



Unit .32

Session .02

The Church Is Sent to the World

Scripture



Acts 13:1-12

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. **4** So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. **6** When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. **7** He was with the

proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **9** But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? **11** And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. **12** Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Intro Options



Option 1

Imagine some every day tasks you could send a group member to accomplish. Give everyone a piece of paper to vote for who they would send. Some examples are:

- Rescue a cat from a tree
- Pick up coffee and donuts for the group
- Give a message to a secret crush

Much like we may send someone to accomplish a task, God sends missionaries from the church to accomplish His mission. In today's session, God sends Barnabas and Paul on a missionary journey. The church sets them apart to go on this mission together. Who knows, one day God may call some of your students to serve as missionaries.

Option 2

Your students should pretend they work for an advertising agency producing generic ads that any company can then purchase and tweak to fit their own product or service. They've been instructed to create their next template: "Be a part of something special." This template will encourage people to join a particular organization or encourage those already in the organization to be more loyal. Students can create a radio ad, a poster, or a video commercial. Just keep the ad generic enough that any group, from a baseball team to a music group fan club could use it.

Let the students prepare and then share their generic ads. Debrief which tactics they used. Did they appeal to guilt? To a sense of family and belonging? To self-promotion? To happiness?

In today's session, we'll see that God commands His church to go to all nations as missionaries. This command holds for all Christians. Just like your students' advertisements invited people to promote loyalty to an organization, Jesus invites us to be part of the expansion of the kingdom of God, either by going ourselves or by sending others.

Main Point:
**God sends missionaries
from the church to
take the gospel to the
entire world.**

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 13:1-2.



Although the church leaders at Antioch were diverse in many ways, they were unified in the gospel of Jesus Christ. United under one Lord, we find them worshiping and fasting together in the opening verses of Acts 13.

Fasting is giving up something you love for someone you love more. It typically involves giving up some kind of food, although some may give up other things for a season as well (like TV or social media). It is a physical way of expressing a hunger for God and a longing to be filled with Him. Fasting demonstrates a dependence upon God to sustain and satisfy you. As such, fasting is often coupled with an increase in prayer and worship. That spiritual context makes us more sensitive to hear God's voice and follow His direction.

▪ Why do you think there is a relationship between fasting and hearing God's voice more clearly in our lives?

It was in the church's worship and fasting that God spoke to them. Was this a coincidence? Of course not. There is a correlation between our spiritual practices and our sensitivity to God's voice. That should not surprise us, as God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

Read Acts 13:3-8.



When God spoke, these Christians responded with action. Stories like this must have inspired men like William Carey and Andrew Fuller, who ignited a missionary movement in the 19th century. It was through the reading and study of God's Word that Carey and Fuller came to the conviction that every church and every believer was commissioned by Jesus Christ to share the gospel, even (and especially) those who lived in the outermost parts of the earth. Some Christians may be called to support and send while others may be called to go. Either way, we all have a role to play in the Great Commission.



▪ How can we support missionaries God has sent?

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

Mission of the Church

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

COMMENTARY

Acts 13

Main Point:
God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

13:1-2. “Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible. In nothing is man more closely connected with the world of sense than in this need for, and enjoyment of, food. It was the fruit with which man was tempted and fell in Paradise. It was with bread that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. But He triumphed in fasting...”¹

“So the call takes place during a time of spiritual focus on God... Worship and prayer appear side by side as key tasks of the church. In sum, prayer and spiritual forces work together in this text and play a role in guiding the church.”²

“That they were fasting indicates the church was in a particular mood of expectancy and openness to the Lord’s leading.”³

13:4. “We build churches not just to go in for worship, but also to go out with God’s heart for people.”⁴

1. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981).

2. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids (Mich.), MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

3. John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (The New American Commentary), vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub Group, 2011).

4. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids (Mich.), MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

In Defense (p. 58, DDG)



When we live for God’s mission, it is inevitable that we will face challenges and opposition. In those seasons, knowing that you have been sent by the God of the universe is an anchor and a rock. Navigating moments of doubt and discouragement would be impossible if you were going merely out of your own ambition or because your church sent you. When you have been set apart and set by God, though, you can persevere knowing that you are there by God’s providence, plan, and purpose.

TEACHING PLAN

You can't act upon what you don't know, so the first step is to discover how your church is already involved in missions. If your church has missionaries from your own congregation, get their names, stories, and locations. Pray for them, and if possible, contact the missionaries for ways to support them. Make a goal as a group and try to raise an offering to give toward missions. God is a sending God, and His church should be a sending church.

▪ What can we expect to happen when we obey the Great Commission?

Paul and Barnabas gave us a great example of what missions should look like and what we can expect as we live out God's mission. Following God's calling, they were sent out from their church. Upon arrival, they began to proclaim the Word of God—not their ideas or agenda, but God's Word. Starting with Jewish synagogues, they took the gospel throughout the region as much as they possibly could—"they had gone through the whole island" (Acts 13:6).

Along the way, various responses were encountered. Some, like Sergius Paulus, were interested and open to the gospel, while others, like Bar-Jesus, opposed them. This should be expected for anyone who lives on God's mission. We should expect that God is working in people's hearts and preparing them to receive His word, while Satan and sin are at work in other people to oppose God's mission.

Read Acts 13:9-12



If we are going to have the courage to fulfill God's mission, we must be filled with the Spirit. In our flesh, we might say the wrong thing at the wrong time with the wrong tone. Sometimes the situation calls for gentle persuasion, while other times it calls for direct confrontation. In Paul's case, it called for the latter, but we would never be able to rightly discern what each moment calls for apart from the Holy Spirit.

▪ What can we learn from Paul's courage with Elymas? What stands out to you about what Paul told him?

Paul didn't talk behind his opponent's back, nor did he become cowardly. Rather, Paul knew that God had sent him and was with him. Paul was walking in the truth, and that gave him courage to face his opponent without fear. When he did speak with boldness, Paul didn't make it about himself. Instead, he focused on the truth.

▪ What are some ways that you can be bold in standing for what is right and true?

Without being overly alarmist about it, we can acknowledge that truth is (and has been since Genesis 3) under attack. Elymas was a "son of the devil" because he was "full of all deceit" (Acts 13:10). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), but Jesus calls us to bear witness to the truth because the truth has power to free people from Satan's deception (John 8:32, 2 Cor. 4:4-6). Standing for the truth takes courage.

But Paul wasn't merely standing for truth for the sake of argument. He wasn't looking for a fight, as many do today. Rather, Paul wanted the proconsul to believe in Christ. His motivation was for the lost to be freed from the grip of Satan and his evil schemes, not to win a debate. We must be careful to check our motives as we seek to be a people who stand for the truth. Are we more concerned with winning a debate or winning people to Christ?



COMMENTARY

Acts 13

Main Point:
God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

13:5. That Paul always begins with Jewish synagogues demonstrates two things. First, the apostles did not see themselves as starting a new religion; rather, they viewed Jesus and the gospel as the fulfillment of the religion which followed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Put simply, Christianity is true Judaism—that was the apostles’ appeal to Jews in Jerusalem and beyond. Second, it shows that although the good news had spread into the Gentile world, God’s heart had always been to bring Jews into the church of Jesus Christ. The inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 10 was never meant to exclude Jews from the covenant people. Paul was broken-hearted to see that the people who had “the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” were “cut off from Christ” (Rom. 9:2-5).

“If it is the duty of all men, when the gospel comes, to believe unto salvation, then it is the duty of those who are entrusted with the gospel to endeavor to make it known among all nations for the obedience of faith.”⁵

13:9-12. Elymas was a Jewish false prophet. Paul and Barnabas were Jewish believers, and they started their mission by preaching in Jewish synagogues. Some of the great opposition to the gospel is not from the secular world, but from within religious communities. Jesus, the apostles, and the early church’s greatest opposition came not from the Roman culture, but from Jewish opposition. Yes, they faced opposition on both sides, but the fiercest opposition came from their own countrymen. It is critical that we stand against Satan’s deception, both secular and religious.

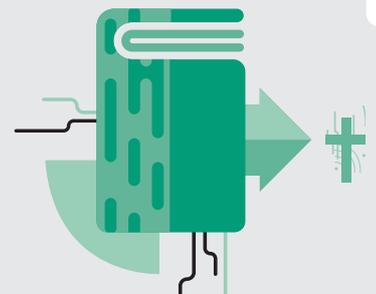
“In v.9 Luke identified Saul by his Roman name, ‘who was also called Paul.’ From this point on, the name Paul appears, whereas before it had been ‘Saul.’ Polhill notes that ‘Paul’ is his Roman name, and since his mission now led him to the Gentile, Roman world, that is the name the apostle would be known for in his ministry. He also notes the shift from this point on from ‘Barnabas and Saul’ to ‘Paul and Barnabas,’ and later to ‘Paul and his companions.’ It is at this junction that Paul has assumed primary leadership of the Christian mission in the Gentile world.”⁶

5. Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a Memoir of His Life, by Andrew Gunton Fuller: Reprinted from the Third London Edition* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845).

6. John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)*, vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub Group, 2011).

(p. 57, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus told His disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, reminding us that God’s people are on offense, continuing the mission Jesus began. God’s plan is for missionaries to take the powerful, good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness with confidence that Jesus will build His church.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What are some areas you need to keep learning in so that you will be able to stand for the truth?

The proconsul was an “a man of intelligence” (Acts 13:7). How can Christians do a better job of reaching people who are evidence driven?

Heart



What can you fast in order to seek God more intentionally?

What are some things you love that might make it difficult to follow God's voice if He called you to missions?

Hands



How can we guard against being combative as we defend the truth?

What are some ways that our group can get more involved in God's mission?

Main Point: God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.



Head

God is an intelligent God, and He made us in His image as intelligent beings. Of course, reason alone will not reveal the truth of the gospel to anyone, for God must open our eyes to see and soften our hearts to believe; but God does use persuasion to help people see, understand, and believe. The proconsul was “astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:12).

As followers of a God who speaks, reveals, and teaches, we must be students of His Word so that we can be God’s instruments of truth in the world. Christianity is not anti-intellectual. We have the most compelling, satisfying answers to the pressing questions of the human heart—questions of purpose and meaning and destiny. If we are careful to learn and study, God will use us to bear witness to the truth and free people from the deception of Satan.



Heart

Fasting can be intimidating, but it doesn’t have to be. God has commanded us to do it, and He will supply us with the grace to obey. In Matthew 6, Jesus gives some instruction about fasting and says, “when you fast” (Matt 6:16). Notice Jesus said *when* and not *if*. Fasting is something God wants us to do in order to grow our appetite for His word and will in our lives. As we fast, God will show us His will. When He does, will we be willing to follow Him?

Everyone has dreams for our lives— the career we will have, where we will live, the goals we will accomplish. The challenge is to have a heart that holds all of those things loosely so that we are willing to follow God anywhere He calls us to go. I must admit, I love being home. I like being near family and staying in my comfort zone. When I was a teenager, we moved away from the only home I’d known in order to follow God’s calling for our family. To be honest, if I’d have had a choice, I would have stayed in my comfort zone. But God’s plans are always better than our own. It’s not bad to have things that we love about our lives, but they should never become idols that keep us from a willingness to follow God’s will for His mission.



Hands

We are supposed to put on the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). This certainly means we should not go looking for fights, but it also means that we should not be cowardly or compromising. A courageous, unflinching response may be necessary, but we should not take pleasure in rebuke. Our tongues have the capacity to do great damage, so we should pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to discern the right words and tone that would fit the occasion and overflow from a pure heart.

At the end of the day, every follower of Jesus has a role to play in the Great Commission. We must ask ourselves what we can do to join the mission. It may be as simple as getting a list of missionaries to pray over on a weekly basis as a group. It may involve connecting with your student pastor or a church leader who oversees mission trips at your church. Whatever it looks like in your context, take some action steps toward obeying the Great Commission.