

Title: What Kind of a Church Sends Missionaries?
Text: Acts 13:1-3
Theme: What Kind of a Church Sends Missionaries?
Occasion: Commissioning Bobby and Taylor Johnson
Prop Stmt: Missions is in the DNA of the church

Ever since the tower of Babel, racism has been a particularly wretched expression of human sinfulness. Christ's command to go into all the world and make disciples, starting with Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria and then the ends of the earth is culturally and racially loaded. Just like Christ's intentional visit to Samaria, it raised eyebrows. This should not have been a surprise.

Several hundred years before, Daniel the prophet wrote over and over about people, nations and men of every language, who would one day be part of the kingdom that will never end. But arrogance runs deep. And, what sounds as a lofty sentiment may be just that. Can we really expect men, born and bred as part of an exclusive race to open up their very hearts and lives to people of other nationalities and ethnicities and really accept each other? Maybe it is just like a Hallmark card. It sounds good, but no one really believes it.

Acts 2 still sounds rather safe. But, again do not lose sight of what is going on. The God-man had come to earth in the form of a human. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, and although He was God, and God is omnipresent, the physical body of Jesus was present only in one place at a time. Now, He tells His boys – go global! My body, through you, has to go global; and, in order for that to happen, I am physically ascending to heaven and the Spirit is descending. Get this! God will be absent in the flesh, but present by means of the Spirit. That is the transition that takes place between Chapters 1 and 2 of Acts. The commission by Christ is being carried out by the Spirit. The Spirit is taking the body of Christ, the Church, the Kingdom – global!

Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel tell us that through the Spirit, the servant of God will bring salvation to the nations and will gather God's people on the day of salvation and will empower the word of the LORD as it goes forth to accomplish its purpose, and even be the force behind the reconstruction of the new temple. Joel said that on the coming day of the Lord, the Spirit will be poured out on all of God's people. (Jew and Gentile) So, Pentecost was an astounding day, not simply because of the obvious miracle, but because the promises that God had made hundreds of years before were coming true before their very eyes. The curse of languages at the tower of Babel that resulted in the separation of the nations in Genesis 11 was now being reversed. The gift of tongues was a sign that instead of separating people, God was calling out a new nation, a new people who would speak the language of the cross and be redeemed by the blood of Christ.

That sounds exciting. That sounds wonderful, until you actually bring a black guy home to meet dad, or a white girl to the family reunion – know what I mean? Please understand this! Every racial sensitivity that we have now, they had in Acts and even more. Every kind of racial history, animosity, slavery struggle, socio-economic barriers, racial

inequality, and suspicions that we have, they had and more. So, when Luke says, that Jews were in Jerusalem from every nation and that many of them became followers of Christ – we can rejoice but reaching Jews from other nations does not fulfill the great commission. And Luke knows that. So...

The story of the early church goes on. The gospel is still, in the early days, being held rather tightly by the Jews, so, persecution breaks out (8.1) “against the church at Jerusalem.” And where did the believers run to? They ran to Judea and Samaria (gasp). “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (8.4) including Philip. Philip preached the gospel in Samaria and in verse 26 “an angel of the Lord” told Philip to go south to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip did, because God had an appointment for Philip with an African from Ethiopia. In verse 29 we read, “the Spirit told Philip to go to that chariot and stay near it.” This black official from the Ethiopian Empire is reading from Isaiah 53 and Philip explains the gospel to him and the man comes to faith in Christ, then stops at a river and Philip baptizes him. Guess what – he just joined the body. He became part of the stuff and he belongs here! Now you have Jews, Samaritans, and an Ethiopian. Acts 10 is the story of the gospel going to a Gentile and his home. But by this time, the persecution that broke out back in Jerusalem has pushed some people as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. (v.19) “telling the message only to Jews.” But then something happened in v.20. “Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus” and guess what – (next verse) “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

Antioch was a city like every other city in the Roman Empire in that it was given over almost completely to idolatry. The church at Antioch was in the middle of a place that was not friendly to the gospel, and yet people were coming to Christ. Barnabas is sent to Antioch to see what is going on. His initial visit is very encouraging. These people were changed by the gospel. Apparently, Barnabas knew that he needed some help in teaching all of these new believers, so he went to Tarsus in order to get Saul (Paul) and for a whole year they met with the church and “taught great numbers of people.” The church at Antioch is made aware that there is a need back in Jerusalem, so they take up an offering and send it by means of Barnabas and Saul, back to Jerusalem to help the brothers and sisters. Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch at the end of chapter 12 and then we read these words in Acts 13.1-3. (Read Text)

What kind of a church sends missionaries? It is one, born and bred in the gospel that has an open heart, open home and an open hand. But, how does that happen? Many of us have seen churches where instead of openness of heart, there is suspicion. Instead of openness of home, there is distance, surface relationships and a “prove you are good enough for me” atmosphere. Instead of an open hand, there is stinginess, turf wars, territorialism, and self-protection. But not in the church at Antioch. This was a church in which the Spirit of God was at work in such a way that he called two strong leaders from the church to leave and minister elsewhere for a while. They did!

1. **A Church that has been changed by the gospel.**

When I read this account, I get the impression that these people really understood the gospel and the implications of the gospel. They really did not hold your past against you. For example, look at the names of the leaders. There is one guy named Manaen. Manaen is the Greek form of a Hebrew name. This guy was probably a Jew, who had been raised in Greek (Hellenistic) culture. A Hellenistic Jew was not accepted by the “true” Jews. But notice that this guy was raised with, (lit. as a foster brother) with Herod the tetrarch. This is the Herod who killed John the Baptist and participated indifferently in the trial of Christ. Saul is also on this list. While the church in Jerusalem was initially skeptical of Saul, until Barnabas vouched for him, the church in Antioch apparently has no such problems. You love Jesus? You belong here!

The Roman Empire was segregated so much more than we are. Keep in mind that about 60% of the population was in some form of servant/slave condition. There was no middle class. Therefore, there was a very high level of class consciousness. In general terms the rich looked down with great spite on the poor and the poor hated the rich. The educated scoffed at the uneducated. Romans did not like the Greeks and the Jews did not like anyone. But here was a church where the leadership of the church reflected something that was rather unique. Barnabas was a Jew, Simeon was from Africa, Lucius was Roman (at least in culture), and Manaen was a Jew. This early church looked a little like the United Nations. And it should. People like that understand what the gospel is about. The gospel is not an excuse to be territorial. Other ethnicities are not the enemy, they are people, made in the image of God who need to come home to their Creator, and that can only take place through Christ. These believers in Antioch made much of the grace of God. They were so amazed by grace, they were not distracted by race. So, the idea of sending two of their leaders away to start churches in other countries and to take another step in carrying out the church’s mandate was a no-brainer!

2. A Church that realizes the goal of the gospel.

This church was a model of the coming day when people from every tribe, nation and language would make much of Jesus and crown Him as King. They enjoyed an uncommon commonality. I try to tell every couple preparing for marriage, that after every wedding comes a marriage. Weddings are easy. Marriage is the challenge. Leaving Egypt with pockets of gold was easy for Israel, but living together in harmony when the water ran dry, and the food ran out, and people were complaining? Well that is a different matter. The same thing is true about church. Starting a church can be exciting, but over time, the real issues and struggles that people have come out. That is when you find out how genuine this really is. Well, that is what I am talking about regarding this church at Antioch. They have been together long enough now, to drive each other crazy, and they didn’t. They had not degenerated to a black church over here and Roman church over here and Greek church over here and a Jewish church over here. This was the church at Antioch, where people had been changed by the gospel and realized that the goal of the gospel was to see people come home to Christ and to live now, as a taste of that day to come, when we do it perfectly.

3. **A Church that embraces the supremacy of God.**

The worship life of this church is apparently profound and sacrificial. It was “while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting” that the Holy Spirit spoke to them about setting Barnabas and Saul apart for the work to which the Spirit called them. What is fasting? Fasting is going without a meal because you realize that you need God more than you need food. In Matthew 4.4, Jesus answered Satan by quoting from Deut. 8.3 and said, “It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Do you believe that? Do you really believe that God’s Word is more precious than food? When was the last time you went an entire day without eating? When was the last time you went an entire day without being in God’s Word? Do you ever become a bit uptight when the service goes a little too long, because you want to go eat? If you want a safe, risk-free, predictable, comfortable, non-demanding church, where nothing ever changes, including your life and others, and where the service always got out on time, you would not have liked the church at Antioch. When the text says that they were fasting, I take that to mean that they, as a church were foregoing food for a time in order to seek the will of God. I think they had put themselves into a position where they were wondering what their next step as a church ought to be. Authentic, sacrificial worship was the setting in which God moved to call Barnabas and Saul. The authenticity of their worship is evidenced by their obedience to the Spirit.

4. **A Church that is sensitive to the Spirit.**

How did the Spirit speak? Luke does not tell us that. Verse 2 sounds like this calling was made clear to others, whether by means of an impression, a voice, a word of prophecy, we don’t know. What is clear, is that the church was both sensitive to hear the Spirit and obeyed the Spirit. From Acts 11.25-26 we learn that Barnabas and Saul had an effective ministry in Antioch. They were also the two leaders chosen to take the offering that the church in Antioch had collected for the believers in Jerusalem. Now the Spirit is calling these two effective leaders to leave and the church is okay with that. Their obedience to the Spirit was instant. V.3 says, “So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Which means that...

5. **A Church that is willing to give its best.**

They considered the commission of Christ to be more important than maintaining their circle of comfort. This is good for us to consider. The Lord has used Bobby and Taylor here in wonderful ways. But, as much as we don’t want them to go because of our relationship with them and because of their ministry in this church that has been a great joy to us, there is a greater joy that we are committed to. We are committed to God’s plan for this world, even if that means sending our friends, co-workers, sons, daughters and grandchildren. People who live like that are generous people.

6. **A Church that is generous.**

This sixth characteristic of a church that sends missionaries is reflected in their commissioning of them to go. They placed their hands on them and prayed, because they had taken their hands off them to stay. They entrusted them to God. Now, we can probably assume that the church collected some sort of offering for them, but that is not what I am focusing on when I say generous, although that is certainly part of it. This was obviously a people who lived with open hearts and open hands. They did not even hold people more closely than they should. They were willing to give these men to the mission of the church and believe God.

7. **A Church that helps to change the world.**

In Acts 1 the small group of believers is huddling in the upper room in Jerusalem. In Acts 28, the Apostle Paul is in Rome, “boldly and without hindrance” preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the empire there are churches in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the regions of Syria, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, Macedonia, and Italy. The story continues to this day. And we are part of the mighty current called the church that is spreading the good news of the gospel all over this world. Little soldiers build big armies. Churches that are faithful to the message of the gospel are going to be faithful to the mission of the gospel. We stand in that God-ordained tradition and accept that God-given mandate to take the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. We cannot do everything by ourselves and we cannot do it all at once, but we can do what God calls us to do with the resources that he provides.

By God’s grace, we need to continue to be a launching pad for missionaries around the world, and for church planting here in our own context. Thank-you for being the kind of church that sends missionaries. But let us renew our commitment to the mission of Christ so that what we are doing today is repeated many times over until he returns.