

# Are You On Mission?

## Acts 13:1-12

Today, we actually begin the first **Missionary Journey** of Barnabus and Saul (Saul of Tarsus, soon to be named as the Apostle Paul). But the big question is, **Are you on Mission?**

**Not so much on A Mission, but are you actively about, doing the Mission God has already ordained for you?**

**Are you on Mission?**

There's a lot to consider when we look at the events leading up to what the Church of Antioch is about to do.

Jerusalem had sent men out prior to this time, but by and large they sent men out to witness **what was already going in in the lives** of a variety of people in a variety of places.

Individuals had gone out before, but **not with the primary focus of evangelistic missionary work**, but they definitely did witness to those they came in contact with and as we've seen in previous studies, many were won to the Lord through that venue.

Families and communities had come to a saving knowledge of Christ, but it appears that those were primarily events which took place because **someone was at the right place at the right time, actively "on mission for the Lord"**.

But as of the end of Acts 12, we have yet to see a **concerted evangelistic effort put on by the Church**. Now, here in chapter 13, we see the first true missionaries sent out and it doesn't happen out of the leadership of Jerusalem... it happens out of the **leadership at Antioch**.

The Church of Antioch was about 8-10 years old when we see the events of Acts 13 taking place. If these events happened after the death of Herod Agrippa 1, they would have happened around AD 45-47. Most scholars agree that this first Missionary Journey began sometime in AD 47, departing from the city of Antioch.

Let's look at Acts 13 –

Acts 13

<sup>1</sup> Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

The men involved in this **calling or ordaining for ministry** are by and large unheard of before and a couple aren't listed any other place in the scripture than right here.

First Luke lists **Barnabas**, and yes we know him, Luke first introduced him to us in the earlier chapters of Acts – he is the “**Son of Encouragement**”. We find him very active in the work of ministry throughout the book of Acts (at least up until the **events of Acts 15**) and then he's also listed several times throughout the balance of the New Testament.

Then we come to **Simeon who was called Niger** (*knee-gare*): little of anything is known about this brother. Much speculation is made, simply because of the phrase, “...*who was called Niger*”. Niger is actually a Latin word, meaning black – possibly reflecting a dark complexion. Because he had a Latin nickname, some felt he was also active in the Roman culture in some way. But the fact is many Jews had both a Hebrew name and a Roman/Latin name (i.e. Saul/Paul).

Some have tried to **equate him with Simon of Cyrene**, the man who **carried the cross of Jesus** in Matthew's and Mark's Gospel accounts. One of the arguments that he may have been Simon of Cyrene is that listed right next to his name here in Acts 13, Luke mentions **Lucius of Cyrene**. Cyrene is a city on the coastline of Northern Africa.

Although Paul lists a Lucius in the book of Romans, it is most likely not **Lucius of Cyrene**, since Paul lists him as “*one of my countrymen*” in Romans. So, we know nothing more about **Lucius of Cyrene**.

Also among the leadership of the Church at Antioch was, “**Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**.” Apparently a boyhood friend or at least an acquaintance of Herod. But nothing else is known of him. Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible tells us his name is

**a Greek form of the Hebrew name Menachem.** But beyond that, only God knows. We have no other mention of him in the Bible.

Then at the very end of the list, Luke writes, “...*and Saul.*” Sounds almost like an “*also ran*” thought. Almost like an after-thought. I mean, it wasn’t like he said, “*There was Barnabas and Saul, and some other guys...*” At this point in the timeline of the early Church Luke simply clumps Saul in with the rest.

**But instead of that bringing Saul down a notch or two in our minds, it ought to bring these other Brothers up a notch or two.** Luke had no problem giving these guys equal billing with the one who would very soon be known as the Apostle Paul. Remember, as Luke is writing this some years after these events, he’s already seen the Lord use Paul the Apostle in powerful ways.

So, to me, once again this speaks of **the unsung heroes of the Christian faith.**

All through the millennia God has used **men and women** who will **never be recognized by this world.** But, God knows their names. And this speaks so much about the mindset that you and I ought to have in serving the Savior.

- Do you want to get recognition from man or are you simply desiring to please the Savior?
- Do you hunger for the accolades of the world or will the simple words, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant suffice for you*”?
- Do you need the acknowledgement of the culture, or are you content being known as a servant of the Most High sufficient?

The writer of Hebrews, in that great “*Roll Call of the Faithful*” found in Hebrews 11, lists such notable men and women as **Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Samuel**, as well as a host of others **listed by name.** Names we know and speak of.

But, don’t forget that **along with those recognized** by man are those who he lists simply as:

Hebrews 11

<sup>35</sup> *Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured...* <sup>36</sup>  
*Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, chains, and imprisonment.* <sup>37</sup>

***They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented--<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.<sup>39</sup> And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith...***

All of these unknowns are listed with and held by God in the same honor as those whose names are known. Oh Christian, don't sorrow that no one recognizes your service to our Great King. After all, it is Him you serve and not man.

Luke tells us that these men, "*ministered to the Lord and fasted.*" The best we can understand is that they had a time of prayer and worship before the Lord during a time of fasting. They were seeking the Lord's will and direction for the Church in Antioch. Rather than going by the best laid plans of man, they sought the Lord's direction and He was faithful to reveal it to them. "*...the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

Was it an audible voice, was there an angel that appeared and spoke these things to them, or was it simply a leading of the Spirit?

When I read these kinds of things in the Bible I look for key words or phrases. One of the things you need to understand, Luke didn't write, "*They felt compelled by or led by the Holy Spirit...*"

He wrote that the "*...the Holy Spirit said.*"

Since Luke introduces this section with the clarity of the words, "*Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain **prophets and teachers**...*" this leads me to believe that either through the Spiritual Gift of Prophecy. God by way of the Holy Spirit, spoke to the Church through the words given to one who had the **Gift of Prophecy**.

They were to separate out *Barnabas and Saul for the work* for the work God had prepared for them to accomplish. I love this, God had a plan in mind already, even long before they began to *minister to the Lord and fast*. It is simply NOW they are ready to hear and receive all that the Lord had in mind for them.

But still they *fasted and prayed* before they *laid hands on them, (and) sent them away*.

Absolutely!! Not because they doubted, but I believe as both confirmation and for protection, with God's leading, provision, and blessing.

How dare we ever send someone off to ministry without the covering of God's Almighty hand!

Missions work is a particular calling. It is a calling of God and a gifting from the Holy Spirit.

When we look at the Gifts of the Spirit, we don't see "missionary", but we do see "apostle" – not as an office of the Church, but as a gift to and for the Church. In the Greek language, the word apostle is derived from the verb "to send". Josephus uses the word in the sense of sending "emissaries" or perhaps an "embassy." We also find in the Hebrew a particular meaning of "one who is sent" particularly with a special task.<sup>1</sup>

Outside of the Office of Apostle, given by the Lord Jesus to those who have authority over the Church, we also see the usage of the "ministry of apostle" in the New Testament where individuals or groups of people were "sent out" as authorized representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ and/or His Church. This is made clear in verses such as Acts 14:14 (*"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this..., "*) where we read that Barnabas himself was given the title or ministry position of apostle, not as an office over the Church, but as a representative or as we call them, a **missionary** sent from the Church.

The calling of *Missionary* is an exact and important call, as exact as that of Pastor/Teacher. Although all Believers are called, commissioned, and even commanded by the Lord Jesus to *"always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..."* (1 Peter 3:15), above and beyond **that general call is the special and unique calling** as a **Missionary**: to leave the comforts and familiarity of home, to travel forward as an ambassador for Christ to a place, people, or nation with the precise purpose of winning men to Christ. A missionary is one who is sent out with a task to serve as an emissary of Christ to a lost and dying world.

As one who had a true missionary heart, J.L. Ewin declared:

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Apostle, Apostleship.](#)" *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 131.

*As long as there are millions destitute of the Word of God and knowledge of Jesus Christ, it will be impossible for me to devote time and energy to those who have both.*

Hudson Taylor powerfully expressed the early call of God on his heart to serve as a missionary, particularly to China:

- As child, at age 5:  
**When I am a man, I mean to be a missionary and go to China.**
- As a young man:  
**I feel I cannot go on living unless I do something for China.**
- Late in life, as a veteran missionary:  
**If I had 1,000 lives, I'd give them all for China.**

It can be nothing less than the **sovereign call of God** for a man or woman to serve Him in that capacity.

Let me share with you the story of one other:

David was born in Connecticut, as 1 of 10 children. But by the time he was nine years of age, he had lost both his father, and then five years later his mother, leaving him and his siblings as orphans.

Ten years later, at 19 years of age, he inherited the farm, but because his heart wasn't in farming he prepared himself to enter Yale. In the midst of that preparation God intercepted his life and David surrendered to *"a hearty desire to exalt God, to set Him on the throne and to seek first His Kingdom..."*

After his second year at Yale, he was sent home **suffering from** (what was later diagnosed as) **tuberculosis**; only to return the next year and get expelled because of a major disagreement with one of his professors. After failed attempts to get back into Yale, David was at a loss as to **what the Lord would have him do**. Without his degree, it seemed his options were limited.

But, through the counsel of friends and other acquaintances, David was encouraged to go with the **passion God had given him and step out as a missionary**. So, in April of 1743 David Brainerd began his missionary work with the First Nations People, the **Native Americans of the areas from New York to Massachusetts**.

However, his earlier illness **limited his time of service as a missionary** to only 3½ years. Brainerd died in 1747, at the young age of 29.

What I want you to see in this is that in those years, he was deeply committed to the people he was serving and served the Lord faithfully in spite of many hardships. In those short years as missionary, he suffered from a **form of depression that was sometimes immobilizing** and which, on at least **twenty-two occasions, led him to wish for death**. He was also affected by difficulties faced by other missionaries of the period, such as **loneliness and lack of food**.

Yet, in David's journal entries, there was found these words:

All my desire was the conversion of the (this people) . . . I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls to Christ. I declare, now I am dying, I would not have spent my life otherwise for the whole world.

– David Brainerd

Such a short time to serve the Lord, yet David served Him with all of his heart and all of his strength. His devotion to the Lord Jesus and his commitment to serve as a missionary have been the inspiration of such later missionaries as William Carey, a faithful Missionary to India; and Jim Elliot, who was killed in 1956 by the very tribal people he was trying to evangelize in Ecuador.

It was Elliot who is credited with the words:

*“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”*

If we could do a flash survey of the book of Acts this morning, we would see that the sufferings of the Apostle Paul during and in most cases because of his Missionary endeavors, were the road map to missionaries down through the millennia.

Barnabus and Saul didn't become Missionaries because they went to a Church Job Fair and thought it would be fun to travel the world. They went out because the Holy Spirit had sent them out...

*<sup>4</sup> So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.*

Did they know exactly where they were headed as they left? We don't know. All we know is that they were obedient to go, being *sent out by the Holy Spirit*.

How about you? Have you ever felt that maybe, just maybe the Lord would have you serve outside your comfort zone, outside the familiar, surrendering your plans for His plans –

- It might be something local: ministering to disadvantaged kids in another community.
- It might be something regional: stepping out to share your faith, time, and talents in an area of our country where people are suffering a variety of losses.
- It might be international: taking that step to go where He calls you to go, for the purposes He calls you to.

Whatever the case may be, don't do it on **emotions alone**. Emotions are good, but they are not enough.

Don't do it on the **direction of man**. Getting directions and being equipped to serve is good, but make certain it isn't just the call of a man or an organization.

It truly isn't a Church or a denomination that calls you to serve. It has to be, it must be the calling and gifting of God in your life. If there is a desire, then pray that He would give you the call, the gifting to enable you to fulfill the call and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to complete the call.

With Barnabus and Saul is this one called John (John Mark), introduced to us back at the beginning of chapter 12. If you know the history here and what is going to happen fairly soon, you know that John Mark, later referred to most often as Mark, leaves the Missionary endeavor. We won't go into that today, but for now just understand that the ministry of a Missionary is God's call, not man's.

So, what is God calling you to today?

I close with this: it was back in 1891 Mary Brown penned the words of this old hymn –

It may not be on the mountain's height,  
Or over the stormy sea;  
It may not be at the battle's front,  
My Lord will have need of me;  
But if by a still, small voice He calls,  
To paths that I do not know,  
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in Thine,  
I'll go where You want me to go.

- *Refrain:*  
I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord,  
O'er mountain, or plain, or sea;  
I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord,  
I'll be what You want me to be.

Let that be your prayer today:

Rather it be a missionary on a foreign shore,  
Or a faithful witness to my neighbor next door.

I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord,  
O'er mountain, or plain, or sea;  
I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord,  
I'll be what You want me to be.

Even if I'm simply an unknown to this world, let me be found faithful to Your Kingdom dear Lord.