

Developing a Mindset of Missions: *Lessons from a Model Church* Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3

*“When we’re connected to worlds outside our own, linking arms with Christ followers from other cultures, our spiritual journey is enriched. **We experience a small taste of heaven.**”¹*

Introduction: We are enamored with stories of finding priceless artifacts or valuable commodities in common places, from a mosaic from Caligula’s ship turned into a coffee table, to a small piece signed by Picasso discovered in an Ohio thrift store that was sold for \$14, we love when treasure is unearthed in unexpected ways. In 2001, an antique dealer named Kevin Quinlan bought an Early American-style mahogany card table set at an estate sale. He offered \$1650 for it since it was in good condition, although it was in such good condition it was considered to be an excellent reproduction, not an original. However, it turned out to be an original, perfectly preserved Chippendale masterpiece from the mid-1700’s. Two weeks after the estate sale, it sold at auction for \$1.3 million.²

It’s fascinating to think about how that could happen. How can this family have this treasure and not know what they had?! Did the owner know about it but not tell the next generation? How could so many other dealers (over 100 antique dealers walked by the piece without purchasing it) NOT see the treasure that stood right before them? How does something so valuable get treated as something so common and miss out on the potential value?

I think this story is an apt and cautionary tale for our church and every church when it comes to **what is entrusted to us in the gospel and the extraordinary call and mission to make disciples of all nations**. Here is what we know as Christians and followers of Jesus:

- We have been **entrusted with the good deposit of the gospel** – It was entrusted to Paul (2 Tim. 1:12), who then entrusted it to Timothy in Ephesus, who was commanded to follow the pattern of sound words in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1:13-14). Timothy was to **entrust this pattern and deposit** to faithful men who would teach others also (2:2-3). In other words, truth of the gospel and the perpetuation of disciple making is to be handed down from generation to generation, guarding it, valuing it, promoting it, and expanding it. But we know we are always one generation away from losing it, or allowing it to become common, or covered up by other things in the name of expediency.
- We KNOW the Great Commission is for all believers for all time (until Christ returns) and in every place – **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** (Matt. 28:19-20) We know this, but this simple but profound command can easily lose traction in a church, families, and individual lives because life happens, is full of necessary things, and our mission can get squeezed out or sloughed off to someone else, or to another organization.
- We know that God has had a heart for the nations from the beginning and it has always been his plan for all the nations of the world to worship and glorify Him. From **Genesis 12:1-3** where all the families of the earth would be blessed by Abraham, to Israel being a light to the gentile

¹ Steve Richardson, “Is the Commission Still Great?”, p. 181.

² Ibid, p. 175.

world around (Isa. 49:6), to the church called to reach the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), to the glimpse we get in heaven in Revelation 5:9-10:

*And they sang a new song, saying,
 “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
 for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on the earth.”*

- We know that developing a mission’s mindset is hard. Distractions, sin, other good investments and calls, and local responsibilities all can crowd our view and desire to reach the nations. I often have an “*out of sight, out of mind*” disease where I am so focused on the present and what’s in front of me that it is difficult to think about those far away. This is why it is necessary for us to **deliberately and intentionally set our minds on what Scripture calls us to.**

In his book “*Is The Commission Still Great?*”, Steve Richardson, the President of Pioneers-USA, wrote this:

“Missions is God’s idea, not ours, and it is the central theme of what He is doing in the world, not an optional side project. Western missionaries are not obsolete. Missions is about cross-cultural discipleship, not just any good deed, but it doesn’t have to limit or compete against other forms of ministry...missions is for everyone, not just misfits and super-saints.” (p. 190)

“If the enemy of the gospel can keep us from recognizing the nature of the battle we are in and the privilege of our God-given role, then he has taken us out of the fight without ever firing a shot. We play into his plans when we allow our sense of urgency about the lostness of human souls and their eternal destiny to fade away.” (p. 185)

So this morning is a redirect, a refreshment, a stirring up by way of reminder to the call we have a church continue what was started here, a desire to shine brightly in Simi Valley and to engage in what is doing globally in the building up of His body and bringing all nations into His Church. We will look at a **model church in the book of Acts** that God used to start what we call missions today, or at least from a church sending out missionaries’ perspective. Then we will conclude with what God is doing in the world today and where this church can continue to be an encouragement, connector, resource, and pioneer in God ordained places around the world.

The Church at Antioch: Faithful & Fruitful

A quick survey of the book of Acts is helpful to see how the church at Antioch, a city some 300 miles north of Jerusalem, became a pioneering church in terms of fulfilling the Great Commission out of the Great commandment.

Right before Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection from the dead, He gave His remaining disciples/apostles this clear command in **Acts 1:8**:

*8 But you will receive **power** when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you, and you will be **my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Several truths jump out at this command. 1) The disciples were still focused on Jesus establishing His earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6), but Jesus redirected their focus to a FUTURE kingdom and a PRESENT mission. 2) They would need extraordinary **power** that did not come from themselves to accomplish the mission. 3) They would receive the **Holy Spirit**, who Jesus promised (John 14:16) before and said it was to their advantage that Jesus would go away so the Spirit would come. To say the Holy Spirit coming on the disciples and to successive groups was a game changer is a massive understatement. The Spirit would be IN them (John 14:17; Rom. 8:7-9), would bear witness of Jesus (John 15:26), convict the world of their sin (John 16:9), and guide them in all truth (John 16:13). The story of the book of Acts is really the story of the work of the Holy Spirit, who still guides us today. 4) Their mission would be **expansive**, not just to the city of Jerusalem or the area of the promised land, but would extend to the ends of the earth. This is still where we take our cue today. We do not neglect our local area by any means, but we also recognize a call to greater fruitfulness and reach beyond our locale.

In **Acts 1-7**, we see the fruitful work of the apostles who evangelized, taught, disciplined, trained, and established the church in Jerusalem. There was clear leadership through elders established (as we see later in 11:30). They had to work out the care of their own, making sure widows were taken care of, so they set up a pre-deacon system of care by appointing faithful men to care for physical needs, freeing up the leaders of the church to teach and pray (Acts. 6:1-6). But through **Acts 7**, the church had not truly expanded beyond Jerusalem, and so they had not yet begun to fulfill the call of Jesus from 1:8. That all changed with the **sermon and work of Stephen**.

Stephen was chosen to serve the widows of the church because he was **full of faith and the Holy Spirit** (Acts 6:5), and a man **full of grace and power** (6:8), through whom the Spirit did great signs and wonders. After being wrongfully seized and brought before the Jewish counsel, Stephen gave a sermon that walked through the history of Israel to Jesus, and at the conclusion, he stated in **7:51-53**:

*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, **whom you have now betrayed and murdered**, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it*

At this, they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. He became the first martyr of the church age, a tragedy of needless bloodshed. Yet God does wondrous things through the most tragic things. Persecution was set off against the church in Jerusalem, at the hands of none other than Saul – a man who God used to build the church *before AND after his conversion*. Because of this persecution, the church **scattered, leaving the numbers of the church of Jerusalem depleted, but moving believers to new places around the known world**. God will use all the means He desires to accomplish His purposes, even persecution.

In Acts 9 Saul is converted, and in Acts 10 Peter receives word that the **Gentiles** would become part of the church. This set the stage for the formation of the church in Antioch in Acts 11. Here is how it happened in Acts 11:19-30:

*Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and **Antioch**, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on **coming to Antioch** spoke to the Hellenists also, **preaching the Lord Jesus**. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, **and a great number who believed turned to the Lord**. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to*

*Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and **he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose**, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. **And a great many people were added to the Lord.** ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a **whole year** they met with the church and taught a great many people. **And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.** ²⁷ Now in these days' prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, **to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.** ³⁰ And they did so, **sending** it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*

This was a remarkable church, forged out of persecution and formed out of great commitment. Here are a few **hallmarks** of this church:

- This was the first church that was made up of both **Jews and Gentiles**, a heterogeneous group that reflected the ideal of a cross cultural church.
- This church focused on **preaching the Lord Jesus**, which is always the foundational means by which God causes growth
- This church was effective, seeing a great number who believed and repented, meaning they did not water down the message or the high commitment to Jesus Christ
- This church not only reached OUT to evangelize, but they committed to deepen their understanding of God's Word through the teaching of Barnabas and Saul for an entire year. A strong and growing church becomes an effective church
- This was the first church that disciples were called Christians, which truly meant these two terms are synonymous.
- This church recognized they were tied together with other churches, sending aid to a church than many/most had never been to, but were willing to sacrifice for the church in Jerusalem and entrusting their money to the elders there. They had responsibility and opportunity to not only care for their own region but also with churches throughout the world, recognizing their interconnectedness.

Antioch was a church that was growing in reach AND maturity, focused on their immediate locale AND the church around the world, and focused on preaching the gospel AND caring for practical needs. It is this church that was set up to be used by the LORD to become a **sending church**, one that would be used to reach the nations. By the time of **Acts 13**, God did something extraordinary through them:

*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 **worshipping** 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.***

Notice the makeup and activities of this church after more than a year of existence:

- Antioch was made up of **multiple ethnicities and social classes** – They not only had Paul and Barnabas, but a man from Cyrene in Lucious, a leader most likely from Africa named Simeon, and a leader named Manaen who grew up with Herod, making him influential and most likely wealthy in Herod's sphere. When the church models multi-ethnic, multi-generation, and multi-socio economic realities, we display the fact that God is a God of the nations
- Antioch had **multiple gifts present**, where they had qualified teachers and prophets, or those that could speak and teach the Word of God consistently and faithfully. When the church grows together under the authority of Scripture, there is both **power and unity possible**. When everyone exercises their gifts, the church truly is in a position to be used to reach those outside.
- Antioch was committed to **worship** – There was a clear fervency and commitment to the corporate worship of this church, as evidenced by their practice of *fasting*, a willingness to give up food for a time to focus on the Lord. Worship is not only the goal but the fuel for missions, evangelism, and discipleship. Without this fervency, there is not urgency. The nominal commitment of so many church goers betrays why there is so little fire for reaching the nations.
- Antioch walked with the **Holy Spirit** – Being led by the Spirit means we are submitted to God and His Word, and walk according to His will, not our own. The leading of the Holy Spirit is not merely an emotional response to life, but absolutely engages our emotions, affections, and volition to serve the Lord in the way He calls us.
- Antioch was willing to **set apart and send** – This was the model of a sending church, willing to send their best for the work that God had for them, even though they did not know all the details or what was going to happen. A sending church is one that has a cumulative effect of faithful teaching, obedience, discipleship, and maturity. Or to say it another way, an **equipped church** will be able to send out workers into the harvest.

This is a model church. One that was committed to Biblical truth and living, and one that we want to emulate here. Let's talk for a few minutes to close how God is using this church among the global church and what opportunities we have coming up, especially if we **continue to commit to these same principles as Antioch**.

For the last couple of weeks, I had the privilege to attend a global conference of all Encompass missionaries in Lisbon, Portugal. It was encouraging to hear the commitment to **gospel entrustment and church planting**, the second of which is out of vogue among many missionaries. There is a committed core of families who are sacrificing comfort, the American dream, and the status quo to bring the gospel to the least reached, many of whom we support. We are seeing a growing team in **Osaka, Japan** with Matt and Mai Higby, as God resets their team and refreshing their excitement to reach the lost in that massive place. We continue to see fruitfulness in the work of **Florent Varak** and Philippe Vigue out of the church in Lyon, France, which has now planted four other churches in the area around Lyon. We will continue to support and encourage these churches in any way we can, and hopefully we will send teams to this area to meet practical needs as they arise.

But one of the most encouraging parts of this trip was to see what God is doing in **Lodz, Poland** through the work of **Vance and Jen Yzbick**. Over 10+ years of work, Vance and Jen saw disciples made, suffering

experienced, and a church planted. In a predominantly Catholic and unchurched place, there is now a thriving church with solid leadership. In fact, if you were blindfolded and placed there (and if they would all speak English), it would feel very much like being in Simi Valley, or Rancho, or Dover. This church teaches the truth consistently and boldly, cares for the people God has brought, is developing leaders, and has evangelism as a high priority (one that we can learn from). The more we talked with **Czarek and Eva**, the leader of the elders, and the rest of the elders, it is clear that we share many things in common. Not only that, but Grace Church of Dover is now supporting the work there, which means we are partnering together in reaching the nations, doing the same things in different areas.

We are committed to supporting the church in Lodz, to encourage them, resource them, connect with them, and perhaps help them pioneer the next church plants in Poland. It was affirming for both of us that there are other churches around the world seeking to do the same things we are doing here. We are also committed to supporting **Vance and Jen** in where God places them next, and to do all that we can to make sure they know they are not alone.

So be encouraged, that God is using us around the world, but know we are simply trying to faithfully do what we have been entrusted with. So there is plenty MORE to do in the future. The best thing we can do in terms of fulfilling a missions' mindset: ***we need to live like missionaries here***, committed to wholehearted worship, maturation in God's Word, a willingness to sacrifice for those here and outside, to make disciples HERE in Simi Valley, and to pray to the God of the harvest to raise up workers for His harvest.