

ACTS 12:25-13:3 6/22/25

Ambassadors For Christ

As we move from Acts 12 into Acts 13, we are turning more than pages in our bibles.

We are also turning pages in history.

For the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts, our guide, Luke, has been writing to *"The most excellent Theophilus"* *PRIMARILY* about the things that happened after the ascension of Jesus in and around *JERUSALEM and JUDEA*.

We have seen the proof of the resurrection of Jesus as the risen Lord gave His final instructions to His Apostles-

Acts 1:8

"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

It is for this reason these men were known as **"Apostles,"** they had been personally chosen by Christ Jesus, given **authority** in His name, and **sent out** on a **mission**.

What was their mission? *"You shall be my witnesses."*

What does it mean to witness?

- *Someone who has seen or experienced something.*
- *Someone who declares or testifies about what they've seen.*
- *And by that testimony the one who declares affirms or confirms a thing to be true.*

In the first 12 chapters we have seen the realization of the assertions of Jesus.

- **The Holy Spirit had come upon the Apostles – and with the coming of the Holy Spirit had come power.**
 - Power in the authority of their testimony
 - Remembrance of the things Jesus had taught and conviction in their testimony.
 - Power had been given to them, in the name of Jesus, for God to work through them in works of healing, and even the raising of the dead!
- **And not to them alone!**

- The indwelling had come upon **ALL** who heard the testimony regarding Jesus Christ.
- **And not to the Jew alone!**
 - As the Book Acts has progressed, so has the gospel!
 - The witness regarding Jesus Christ could not be kept in –
 - Those who believed, shared their testimony with others – and the healing power of the name of Jesus went out.
 - To the Judeans
 - To the Samaritans
 - To the Ethiopians
 - To the Syrians
 - To the Phoenicians
 - Jew and Gentile. Male and female. Young and old.
 - People from every tribe, nation or tongue were hearing the witness regarding Jesus Christ, believing by faith, and be saved by God's grace.
 - And more and more people were being empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit of God in their lives.
 - More and more people were being saved from eternal judgement - to eternal life - through the blood of Christ and the faith of a NEW HEART, and a NEW BIRTH from the things of the flesh to the things of the Spirit.

Luke wrote of the wonders of the spread and growth of the church as those who gave **EVIDENCE** of their **TRUE FAITH** – in their **words**, their **attitudes**, and their **actions**.

The evidence of the heart under the conviction of sin is its arrogance, its pride, which is demonstrated by its words, attitudes and actions that proclaim the focus on and glory to SELF!

Whereas the evidence of the heart redeemed by God's grace through faith is in its HUMILITY, its LOVE, which is demonstrated by words, attitudes and actions that proclaim its focus on CHRIST and glory to GOD!

Even in these earliest days of the church, those who **evidenced** their relationship with Christ Jesus were being identified as **"Christians."**

- That is, those who **belong to and follow** the teachings of Jesus, known as the Christ.

But with that identification came persecution and prosecution by those who loved and served the ways of the world in selfish pride and arrogance.

- Loss of employment, loss of privilege, loss of freedom, and even loss of life were constant threats to those who chose to follow the way of Christ instead of the way of man.

AND YET, as we read in **Acts 12:24**, *The word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.*

It is in that thread of continuing the ministry and message of Jesus that we rejoin Barnabas and Saul in the bible narrative.

ACTS 12:25

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Again, we remember from Acts 11:27-30 that prophets had foretold a famine was coming.

Some in the Christian church of Jerusalem would be finding themselves suffering because of the persecution on them in that city.

Christians had been banned from temple services and from receiving resources from the temple storehouse.

So, the church in Antioch gave generously for the support of their brothers and sisters in Christ in need – and selected Barnabas and Saul to take their goodwill offering to the church in Jerusalem.

Let's talk briefly about COMMITMENT and OVERCOMING fear.

Don't miss the ***commitment of love*** in this act of generosity and the great personal risk these men undertook!

During the same frame of time that Barnabas and Saul are making their trip to and from Jerusalem, the church is being persecuted.

The Apostle James had been arrested and put to death.

The Apostle Peter had been arrested, and though freed by an angel of the Lord, was now on the move and likely being hunted.

It takes a kind and generous heart to give to the needs of others sacrificially and in love.

It takes dedication and commitment to those in need when there is a real and present danger to do so!

Barnabas and Saul intentionally went into harm's-way for the sake of those in need!

Friends, this too is the character of following Jesus!

Our Lord and Savior departed heaven to come as an infant, born of the Holy Spirit of God through human birth.

He lived, and suffered, and died for His identity as the Christ. The Son of God. The anointed one of God the Father to redeem mankind from his sins.

And yet Jesus came from Heaven to Earth full of the knowledge that these things would happen.

In Psalms 22 and Isaiah 53, the poets and prophets foretold the suffering the Christ would endure. *AND YET HE EAGERLY CAME ANYWAY!*

Jesus declared these things to His disciples-

Matthew 16:21 From that time on Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

The writer of Hebrews affirms the reason for these things-

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

So then, as "Christians" – that is those who follow Christ's teaching, belonging to HIS way – let us learn from the lesson that has been given us!

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession.** ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ **Let us then with confidence** draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

If you and I are walking *INTENTIONALLY* in the light of God's grace – Trusting in our *IDENTITY* and *SECURITY* ensured by the covenant made by His blood...

Then the only fear that restrains us - Is the fear that WE ALLOW, which comes from within.

All through scripture, we see example after example of men and women who found themselves in a predicament worthy of **crippling fear** – and yet through faith they overcame their fears.

- Daniel in a den of Lions
- Rahab hiding the Israelite spies
- Esther risking her life to save her people
- Steven proclaiming Christ as the Jewish leaders raged around him

What is the common thread of courage that brings glory to God?

It is the heart, mind and soul joined in belief that you are serving the One, True, and Living God.

That unity of faith in HIM, delivers us from crippling fear by giving us the courage to overcome our fears and undertake hazardous tasks in HIS strength.

This was the strength found in Barnabas and Saul as they delivered supplies to Jerusalem and returned to Antioch, *bringing Barnabas' nephew, John, who was called Mark with them.*

- Fairly common in those days for people who moved between the Jewish and Greek world to be known by a Jewish and/or Greek name.
 - Saul / Paul
 - Simon / Peter
 - John (Yochanan) / Mark (Marcus)

ACTS 13:1

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Another major transition we are seeing here in scripture is **the epicenter of evangelism** shifting **out** Jerusalem in Judea **to** Antioch of Syria.

The message of the Messiah had rightly come **FIRST** to the Jewish nation – **But the Jewish nation had rejected Jesus as the Christ** –

Jesus had lamented over the city in **Matthew 23:37-39**

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I tell you that you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

It was a shocking reminder of a similar time of warning proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah to the Israelite generation before the exile- A previous generation who had also rejected the Word of God.

Jeremiah 12:7

I have forsaken My house; I have abandoned My inheritance. I have given the beloved of My soul into the hands of her enemies.

Now the first century generation of Israel had AGAIN rejected not only the **proclaimed** word of God, but the **Living** Word of God as He came to them in person.

Because of this-

The evangelical launching place of the foundational missionary journeys of the first century would go forth from Antioch, not Jerusalem.

And in less than 40 years, Jerusalem would be sieged by Roman legions and the temple smashed into rubble.

And through all this – the church of Jesus Christ was growing not only geographically, but organizationally and culturally.

The church at Antioch was made up of a blend of people of Jews and Gentiles from many nations.

Both Saul and Barnabas were Jews who had been born in Roman providences.

Simeon was called Niger= {"neeger"} Meaning= black

Lucious was from Cyrene, a Greek colony in North Africa suggesting that perhaps Simeon was from there as well.

Manaen is said to have been brought up in the house of Herod (Antipas) –

- And yet heard the witness regarding Jesus of Nazareth, possibly having witnessed him himself, and come to believe that He was the Christ.

Because of the size and political power of the United States, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that Christianity is not the religion of the United States.

FIRST – Christianity is better described as a RELATIONSHIP than a religion –

SECOND - both that relationship and religion are world focused, not politically.

All the people of the earth, from every nationality, and culture will give an account-

- For their relationship with Jesus – did they trust Him / or reject Him
- And their religion – did they follow Him / or rebel against Him

ACTS 13:2-3

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." ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Already in the church at Antioch of Syria there were men called as **prophets** and as **teachers**.

Now the office of missionary was to be established as well and soon the office of pastor/elder would follow as more churches were raised up.

Ephesians 4:11-13

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

In this passage we find THE FIVE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH, Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.

First to see here is that all FIVE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH and those who serve in these roles are called and appointed by Christ Jesus. (He is the He of Ephesians 4:11)

APOSTLES – as we have previously established was a unique and time-bound office held by those men called, appointed, and sent out by Jesus directly and with authority to speak the word of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

PROPHET – The office of Prophet was filled by those God appointed to speak through in revelation of His intentions and His word.

- Those called in this way were those who "**foretold**" things to come, as revealed to them by the Lord.

- And/or “**Forthtold**” God’s instructions, warnings, or promises.

In the current age of the church there is **great danger** in proclaiming either of these offices open and active.

- **If the office of Apostle were open** – then those filling it would have the authority of God with them and with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the power to proclaim **NEW REVELATIONS** from God for God’s people to honor and obey thus leaving the **cannon of scripture EVER OPEN** to a new word from the Lord.
- **If the office of Prophet were open** – then those filling it, like the Apostle, could reveal the **intent, word and will** of God for His people.

But in fact, what see from scripture is that the role of Apostle and Prophet were unique and bound to a time where the foundations of the church were being laid.

- With the death of the Apostle James, we saw the number of the Apostles begin to dwindle, one-by-one, until the last of them, John died.
 - At no point did the early church believe the office of Apostle went on beyond these men.

In **Ephesians 2:19-20** – we read the of the purpose of these two offices-

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

The foundations of the church have been laid – and the church is continually building on that foundation – therefore the work of the foundation is complete.

It is the building on that foundation where the other three offices find their role.

EVANGELIST – The word in the Greek means “*A bringer of good news.*”

- The word in the Greek for “Gospel” translates “*Good news*”

You can see where this is going... The office of EVANGELIST is held by those, called by God, to be “bringers of the good news”

Today we commonly use the term “**Missionary**” - a person sent on a mission, or someone sent with a specific task or purpose, often to share the gospel or make disciples.

The term “missionary” isn’t directly used in the Bible, but the concept is reflected in the mission that Jesus sent His Apostles on and the works of men like Philip, Paul, and Barnabas.

What I will tell you church is that while I see the benefit in supporting men and women sent into the field, near and far, to perform works that are beneficial to the church and pleasing to God –

- I see an even **greater need** for every church to also be supporting those called by God for the specific mission of being an **evangelist** – that is – proclaim the gospel.

Now then, before I leave this topic, let me be clear,

- **Evangelist is a noun** – referring to a person called to the ministry of evangelism.
- **Evangelize is a verb** – referring to the work of sharing the Good News of the Gospel.

While God **CALLS some** to the OFFICE OF EVANGELIST – He has **COMMANDED ALL** His people to EVANGELIZE.

Matthew 28:19-20 speaks clearly to this –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

1 Peter 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

Then there is the office of PASTOR and TEACHER - **“So what's the difference?”**

PASTOR- *episcopos* in the Greek = Overseer

This is the role of those called to be **leaders** among the church and **heads, under Christ**, of the body. Otherwise referred to in scripture as **Shepherds** of the flock.

In the New Testament, the words *pastor*, *elder*, and *overseer* can be used interchangeably.

TEACHER-

- The Greek word for **“preach”** is *kēryssō*, which is the public proclamation of biblical truth.

- On the other hand, the Greek term for **“teach”** is *didaskō*, which refers to *systematically imparting knowledge and instruction*.

Jesus modeled this where at times He would proclaim the word of God to the crowds around Him – and at other times He would explain and demonstrate from the word of God to His disciples to instruct them.

Paul is another example of this where he would at times he would proclaim, and in others where he would instruct.

It has been said the role of preaching is to proclaim the word of God to stir sinners to repentance-

Whereas the role of teaching is to edify, to build up and encourage the body of Christ.

Said a different way –

- The goal of a PREACHER is for the hearer to DO something
- The goal of a TEACHER is for the hearer to KNOW something

Working together, *“the goal of PREACHING and TEACHING is for the HEARER to be motivated to and to know how to draw near to Jesus in repentance and faith to the glory of God the Father through a work of the Holy Spirit.”*

This is made clear by the final verse in the Ephesians 4 passage we looked at-

In Ephesians 4:12 we see the **PURPOSE** of the FIVE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH-
Namely,

¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

Finally, *while the office of Apostle and Prophet are closed* – the work they did during their time continues on in the church today –

And the work of **all of these offices** will continue on in the church -

Ephesians 4:13

¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

I want us to see clearly from our text today in **ACTS 13:2-3** that the church was ACTIVE AND SEEKING the Lord’s will in the growth of the church.

ACTS 13:2-3

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." ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

We see that they were "Ministering to the Lord and fasting."

Ministering – Serving the Lord to His glory and honor in faithful works.

Fasting – Found often in scripture accompanying fervent prayers.

- A whole other sermon could be spent on the topic of fasting alone – but suffice it to say for now is that fasting is not meant to change God's heart – but ours!
- Fasting is not commanded in scripture. But the frequency of its use and connection with prayer demonstrates an intentional and voluntary act on the part of the one seeking the will of God.
- Also, fasting is just as powerful today as it was then in taking a time of intentional *"doing without"* – to focus our attention on God.

God's response - was to acknowledge, through the Holy Spirit, either by consent of thought or through the words of the prophets, that Barnabas and Saul were to be "set apart."

The task before them would separate them from all other duties as God had **called** them as missionaries to do the work of an evangelist.

Therefore, with more prayer – more fasting – and the **laying on of hands** – *A symbolic gesture found in scripture that physically connects the message with the one receiving the message*, these men were sent out, on what we refer to today as the Apostle Paul's First Missionary Trip.

Barnabas and Saul were SET APART and SENT OUT to proclaim the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As we discussed earlier – **we who are in Christ and serving Him** - have ALL been called by His grace and commanded to be sharers of the Good News.

Again - We are not all called as Evangelists, but we have ALL been commanded to evangelize.

Those who hear me much, hear me quoting God's word to us to serve as Ambassadors for Christ.

Listen to the full passage found **2 Corinthians 5:17-20**

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Friends, WHY DID GOD SAVE YOU THROUGH CHRIST JESUS?

- **For His glory?** – YES and AMEN.

We have been “reconciled” – made right with God – having our relationship with God restored through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross.

And what MINISTRY, what PURPOSE, what WORK of service - for His name’s sake, have we ALL been given by GOD?

The ministry of reconciliation – that is – to proclaim the good news to others that God has opened a door of salvation from the judgment for sins through Christ Jesus.

He has called you and I to be **ambassadors** of His Holy Kingdom to this fallen land-

Proclaiming – pleading with the lost – on behalf of Christ – Be reconciled to God.

Church, may we all be intentional to respond to the calling God has placed on all our lives.

As each of us – you and I – will give an account before Him one day –

Be faithful – Be obedient.

Overcome your fear and doubt with faith and commitment.

Trust and find your joy in serving God as an Ambassador for Christ.

Let us pray~