

“A Sending Church”—Acts 13:1-3

Brandon Holiski

Southern Oaks Baptist Church

June 21, 2026

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Grab a Bible and meet me in Acts 13...

Today, we resume our study of the book of Acts, where we left off before our detour into Titus. As we turn the page into this new section of Acts, we have arrived at the point that deals with the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. In this new series—called “Sent”—we will be considering these journeys together. But what I have in mind is rather ambitious. Instead of plowing through chapters 13 to 21 in rapid succession, my desire is for us to pause periodically to integrate the content of Paul’s letters at key points throughout the study.

So, for example, the letter of Galatians was likely written between Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), so why not study Galatians together when we finish Acts 14? Or consider how the church at Philippi was birthed in dramatic fashion through the conversions described in Acts 16. What became of that church? Well, Paul’s letter to the Philippians gives us a good idea. Even though that letter was written when Paul was later imprisoned in Rome, it might be fun to study it after we examine Paul’s time in Philippi on his second missionary journey. This sort of thing is what I have in mind for this series. It’s ambitious, yes, but I think it will help us better understand how the New Testament fits together. So, Lord willing, I hope to proceed in this fashion. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Before we can get to all of that, we have to begin with a church in Antioch...

There are moments in the life of a church that do not seem all that dramatic when they are happening, but history later proves they were turning points. A small group gathers to pray. A few believers worship together. Some leaders fast and seek the Lord. Hands are laid on two men. A prayer is offered. A church says goodbye. That’s what we are about to read in Acts 13. It probably didn’t look like much to the city of Antioch. There were no headlines. No parade. No imperial announcement. No one in Rome was paying attention. If you had walked by the room that day, you might have thought nothing especially important was happening.

But Acts 13 tells us otherwise...Because in that ordinary gathering, the Holy Spirit was doing something extraordinary. He was launching a new chapter in the advance of the Gospel. From this moment forward, the book of Acts begins to move with fresh momentum toward the nations. The Gospel that had been preached in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria is now being carried, intentionally and strategically, toward the ends of the earth.

And what I want you to notice from the very beginning is that this mission did not begin with a strategy meeting, a marketing plan, or a fundraising campaign. It began with a worshiping church. A praying church. A fasting church. A listening church. A church that was willing to release some of its very best people because the kingdom of Christ mattered more than their own comfort, convenience, or institutional security. That is what makes Antioch so compelling.

Antioch was not great because it was big, though it was located in one of the great cities of the ancient world. Antioch was not great because it had impressive leaders, though it certainly did. Antioch was great because it was a church available to God. They were willing to be shaped by the Word, united by the Gospel, devoted to the Lord, and deployed for the mission.

And that raises an important question for us: What kind of church does the Holy Spirit use to send the Gospel forward? Not merely what kind of church do we want to be? Not merely what kind of church feels comfortable

to us? But what kind of church does God delight to use for the spread of His glory among the nations? Acts 13:1-3 gives us a beautiful answer. And the qualities we discover in the church at Antioch are the very qualities we should desire to see flourish among us, in ever-increasing measure, in the days ahead.

Now, have we looked at this passage before? Yes. In fact, a little over a year ago, I preached on these verses as we commissioned several families from our church to plant a church in Greshem. And, this might surprise you, but the text hasn't changed since then, so I suspect some of the lessons we learn here will be familiar. Nevertheless, they are absolutely worth rehearing today, not simply because we need to be reminded, but also because they are so essential for grasping what takes place in the next nine chapters or so of Acts.

With that in mind, let's do the most important thing and read the text. If you are able, let me invite you to stand to your feet once more in recognition of the authority of God's Word. Follow along as I read, beginning in verse 1...

"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping 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 after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:1-3)

This is God's Word. You may be seated...

Before we get to what happened in these verses in the church of Antioch, let me tell you a bit about the city. Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria. It was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world, behind Rome and Alexandria. It's estimated that half a million people dwelled within the city at this time in history. The city was known as "the queen of the East," with a thriving economy and a cosmopolitan culture. The city also served as a base for the Roman military. Because of its geographical location—situated at the crossroads of the north, south, and east—any given day, you might brush shoulders with "Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Egyptians, Africans, Indians, and Asians" who populated the city.¹ It was as diverse a city as there ever was. "A melting pot of peoples and cultures."² And, not surprisingly, it was also as pluralistic and idolatrous as any city known to man.

And yet here, a church was beginning to thrive. This church was planted by some anonymous Christian, fleeing persecution, as described in Acts 11. And several years into its existence, we come to this key moment in the life of the church—both the church in Antioch and the Church at large. What I would like you to see in this text today are four characteristics of the church at Antioch that I believe we as a church should seek to emulate. Here is the first one: The church at Antioch consisted of...

A Discipled People (13:1a)

Luke suggests, in verse 1, that the church at Antioch was being led by a group of "*prophets and teachers*," but it's not entirely clear "whether Luke is suggesting...that the same people were both teachers and prophets or whether these gifts resided in different people."³ In other words, are we meant to think of some of the men listed as the prophets of the church and the others as teachers *or* are we meant to think of all of them as "prophet-teachers"⁴? It's hard to say for sure, but if you pressed me for an answer, I would guess the latter since, as we see in the next paragraph, Saul (Paul) exercises both a teaching and prophetic ministry (13:9-11).

These leaders, no doubt, were engaged in that Great Commission work of making disciples, which necessarily involved "*teaching [people] to observe all that [Jesus] commanded*" (Matt 28:20). The believers in Antioch were an instructed people. A discipled people. They had solid teachers and prophetic leadership that would help them "discern outlets for their newfound knowledge."⁵ The leaders of any given church should be gifted-

disciplers. Antioch had them. The church benefited from them. They were a disciplined people, receptive to the teaching of the leadership God had installed in their midst. May the same be true of us.

Next, I want you to notice that they were...

A Diverse People (13:1b)

You get a sense of this from the leaders who are mentioned in verse 1. Let's call them "the Antioch Five," who essentially served as the elders for the church.⁶ In addition to the plurality of leadership in Antioch, the diversity of the leadership also stands out. Let's consider each of these figures for a moment...

Barnabas, who heads up the list likely because he was the most prominent of these leaders at this stage of church history, was a Jewish-Christian with a priestly background, who had previously been sent by the church in Jerusalem to scout out what the Lord was doing in Antioch. He was originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36), which was an island to the West of Palestine. He was a landowner who, when coming to Christ, sold his property and gave the proceeds to the ministry of the apostles (4:37). His given name was Joseph, but the apostles called him "Barnabas," which means "son of encouragement." The nickname says a lot about his character. He was an encourager. A generous man. A deeply devoted follower of Christ. And he was instrumental in enlisting, bringing up, and integrating Paul into the life of the church.

Next, there is "*Simeon who was called Niger.*" "*Niger*" derives from a Latin word meaning "black," and the nickname probably referred to his darker complexion, which could suggest an African origin. Some have wondered if this Simeon is to be identified with the Simon of Cyrene,⁷ who was made to carry the cross of Christ on the way to Golgotha. That would be awesome, if it were true, but Luke (the author of Acts) gives us no indication that such a connection is warranted. Luke does mention Simon of Cyrene in his Gospel (Luke 23:26), but the name is spelled differently in the Greek of these two texts, and here nothing is said of Simeon being a Cyrenian, though the next person, Lucius certainly was.

Some have wondered if this "*Lucius*" is the same kinsman of Paul mentioned in Romans 16:21, but once again there is no historical or textual reason to equate them. "*Lucius*" was a common name in the Roman world.⁸ It's also unlikely that this Lucius is the figure we know as Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and this book of Acts, though some have tried to make that case. What we do know is that Lucius was from Cyrene, which is in Northern Africa (think modern-day Libya). It would be reasonable to imagine Lucius as one of the men from Cyrene, along with those from Cyprus, who first preached the Gospel to the people of Antioch when the church was first conceived (Acts 11:20). We cannot know for certain, but it wouldn't be surprising if this were the case, which would make him one of the founders of the church in Antioch.

Next, there was Manaen. Manaen is the Greek version from a Hebrew name that means "comforter" (Manahem). Given the name he was probably Jewish. If you compare translations of verse 1, you will notice that Manaen's relationship to Herod is described differently. It all comes down to how you translate a particular word (*syntrophos*), which the ESV renders "*lifelong friend.*" That's a fair rendering. It can also mean something like "foster-brother," since it was a term used for "boys of the same age as the royal princes, who were taken to court to be brought up with them."⁹ This means Manaen was probably the recipient of a first-class Greek education. R. C. Sproul likened him to Moses, who grew up in the courts of Pharaoh before he was exiled from that life of privilege and called into God's service.

"*Herod the tetrarch,*" with whom Manaen was raised, is also known as Herod Antipas, the youngest son of Herod the Great.¹⁰ Herod the tetrarch was the guy who had John the Baptist beheaded and conspired with the Romans to have Jesus executed. That guy was raised with Manaen!¹¹ The same household produced one of the most infamous enemies of Christ and one of the most important leaders in the early church. How do you explain that? Grace. "God in His kindness rescued this man Manaen from the rank paganism of the household in which

he was reared.”¹² This, according to F. F. Bruce, serves as a fascinating “commentary on the mystery and sovereignty of divine grace that, of these two boys who were brought up together, one should attain honor as a Christian leader, while the other should be best remembered for his inglorious behavior in the killing of John the Baptist and in the trial of Jesus!”¹³ Incidentally, Manaen could also help explain why Luke seems to have so much access to information related to Herod’s family.¹⁴ Manaen may well have been Luke’s informant.¹⁵

Saul, who in this very chapter will begin to be referred to as Paul,¹⁶ was a highly educated Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, who was born with Roman citizenship. He was a former persecutor of the church, present when Stephen became the first Christian martyr. Educated by the famous rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. A Pharisee. Converted when the resurrected Jesus appeared to him on the way to Damascus. Set apart as an Apostle to the Gentiles, who will go on to write much of the New Testament, and be the main Christian figure from this point on in the narrative of Acts.

These are the “Antioch Five”—Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul/Paul. They are quite a group. It’s clear from this list that the church of Antioch had culturally diverse leadership, which was, no doubt, consistent with their culturally diverse church and city.¹⁷ Yet for all their diversity, Antioch, as described in Acts, “displays a remarkable degree of unity and sense of purpose.”¹⁸ This would have stood out in Antioch, which was as splintered and siloed as our society today. What could bring such a diverse group of people—elites and paupers, Jew and Gentile, old and young, from various walks of life—together? The answer is: the Spirit of God. Their community was supernatural. The Gospel had broken down barriers that the society at large sought to maintain. The Gospel had destroyed the dividing wall of hostility. “Outsiders from everywhere could have imagined themselves joining the Antioch congregation, knowing that it welcomed all sorts of people and could communicate the Scriptures to those of many nationalities and backgrounds.”¹⁹ Something was happening in the church that wasn’t happening in the world. It was supernatural. And that’s what made it so compelling. So unique. So marked by the aroma of Christ. No wonder it was in Antioch that people were first called “Christians.”

Churches should strive to be as diverse as the community in which God has planted them because churches should seek to reach everyone in their community, because the Gospel is for everyone in their community. Such diversity is a beautiful thing, a Christ-honoring thing, and a glorious foretaste of the heavenly glory that awaits the Church. May we never forget that God is saving people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people. Inasmuch as possible, we should strive for our churches to reflect that hope and anticipate that future.

Third, the church in Antioch was...

A Devoted People (13:2a)

Verses 2 and 3 paint a picture of a church gathering, worshiping, fasting, and praying. Should not every church be known for the same things? They were devoted to the Lord, and these spiritual disciplines evidence their devotion.

The word translated “*worshiping*” literally means “ministering” or “serving.” It’s a rare word in the New Testament but is used in the Greek Old Testament “almost exclusively for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.”²⁰ It seems though that the Christians adopted this priestly language to describe the ritual services and prayers they rendered in corporate worship. And it is from this Greek language that we derive English terms like “liturgy” and “liturgical.” The particulars of their worship are not specified, but they have clearly come together for the purpose of worship.

Luke also tells us that their worship was accompanied by “*fasting*.”²¹ Fasting is one of those disciplines that rarely, if ever, occurs by itself because it’s not an end in itself. As John Stott points out, “It is a negative action (abstention from food and other distractions) for the sake of a positive one (worshipping or praying).”²² The fact

that they were fasting shows that they were keenly aware of their need to depend on the Lord. They were likely seeking guidance and deeper intimacy. For all their remarkable gifting, they were still pressing into the Lord, seeking Him above all. And we see them praying in response to the Spirit's voice at the beginning of verse 3.

The believers at Antioch—not just the leaders—were a devoted people—who gathered for worship, prayer, and fasting as they sought the Lord.²³ And it should not be lost on us that it “was in the context of worship, prayer and fasting that the church at Antioch was led by the Holy Spirit to initiate the first intentionally centrifugal Gentile mission (13:1-3).”²⁴ The Spirit of God moves through such means. That should incentivize our gathering for the same purpose and with great expectancy. This is the fuel of missions.²⁵

And so, we see, finally, that the church at Antioch was...

A Deploying People (13:2b-3)

So there they are, gathered in corporate worship, when the Holy Spirit speaks to them. We are not told how the Holy Spirit communicates to them, but most have assumed it was through the “prophetic utterance” of one of their leaders.²⁶ The Spirit says, according to verse 2, “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” Interestingly, within the book of Acts, this is the only imperative (command) that the Holy Spirit issues to the church. It's a command to send out missionaries. This shouldn't surprise us since the Holy Spirit was given to the church for the sake of God's mission (Acts 1:8). He enables the people of God to fulfill the mission God. Our role in the mission begins with His initiative and is sustained by His empowering.

The calling out of these two men—Barnabas and Saul—has a point of contact with Abraham's call in that the call of God was not very specific initially.²⁷ To Abraham, God had said, “*Go...to the land that I will show you.*” He was called out, but not initially told where he was being sent. Likewise, in the case of Barnabas and Saul, they were called out, but not told much about where this planned “work” of God would take place. The calling was clear for all of these men. The particulars, not so much. “So in both cases the response to God's call required an adventurous step of faith.”²⁸

Though the “work” to which they were called is not defined here, in retrospect we now know that this particular call ushers in a new era of missionary activity. In Acts 1:8, Jesus describes how His followers will receive His Spirit so that they can be His witnesses “*in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” Most scholars see the book of Acts as structured into sections that deal with the Gospel spreading into each of those territories. Chapter 1 through 6 describe how the Gospel spread in Jerusalem. Chapters 6 through 12 describe its spread into Judea and Samaria. And now in chapter 13 we see formal beginnings of global missions. That's what Barnabas and Paul are being sent out for. This is the launch of Paul's (so-called) first missionary journey.²⁹ “The move to the ends of the earth has started in earnest.”³⁰

But before these men set out, we are told that the congregation has something of a commissioning time. Look at verse 3—“*Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*” This commissioning ceremony, with its laying on of hands, was “an act of blessing in which the church associated itself with them and commended them to the grace of God (14:26).”³¹ If there's any doubt, you can look at Acts 14:26, when they return to Antioch, which Luke describes as the place “*where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.*” Thus, they were sent off with the blessing of the church at Antioch, and it was to the church at Antioch that these men would return to give a report of the Lord's work (Acts 14:26-27).

But this congregational laying on of hands conveys something further, as Bruce Milne explains:

“In a profound sense the entire church will go forth: the two missionaries by their hands-on proclamation, the congregation by their constant prayers, and gifts, in support. Hence a scene is enacted which has had its echo in a multitude of congregations of God's people over the passing centuries, and is

being repeated all over the world at this very hour. This was the beginning. [As Darrell Bock explains,] ‘Everything about Acts shows us that its impetus is toward the church’s call in mission. We build churches not just to go in for worship, but to go out with God’s heart for people.’”³²

Do you have a heart for missions? You should. Every member of the church is meant for missions. As I tell you often, the Gospel came to you because it was heading to someone else. “Every saved person this side of heaven owes the Gospel to every unsaved person this side of hell.”³³ We are all missionaries, in the sense that we are all sent by the Lord Jesus—commissioned—to make disciples who make disciples wherever God has placed us.³⁴ Missions is not an optional add-on to the Christian life. It is the Christian life. You’re either a missionary or a mission field. Spurgeon once said you’re either a missionary or an imposter. Which is it? That doesn’t mean that we are all called by God to be vocational missionaries, sent out to new lands. But it does mean, wherever God has placed us, He is sending us to proclaim the message of the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation. Derek Thomas reminds us:

“Missionary endeavor is a responsibility of the entire church! It is not meant to be a quirky fixation of the select few who are ‘missionary-minded.’ Not to have a heart for missions is the same as not having a heart for Jesus Christ. It shows an indifference to what brought the Savior into the world and what drove him to the cross. Missions *is* the heart of God. It is the beating pulse of the Almighty for the lost souls of men and women. To be cold toward missions reveals an indifference to what lies at the center of God himself.”³⁵

He's absolutely right.

And notice how this text weds the notions of “personal call” and “congregational affirmation.”³⁶ God called individuals, but he had those individuals look toward the congregation for affirmation.³⁷ Indeed, Saul/Paul, we know, had already received a personal call to missionary work among the Gentiles (9:15; cf. 22:15; 26:17), but it wasn’t until this point, a decade or so later, that he would be launched out to fulfill that calling. He waited until the Spirit of God worked in the congregation to confirm that calling and send him out. God is the one who calls, but He is pleased to work in and through the local church to confirm our calling and deploy us into service. He works through His church. And this is why verse 3 states that the church at Antioch “*sent them off*” and then the very next verse says that they were “*sent out by the Holy Spirit*.” So who sent them? Was it the church or the Holy Spirit? And the answer is “yes.” It was both. It was the Holy Spirit *through* the church. Antioch was their “sending church” to use the lingo of the day. But the ultimate Sender, make no mistake, is the Holy Spirit. And actually, in Greek (the language that this was written in), there are actually two separate verbs that are used in these verses for “sending.” In the case of the Holy Spirit, in verse 4, He sends them. But in the case of the church, in verse 3, the verb may be better rendered “they released them.” Since missionary work is initiated by God, then any “sending” we do as a church is really a kind of “releasing.” Nevertheless, the Spirit facilitates this sending through the local church. I really appreciate what John Stott what wrote concerning this:

“...in our anxiety to do justice to the Holy Spirit’s initiative, we should not depict the church’s role as having been entirely passive. Would it not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so? This balance will be a healthy corrective to opposite extremes. The first is the tendency to individualism, by which a Christian claims direct personal guidance by the Spirit without any reference to the church. The second is the tendency to institutionalism, by which all decision-making is done by the church without any reference to the Spirit. Although we have no liberty to deny the validity of personal choice, it is safe and healthy only in relation to the Spirit and the church. There is no evidence that Barnabas and Saul ‘volunteered’ for missionary service; they were ‘sent’ by the Spirit through the church. Still today it is the responsibility of every local church (especially of its leaders) to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, in order to discover whom he may be gifting and calling.”³⁸

Don't underestimate the role of the local church to "call out the called."³⁹ And if you are suspecting that the Lord may be calling you out to some ministry endeavor—like pastoral ministry, or global missions, or church planting—don't try to go at it alone. Involve your church. The witness of Scripture should lead you to assume that whatever God is stirring up within you is not meant to be divorced from the local church.⁴⁰ Such work "is supported and sourced in the local church."⁴¹ In fact, our denomination feels so strongly about this that the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board will not appoint missionaries and church planters who have not had their callings affirmed and supported by a local church. That conviction is not arbitrary. It derives from the pattern we see in Scripture, including here in Acts 13.

In the case of the church at Antioch, we see that God calls them to send some of their key leaders.

"The message the church received was to release [some of] their best for missionary service (13:2), and their earnestness was such that they were willing to do so (13:3). This is typical of churches that have a missionary vision, churches whose main aim is more than survival or maintenance. Missions is so important to them that they willingly take steps that may seem harmful to the church in order for the missionary program to thrive."⁴²

Therefore, being a sending church, deploying missionaries with an eye toward church planting, will mean sacrifice. It's going to mean risk. It's going to take faith. It's going to take thinking in ways that most churches, to our shame, don't always think. Ways that are costly. Ways that seem to disadvantage us. Ways that don't make sense to everyone.

Consider the world of farming. What is a farmer most concerned about? Famine. You can't predict when it will happen. You can't control the rain. And that makes farming risky. Why? Because when the farmer has seed, he has to make a decision. On the one hand, he could use that seed for himself, grind it into flour for bread, and enjoy it while he can. On the other hand, he could plant it, and hope for the best. But, as J. D. Greear reminds us,

"Planting always involves risk. We release control of something we need in the hopes that it will come back to us in multiplied measure. But once we let go of it, we forfeit any ability to use it for ourselves. Seeds you plant can no longer be consumed. Yet without the act of planting, there will never be a harvest."⁴³

Churches are always tempted to build bigger and bigger storehouses of seeds, accumulating more and more members, bigger and bigger operations, without planting anything with an eye to the harvest. There's nothing wrong with big churches, don't mishear me. But what if God's evaluation of a church had more to do with how we scatter our seed than it does with how big we build our storehouses and barns? What if His measure of us had little to do with seating capacity, and more to do with sending capacity? Have you considered this?

Now we don't send and plant at our own initiative, any more than the church at Antioch did, but when the Spirit comes calling, we ought to be ready to be as prompt in our obedience, whatever the cost. As Greear continues,

"God grows his kingdom only as we take our hands off of what little portion he's given to us, 'die' to our control of it, and plant it into the world. That feels just as scary to us as to those farmers planting their precious, remaining seed into the dusty plains of Oklahoma and praying for rain."⁴⁴

But risk is right, if God is in it. And the way of Jesus is not about pursuing success in the eyes of the world, it's sacrificing for the sake of the world. That's why churches plant. That's why they send out missionaries. Not because it makes things easier for them. No, it makes things harder. But churches should be about building God's kingdom, not their own. Jesus loves churches who think beyond themselves, and seek instead His glory and mission. Churches like Antioch. They didn't hoard their resources for their own comfort and convenience.

They were instead generous—both with their finances and with their people. May the same be true with us, as the Lord leads.

But while the attention of this text is on these missionaries who were sent out from Antioch, let us not forget that God didn't call all of them to leave. Most stayed in Antioch. Why? Because there was still much fruitful ministry needed in that church. And indeed, if you know your history, the church at Antioch will be involved in many more exciting ventures in the years ahead. Patrick Schreiner describes the church as becoming "the base for mission to the nations."⁴⁵ Christopher Wright, similarly, described the church as "the hub for mission to the north and west."⁴⁶ Stott called it "the springboard for the worldwide Christian movement."⁴⁷ And this is not the last time Antioch would send out missionaries. Silas, for example, would join Paul from Antioch. And even into the second century, significant church fathers, like Ignatius, who was ultimately killed in a Roman arena, would emerge from this church. The story of the church of Antioch is far from over.

I think, by God's grace, the same is true for Southern Oaks. Now I would never presume that we are the next Antioch. We're not. Far from it. And that's okay. But I am happy to see us pursuing the sort of missional vision that Antioch modeled. "And as we follow this pattern, we will reflect—albeit dimly—the missionary heart of the Father, who sent heaven's best, Jesus Christ, for the good of the nations."⁴⁸ As the famous missionary and abolitionist, David Livingstone, once said, "God had only one Son, and He was a missionary." As the Father sent Him, so He sends us (John 20:21). You don't need to hear a voice, when you have a verse! You don't have to wonder if you're called, you just need to open your eyes to where God has placed you. So we are to imitate our missionary Father and His missionary Son when we send out others for the advancement of the Gospel and building up of God's Kingdom, whether we are sending them out by dismissal from the corporate worship until we assemble next Sunday again or we are sending them out in the hopes of seeing a new church planted in the not too distant future.⁴⁹

So, what kind of church does the Holy Spirit use to send the Gospel forward? That's the question we began with. It's not a perfect church. Not a famous church. Not necessarily a large church. But a church that belongs to Christ. A church shaped by the Word, united by the Gospel, devoted to the Lord, and willing to be sent for the sake of His name. And, brothers and sisters, the reason we can be that kind of church is because before the church ever sent out the likes of Barnabas and Saul, before Antioch ever released its best, before missionaries ever crossed the seas or planted churches or preached Christ in places where He had not been named, God the Father sent His best. He sent His own Son.

Jesus did not cling to the comforts of heaven. He came. He was sent into our world of rebellion, idolatry, division, and death. He came not merely to give us an example of mission, but to accomplish the mission we could never accomplish. He lived the righteous life we have not lived. He died the sinner's death we deserved to die. He rose from the grave so that people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people might be forgiven, reconciled to God, and brought into one new family by grace.

That is why we go. That is why we send. That is why we sacrifice. Not to earn the love of God, but because in Christ we have already received it. Not because the church has a mission of its own invention, but because the risen Christ is still gathering His people from the nations by His Spirit through His Word. So, Southern Oaks, may we not be a church content merely to gather seed into bigger barns. May we be willing, as the Lord leads, to plant. To release. To send. To pray. To give. To go across the street and, perhaps, across the world.

And for some of you, the first step is not to go for Christ, but to come to Christ. Before you can be sent as a witness, you must be saved by the Savior. So come to Him today. Trust Him. Turn from your sin and self-reliance. Believe on Him. Receive Him as your only Hope for salvation. Call upon His name to save you. And He would extend to you grace and mercy. You would be forgiven. You would be delivered. You would be received by Him. And then, together, let us say to the Lord: Here we are. We belong to You. Use us however You will, until the glory of Christ fills the earth.

And all God's people said? Amen. Let's pray...

¹ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, CCE (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 155-156.

² D. J. Williams, "Antioch on the Orontes," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, eds., Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 53.

³ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NICAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 373.

⁴ Patrick Schreiner, *Acts*, CSC (Holman Reference, 2021), 374.

⁵ Dean Pinter, *Acts*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 304.

⁶ Merida, 165.

⁷ Mark describes Simon of Cyrene as "*the father of Alexander and Rufus*" (Mark 15:21), who were evidently known to the believers in Rome—the likely audience of Mark's Gospel. This "*Rufus*" may be the same man greeted by Paul in Romans 16:13. See F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, Rev. Ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 245n.4.

⁸ Indeed, it was one of the eighteen *praenomina*. See Bruce, 245.

⁹ Bruce, 245. See also Brian J. Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 459.

¹⁰ "Josephus mentions an earlier Meahem, an Essene, who was honored by Herod the Great for having foretold his rise to royal estate; it has been conjectured that he might have been the grandfather of this Menahem (Manaen)." Bruce, 245. When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided among his children, who each became a ruler over a fourth of that kingdom, which is why they are called "tetrarchs."

¹¹ "Some have linked him [i.e., Manaen] with Chuza, a steward of Herod Antipas (perhaps a manager of one of his estates), whose wife Joanna was among the women who accompanied Jesus (Luke 8:3). This connection must remain hypothetical, however." Schnabel, 554.

¹² R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 219. He also states, "Behind all this was God, of course, who will take from the same family as [sic] Jacob rather than an Esau, a Manaen rather than an Antipas. One will be taken; one will be left. One receives justice; one receives mercy. This serves as a microcosm for all of us." Ibid.

¹³ Bruce, 245.

¹⁴ Bruce, 245.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 216.

¹⁶ "In 13:9, introducing Saul's first words in his narrative, given in direct speech, Luke transitions from using 'Saul' to using his Latin name 'Paul,' which he will use in the remainder of his narrative, a change in nomenclature that signifies the transition from missionary outreach to the Jewish people to missionary work among both Jews and Gentiles in areas outside of Palestine." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 548.

¹⁷ Ray Bakke remarks, "So the first large city-centre church we know anything about had a five-person pastoral team from three continents. This is the climax of Pentecost. In Jerusalem they spoke many languages, now in Antioch they were fleshing out multiculturalism in the structure of the pastoral team." Quoted in Milne, 280.

¹⁸ Vickers, 459.

¹⁹ Merida, 165.

²⁰ K. Hess, *NIDNTT*, 3:551-52.

²¹ Cf. Acts 14:23.

²² Stott, 217. Don Whitney has said, "Without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience." Don Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 165.

²³ Most scholars believe that the entire congregation is participating in these activities, not just the five men mentioned. See, e.g., Vickers, 459; Fernando, 374; Stott, 216; Pinter, 298.

²⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 258.

²⁵ Merida, 166.

²⁶ Schnabel, 555. See also Bruce, 245; Fernando, 374; Pinter, 300.

²⁷ "Luke does not explain why Barnabas and Saul went to Cyprus (v. 4); this destination is not mentioned in the prophetic utterance of v. 2. Barnabas and Saul may have planned a new missionary initiative with the goal of reaching Cyprus for some time. Two factors may have been decisive. First, Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (4:36); as he had recruited Saul as a coworker for the evangelistic and pastoral ministry in Antioch (11:25–26), he may well have taken the initiative in suggesting Cyprus as the next geographical area in which they might preach the gospel. Second, some of the Greek-speaking Jewish believers who had to leave Jerusalem in AD 31/32 engaged in missionary work in cities on the Phoenician coast, in Antioch, and on Cyprus (11:19); since Barnabas would have known these believers, he may well have felt responsible not only for the consolidation of the work that Jerusalem believers had initiated in Antioch but also for their work in the cities of Cyprus. Barnabas, together with Saul and the other leaders of the church in Antioch, would surely have asked God for a confirmation of these plans whose realization implied that the two leading teachers and missionaries would leave the ministry in Antioch to engage in missionary outreach in other regions." Schnabel, 555-556.

²⁸ Stott, 217.

²⁹ “So-called” because it is common for people to speak of Paul’s three missionary journeys, but, as Schnabel points out, “to talk of his ‘missionary journeys’ wrongly creates the impression that Paul’s missionary work was limited to these journeys.” They were not. And Schnabel itemizes fifteen phases/periods of Paul’s missionary work described in Acts. See Schnabel, 548-549.

³⁰ Bruce Milne, *The Acts of the Apostles: Witnesses to Him...to the Ends of the Earth* (Christian Focus, 2010), 280. “The mission to the Gentiles is not new in one sense. A breakthrough occurred in chaps. 8-11. What is new is Gentile assemblies, the local church’s partnership, and the official sending of missionaries into the larger world.” Schreiner, 372.

³¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 216. “The laying on of hands is a symbolic, public declaration that someone has been recognized as worthy of some task and has the blessing of God and whoever is involved...[T]he primary goal of the laying on of hands is recognition and commissioning for service.” Vickers, 460.

³² Milne, 283 (quoting from Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 440). Milne adds, “It should also be noted that for the first time there is no direct Jerusalem involvement, nor any apostolic presence, other than Saul himself. The church is moving out beyond its first foundational forms to the apostolicity of its life as the people of God scattered through the world.” Milne, 283.

³³ A saying attributed to David Platt in J. D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 19.

³⁴ “The word ‘missionary’ has to do with sending. The Latin word mitto, mittere, means ‘to send’; ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ come from the forms missi and missum. The mission of the church is the sending of people by the church at the leading of the Holy Spirit into areas of the world where the name of Christ is not known and God is not worshiped.” James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 226.

³⁵ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 364.

³⁶ David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1988), 35.

³⁷ “The commissioning by the church in Antioch does not mark the beginning of the missionary work of either Barnabas or Saul/Paul, but should be seen as confirming their missionary calling and as inaugurating a new phase of missionary work.” Schnabel, 555.

³⁸ Stott, 217-218.

³⁹ See Scott Pace and Shane Pruitt, *Calling Out the Called: Discipling Those Called to Ministry Leadership* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2022).

⁴⁰ “Paul did not operate as a missionary independent of the church but as a missionary who belonged to a local congregation, who was recommissioned by a local congregation to a new missionary initiative, and who regarded himself to be accountable to the congregations in Antioch and in Jerusalem—two churches which he regularly visited after the conclusion of another phase of missionary work.” Schnabel, 562.

⁴¹ Schreiner, 374.

⁴² Fernando, 377.

⁴³ Greear, 15.

⁴⁴ Greear, 16.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, 374.

⁴⁶ Wright, 217.

⁴⁷ Stott, 156.

⁴⁸ Merida, 167.

⁴⁹ Merida, 167.