...

- **Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

- now, I realize that some might say – but I can't see myself ever being sent by the church, or by being used in any way because of the way I've lived in the past...please don't miss this about the adventure...

B. With people who haven't always been perfect.

- you realize that reading this text for the first time is intended to may you gasp, right?...
- who's on the team?...

- **Acts 13:2 - While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**

- **Acts 13:9 - But Saul, who was also *known as Paul*, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,**

- I wonder why the Lord works that way?...

- maybe it's so that all the credit will go to Him and his grace...instead of the person and his/her natural giftedness?...

- **1 Timothy 1:12-17 - I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.***

C. Where sometimes truth has to be proclaimed boldly.

- this passage shows that sometimes ministry of the Word has to be confrontational -
Acts 13:10 - You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?

- all righty then...

- but please keep in mind – that's only part of the ministry of the Word...

- **1 Thessalonians 5:14 - We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

- there's another sad detail embedded in this passage too...but it's an honest part of the adventure if we're going to practice full disclosure...

D. Where sometimes people will let you down.

- **Acts 13:13 - Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.**

- that issue is going to have a dramatic impact on Paul and Barnabus' relationship someday...and it will even come up again right at the very end of Paul's ministry...

- but God designed ministry to include imperfect people – that’s why we have to keep our eyes on Jesus, not men and women...
- but there’s no question about this – the larger point is definitely true – there are many men and women around here who would say that the reason they participate in local church ministry the way they do is because of how exciting and fulfilling it is...
- and you realize that if Faith West becomes a reality and if additional responsibilities with Faith Global Ministries become a reality simultaneously – there are going to be all sorts of additional places for hands on the plow...

- now, what about the way the passage ends?...

III. Leave the Results Up to Our Sovereign God.

- Paul and Barnabus sincerely made the gospel offer to the Jews in the synagogue...that would become a pattern in his ministry...
- but...
- **Acts 13:45-48 - But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. “For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.’ ” When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**
- sometimes the Lord changes your ministry path...
- the big take-away is – God mediates His plan and program in and through the local church...when it came time to launch the beginning of the Lord great project of foreign missions – He did it through the church...