

Acts 13:1-12

“A Man On A Mission”

Since the book of Acts deals with the foundational aspect of the early church, and the goings on therein its been interesting for me to see all these 1st time events that took place as we've been studying the book. Various aspects of the *historical* record, ch 13 brings us yet another 1st in regards to church history as far as the record is concerned and that is an organized, concerted effort at missions. Thus far throughout the 10 years plus of the ministry of the church we've yet to see one missions trip formally organized and sent out. Now we've definitely seen some “accidental” missions trips, or “circumstantial” missionary work in that when people were forced into various places due to persecution or whatever, by default they took the gospel with them. But ch 13 brings to us something altogether different than that, here we find that things have been going great, the church is thriving, there's no natural reason for them to leave, but the Holy Spirit begins to move in such a way as to speak *to* the people *through* the prophets to organize a missionary team and send the gospel out to the uttermost parts of the earth. and It's sort of ironic to me that the 1st formal missions team isn't formed out of the church in Jerusalem where the church was born, but rather the Gentile church in Antioch.

The only people the church in Jerusalem has formally sent out have been those who've gone to verify or ratify the work of the Spirit in other places that have already taken place. They haven't sent out any teams to begin a work, or establish a work anywhere. But I suppose that in a sense it's only natural that the work of reaching the world of the Gentiles for Christ would be birthed out of a Gentile church, even though its Saul and Barnabas who'll be sent out (a Levite and a Jewish scholar of scripture of the tribe of Benjamin) still yet it was from Antioch that they were commissioned.

Now we learned in vs 25 of ch 12 that when Saul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem (having taken financial support to the church there from the body there in Antioch, another 1st) that they had with them Barnabas' Nephew, John Mark. and Here in ch 13 we'll see him referred to as John, but don't be confused its not the apostle John that's in view here in ch 13, it's John Mark the Nephew of Barnabas, the son of the Mary in whose home the church was meeting back in Jerusalem. So the account picks up back in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul having returned from Jerusalem, and we read here.

Vs1

Now there are a couple of things that we want to see in this, not in any particular order of priority but #1 Notice the diversity that made up the unity that was in the body of the Gentile church at Antioch. Culturally speaking we see Jews, (Barnabas and Saul), we see an African, Simeon who was called Niger which means “black”, so there was Jewish people, black people, white/Grecian people Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen.

Socially we see that Manaen was of an aristocratic background, brought up with or raised with Herod the tetrarch (who was the Herod who beheaded J.B. and had a part in the trial of Jesus), they shared the same nanny sort of a thing, they were buddies, played together growing up. Pretty amazing to think of the 2 totally different paths they took in life. Saul was upper class as a Pharisee, highly educated, we don't know much about Barnabas other than he seemed to be a man of means, had land to sell, gave it to the church and all. But the point here is that we have Jew and Gentile, people from various cultural backgrounds, different social status', diverse upbringings, being from miscellaneous places on the map all coming together becoming one unified body in Christ.

That's one thing that I love so much about the body of Christ, the fact that it doesn't matter who you are, where you've been, what you've done, how much your net worth is, what your cultural background may be, we're on equal footing, we're one in Christ. and Jesus becomes the common bond, we're knit and woven together in His love, there are very few of you that apart from Christ would be in my social circle of people that I hang with. and I'm quite certain the feeling is mutual, if you would've seen me in the world, with the long hair, the musician thing, the direction I was seeking to take my life, there are a few, but the vast majority of you wouldn't have looked at me like, "Now there's someone I'd like to know!" But now we have Christ in common, and He brings us together in a beautiful unity where, "...*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*" Col 3:11

In this fellowship that you call home there are people who've come from all walks of life, from successful business men, to professional bums, from straight laced, to debased partiers, from highly educated, to dumb as a stump (you'll find most of those guys in leadership) (God chooses the fools right, and I'm 1st on the list) ;0). But Christ brings us all together, and now I have this beautiful fellowship with those that otherwise I'd have never gotten the privilege to even know, and that can only happen in the Lord, nowhere else in the world are you going to find the equal footing that's in Him. and Vs 1 illustrates the unity that's to be found in the diversity of the body of Christ.

The 2nd thing that we notice about the church that's to be found at Antioch is this mention of the 2 basic offices that currently comprise an integral aspect of the fellowship. *Prophets* and *teachers*, and again we note the fact that God gave different and diverse gifts to different people as He saw fit, not any one individual was operating in every gift. There's only 1 person that had the Holy Spirit given to Him with out measure and that's Jesus Christ The rest of us have the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to us *in* measure, that is, there is definite limit by which the Holy Spirit will exercise His power through any one of us, and the degree of that limit differs with each person.

The bible says, “*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*” Eph 4:7 and Again, “*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,” Rom 12:3-6 and At this point in the history of the church at Antioch the Holy Spirit had seen fit to establish certain people who held the offices of prophets and teachers. and Paul tells us in the book of Eph that such men were given to the church by God for the equipping of the saint for the work of the ministry.*

Now we should point out that the gift of prophecy and the office of a prophet are 2 different things. The gift of prophecy still exists in the body of Christ, and by strict definition the office of a prophet does not, Paul tells us in Eph 3 that the foundation of the church was built upon the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. So from that we're able to deduct that since the foundation was laid nearly 2,000 yrs ago, that neither apostles, nor prophets are an aspect of the church today. There are similarities in missionaries/church planters pastors and teachers, but again the prophets/apostles were fundamental foundational aspects of the church. and The prophet wasn't so much a foreteller of the future (though at times he might) as he was a “forth-teller” of the word of God. He was one who would speak, and give direction to the church under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The teacher was one who was especially gifted at expositing the OT scriptures, the NT hadn't yet been compiled, many of the epistles (if any) hadn't yet been penned. and So when these guys shared the gospel, they did so entirely from the OT, that's why its so often said that the OT is the NT concealed, and the NT is the OT revealed. and We read in vs 2-3

Vs2-3

So here we have the Holy Spirit formalizing the 1st official missions team set apart to take the gospel to the world. But notice that we read that the Holy Spirit spoke to them as they ministered to the Lord. Which is the 1st priority of anyone who's a servant of God, and there's a # of ways that we minister to the Lord, be it in prayer, through our worship, we serve the Lord through serving His people, there are a lot of things that take place in my life, or that I do, that if it weren't unto the Lord I wouldn't do them. But because I *love* the Lord, want to be *pleasing* to the Lord I'll minister to the Lord in whatever way that I believe He may be leading me. and There are times that that will go against the grain of our flesh. We minister to the Lord in teaching His word, or sharing the gospel, building up and edifying one another, part of the way they were ministering to the Lord was by fasting, denying their flesh, and seeking after Him, His will, His purpose and plan for their lives. The main idea here is that body life was taking place in the church at Antioch.

It was then that the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Now how did the Holy Spirit say that? I don’t know, more than likely through the voice of one of the prophets there in the church.

But there’s a few quick things here, 1st of all we read that the Holy Spirit said, “Separate to Me.” Before Saul and Barnabas can do anything great *for* God, the 1st have to be separated *unto* God, which points to what? Sacrifice, being separated *to* God means being separated *from* other things, I can’t really say “Yes” to God until I’m willing to say “No” to those things that might get in the way or somehow inhibit His call upon my life. You see God had a very specific work planned for their lives, we read here that the Holy Spirit said that they were to be separated to the work to which He had called them. Later Paul would write, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*” Eph 2:10

Here we’re seeing Paul’s being called (along with Barnabas) to walk in the good works that God had prepared beforehand for him to walk in. You see, as far as God’s plan for Paul’s life that was something established yrs ago, God made His plan for Paul’s life very clear practically from the point of his conversion. Remember back in Ch 9? The Lord said of Paul to Ananias, “...*he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*” Acts 9:15-16 The call of God upon Paul’s life was in no way a “touchy” “feely” feel good kind of ministry, it was a serious call to a serious ministry (not that there’s any other kind but you get the idea).

But timing was of the essence, though the call of God had been made clear, the timing of God *had not*. But now God makes it clear, they were ministering to the Lord, fasting, seeking after Him, and the Holy Spirit said, “Now.” “Now’s the time for these guys to be set apart for the work to which I have called them.”

You guys, we’ve considered observations, and interpretation of vs 2, but there is tons of personal application in this vs. “What do you mean?” Are *we*, (make it personal) are *you* truly separated to the Lord for the work that the Holy Spirit has called you to? What part of your life have you given up that you might be occupied with the life that He’s called you to? That’s what Paul was talking about when He said, “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” Rom 12:1-2

Being separated *to* God demands a separation *from* those things that would otherwise hinder His call upon your life, whether it be questionable situations/circumstances that disregard blamelessness. Or outright sin in your life, those things got to go, sometimes its not what we do so much as what we *don't* do, sins of omission, we're not praying and seeking the Lord, we don't spend any time in His word, we're rarely to never in fellowship, and then we wonder why He's not using our lives. Those things aren't legalism, they're simple wisdom, applying the principles and precepts of the Word to your life isn't legalism, that's wisdom.

Take it one step farther; are you even aware of what God's call on your life *is*? Now certain aspects of that call are obvious, if you're a wife you're to submit to your husband as an aspect of your worship to the Lord. If you're a husband you're to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, you're to provide for your family lest you be worse than a non believer, children are to obey your parents, parents don't provoke your kids. We're to be diligent in the work place, servants in the body of Christ, these things we know, the bible is very clear about the general will of God for our lives. Often times its when we're busy about obedience in general that God will begin to lead us in specifics.

I was talking to a brother about this last week, because we all want to serve the Lord somehow (at least I hope we all do) but often times exactly what He wants we're not sure. Well, instead of focusing on what we're not sure of and doing nothing, lets focus on what *we are* sure of and do *something*. Get involved *somewhere*, begin to serve the Lord *somehow*, and trust that as you serve God *generally*, He'll begin to define and develop your role *specifically*.

I was reminded of Genesis 24 when Ab's servant went to find a bride for Isaac, he didn't really know which way to go, or how to approach the situation, yet he set out in obedience with some general direction from Ab and when he got out in the way, the Lord led him very specifically to Rebekah. Now if he hadn't been obedient and began to serve in general, than he would've missed the specific role and divine appointment that God had called him to altogether.

So sometimes the Lord would simply have us to exercise our faith in what we *do* know in general, than He'll govern and guide us into the specifics. and He'll do that in His time, so we see the need here to be separated *unto* the Lord, and *from* the thing of the world, the need to be busy about body life and ministering to the Lord in general, the fact that we can trust that God will lead us into His will for our lives specifically in His time, but meanwhile we should be serving the Lord generally rather than doing nothing. Because doing nothing with regards to investing into the Kingdom the things that God has invested into you is a dangerous place to be. Time will forbid us but you can read Matt 25:14-30 in regards to that.

But here in vs 3 we see the official commissioning of this missionary team, they had hands laid on them, and then they were sent away. This laying on of hands wasn't with regard to their being ordained, that had happened long ago. This was the churches way of saying, "We're officially commending you *to* this work, we're identifying with you *in* this work, and as you go out you're representing 1st and foremost the Lord, but then also this body of believers specifically to the world and we support you in the work."

Vs 4

Pause there for a moment; we need to see something here. Notice that in vs 3 we read that the church sent them *away*, but here in vs 4 we read that it was the Holy Spirit who sent them *out*. What's my point? That it doesn't do the church any good to send you *away*, (as much as we might want to with some of you, I'm kidding) if the Holy Spirit isn't the One sending you *out*. Or to put it another way, the only thing the church *can do* is send you away, but it has to be the *Holy Spirit* Who sends you out, or else you won't be effectively accomplishing anything of eternal value for the kingdom.

Something else we see here is that which we mentioned last week and that is the working closely together of the supernatural and the practical. We read that it was the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that sent them out, but practically speaking He didn't tell them where to go (as far as the record is concerned.) I would imagine that pretty much anywhere there was lost souls God was good with, and since at this point Barnabas is the leader of the group, it makes sense that he would want to head to Cyprus, why? Because that's where he was from, ch 4 tells us that, so he's got friends, perhaps family that needs Christ, so he says, "Let's head there."

Vs5

This is John Mark whom I mentioned in the beginning of our study. No doubt this young guy would've been a valuable aspect of the team having been an eyewitness to various aspects of the events of the life of Christ.

Now Salamis is on the eastern most coast of the Island of Cyprus, and we don't really read of anything worth mentioning happening there, how would you like that, you know God's called you, you've gone out in obedience, and the very 1st thing you encounter avails little to no fruit? But these guys press on, they refuse to give in, or give up because God's placed a call on their lives, and they're going to continue on, they're men on a mission. and We read here that they make their way about 100 miles or so to the western most side of the island to Paphos.

Vs6-8

So here Saul and Barnabas are, just sharing the word of God, presumably in the same fashion there in the synagogues, and the proconsul, or the chief representative of the Roman government there on the island catches wind of these guys and wants to hear what it is that they're sharing with everyone. But we find here that he was in league here with this sorcerer, Bar-Jesus, which means "Son of Jesus" or even "Son of Salvation" or "Son of God's Salvation."

This governor sort of seeks counsel from him, but we read here that he (that is the governor) was an intelligent man, isn't it amazing the stupid things that some of the most intelligent people will do? Especially as it pertains to spirituality, because the bible says that the natural man can't discern the things of Spirit of God because they're spiritually discerned. But if the Holy Spirit isn't dwelling in you, than when it comes to matters of the Spirit you're acting out of ignorance, you're really not aware of what you're doing. It's like he was calling the psychic hotline all the time and consulting his horoscope for direction. But why seek *life's* direction from the *dead*? It's just dumb, but to his credit, this guy was interested in the word of God, so he calls for Saul, and Barnabas, but this Elymas seeks to with stand them, why? Job security, Sergius gets turned on to Christ, Elymas goes down the road with out a job. So much like Jannes and Jambres sought with wstand Moses before the Pharaoh, so this guy tries to with stand Saul and Barnabas. and Really that's to be expected, the 1st thing they meet with is no real success to speak of, the 2nd thing they meet is resistance from the enemy.

Anytime you move out in faith in obedience to the direction of the word of God for your life, you can count on their being opposition that seeks to bring frustration to the work. Whenever God begins to move in your life, you can expect the enemy to counter, he wants to hinder God's will for your life.

It's one thing to decide personally to go against the love and grace of God for *your* life, but its another thing altogether when you seek to influence others to reject it for themselves. Jesus said that it would be better for a millstone to be hung around your neck and to be cast into the sea than to cause one who believes in Him to stumble. This guy was seeking to hinder the work of God's salvation in another man's life. Trying to turn him away from the faith!

Vs9-12

“Showdown in Cyprus” and of course by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit Paul was caused to be an overcomer of the opposition in Christ. Just think, had they gotten frustrated at the opposition, determined perhaps they missed it and that God must not have called them because it was so hard and gone back, they'd have fallen short of the fruit. But because they persevered and hung in there they reaped a harvest. What's the point, that tough times and opposition doesn't mean that you're not walking in the will of God for your life, to the contrary that can be the very fingerprints of being where you need to be. If you never encounter any enemy opposition, maybe you're not where you need to be.

In vs 9 we see the name change from Saul to Paul and that's the way it goes from here on out except for when he recounts his conversion. Lot's of speculation as to why, most likely it was simply because being born a Roman citizen it was his Roman name, Saul was his Hebrew name, Paul was his Roman name, since he was ministering to Gentiles primarily, he went by his Roman name.

But we read here that Paul stared this guy down, and called him out, notice the play on words in vs 10, his name was Bar-Jesus, but Paul called him a “son of the devil.” Far from what you’re name means, these are your true colors, and since he was blind spiritually, his God given judgment was that he would be blind physically for a season as well. But I just love the boldness that the Holy Spirit gave to him, “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? Now the hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind, not even seeing the light of day for a time.” and Just like that Elymas fell blind, needing someone to lead him. Fairly picturesque isn’t it? He did need someone to lead him out of darkness and into the light. As did we all before we were led to Christ.

But what I want to leave you with is the fact that though the governor witnessed an amazing miracle, what *astonished* him was the teaching of the Lord. The gospel of Jesus Christ the fact that Jesus Christ came to this earth, laid down His sinless life on the cross out of His love for us, and that by simply believing in Him he could receive the forgiveness of sin and inherit everlasting life. He was astonished! What love is this? What simplicity there is in the gospel, God has made it so simple, and he believed, and was saved. Don’t complicate the gospel, keep it simple, and people will be astonished, absolutely blown away that they don’t have to dress a certain way, cut their hair just so, do this, or don’t do that, but that by simple repentance from sin, and faith towards Christ they can be saved. It’s the goodness of God that leads us to repentance, Paul was a man on mission, determined to declare nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified with a hurt and dying world and God used his life radically.

Perhaps you’re here and you’ve never given your heart to Christ, you’ve thought you needed to do this, or quit doing that, get your life just so, then maybe God would accept you. Listen, the good news of the gospel is that you don’t have to *anything* because Jesus Christ has done *everything* all you have to do is believe *upon* Him, give your heart *to* Him, and you’ll be saved.

Prayer Points: Lord we’re astonished at what you’ve done for us, You’ve given Your all, that we might have all that You have to offer. Help us to keep that message simple, direct, understandable, God if we’re not sure what You have for us specifically, help us to simply step out and serve You generally, and trust You to lead our lives, may we lead our lives separated unto You, that You might use us for Your glory, and we’ll give You praise in Jesus name.