

3/13/16

Acts 13:1-12

A Searching & Saving God

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.

(Pastor Prays)

This weekend is Disciple NOW Weekend. Our bleary-eyed students have had a lot of fun, drunk a lot of soda and worn out a lot of adults. We named this year's Disciple NOW "Contend" based on Jude 1:3 because we are appealing to our students to contend "for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints."

Because whether we like it or not we are just like the early believers in that we are always just one generation away from losing a robust Biblical Christ-centered Christianity. It's why our church--and any legitimate church-- goes to such great lengths to reach, empower and equip the next generation for the impending sprinted onslaught: because we are living like sheep in the midst of wolves.

So as Jesus said, we must be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.

But it has always been like that from the beginning of the church. It's like that in our text for today. By the time we get to Acts 13, in the words of G. Campbell Morgan, we've come to a "watershed moment" in the book.

The church at this point is just 25 years old and you'll see the indomitable Peter and his influence fade as new teachers emerge and new missions are launched. And if we are to be a Christ-centered church, a New Testament church, then we must not be afraid to look at the hard things and embrace the struggle-laden joy of following the Crucified One knowing that Hell is against every good thing that we do so as the church.

Let's not waste our existence with peace-time amusements. Let's be a church that God uses, one that is tied to the bible, centered on the cross and serious about mission.

Our God is a Searching and Saving God & He Uses People Like You

Let's talk about what God uses:

God Uses a Well Built Church

It's right there in the very first phrase of v. 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.*

Antioch is an unusual church. Like the liberation of France or D-Day, Antioch is the first beach held in the Pagan world, an outpost of holiness in an ocean of filth.

It's there at Antioch, believers in Jesus are first called "Christians." They were called that as a way of insult and derision because their lives were so different. They lived like Christ.

But instead of hanging their heads in shame, they wore their name "Christian" as a badge of courage and honor. It's the church at Antioch that wasn't afraid to take the best it had, Paul and Barnabas and send them to plant churches and reach the nations for Christ.

Antioch is the church that Paul would return to time and time again to report his work and be strengthened in the Lord.

What made this church so special? I think you get a hint of it in v. 1. In that church, they had prophets and teachers and, without talking about those things too much, the prophets and teachers would represent two vital things that we must have and must pass on.

The Prophets – Spirited Truth and the Teachers – Biblical Foundation. Any church that is not giving spirited truth based on a Biblical foundation is not worth the bricks holding it up. So many people are looking for an "experience" at church when what we need is a Biblical *foundation* that gives us a spirited truth. It's why we do what we do here, because this book tells us a story of redemption, a story that starts with a Holy God in creation, a sinful man separated from God, and a cross where justice of God is met, the mercy of God is displayed and the grace of God has the power to save.

That's what God uses. A church built on grace. Isn't that what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15? *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.* God uses a well-built church, and a well-built church never waivers from the Gospel and never substitutes the easy "believism" of entertainment for the nails and wood of real saving grace. God uses a well-built church.

God Uses Clear-Eyed Leadership

Look at the list of names in verse 1. Some we know and some we don't. Each one is different and each one is useful in the hands of God.

Barnabas, a really important guy, he's a Christian from Jerusalem. He's patient, generous, and faithful. He has a Gospel-driven optimism. We call it hope, and God uses him to encourage, to put strength into people. Don't you want to be that kind of clear-eyed person who people are glad to see walk into the room because the Jesus in you puts strength in other people? That's what I want to be.

The next one mentioned is Simeon, who is called Niger. We don't really know anything about him, really, except Niger which is Latin for "black." So probably along with Lucius of Cyrene, you have two black men as part of the church leadership and it's not an issue, not for them and not for the church. You know why? Because the *Gospel* is the issue. They are going to place their hands on Paul and Barnabas and commission them to take the Gospel to the nations.

Then there is a guy mentioned in v. 1 named Manaen, a long-time friend of Herod the tetrarch, his foster brother. He was raised with him. This guy was very close to Herod and that's weird. This guy Manaen gave up a lot to be in the church.

Then there is Saul, a self-described blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent, a really bad guy who God really changed.

And what you have here in this mix of leadership is a radically diversified group that is just as radically unified on the mission of Christ. It's what the cross does. It kills our pride, our past, our prejudices and hang-ups so that you can say, as in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Don't you want to be that kind of clear-eyed leader? A leader who keeps focus on the cross of Christ and the mission of the church, knowing that every ministry and activity, every program and endeavor must be judged on its Gospel content and its missional

focus? That's what clear-eyed leadership does. God uses a well-built church. God uses clear eyed leadership, and

God Uses Christ-Centered Worship

When you read v. 2-3, you get to the service. The worship in the early church was more substance than show and, more than that, you see how worship is the context for Gospel work.

Worship and work are always tied together. Work without worship makes you calloused and fatigued. Worship without work makes you hypocritical and lazy. The two together makes you useful.

The word for worship in v. 2 is *leitourgeó*. It's where we get the word "liturgy." The word carries the idea of order, direction or purpose. The worship is going somewhere just as every worship service should be. It's understanding that God is the audience so that what we do here is for Him and His glory. Not only that, every worship service carries a laser focus. In the text, this focus is intensified by fasting, which is foregoing food for spiritual focus.

They were praying and listening and God prompts the church to take the best leaders it has and commission them. In v. 3, they put their hands on them in a promise of solidarity and support. And they send them out for the glory of God and all of this because of the Gospel of Christ.

You see, our God is a searching and saving God who is searching and saving even today. It's what we believe at Hickory Grove: That God is a loving but Holy God and it's the holiness that troubles us. Because of your sinful nature, the sins you commit, you live in God's creation without a connection to the creator. The Gospel is Christ Jesus who lived perfectly and then paid the debt, sin debt. He purchased sinners with His blood. He did that on the cross.

The cross is where the justice of God is satisfied and the mercy of God is realized. It's why it is so vital for you to understand that there is nothing you can *do*, no religious act you can perform, to get God to love or forgive you. And the love and forgiveness of God is poured out at the cross.

As the old hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked, I come to thee for dress. Helpless I look to thee for Grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me Savior or I die."

I would invite you to come to the fountain that is Christ. Be cleansed, forgiven, accepted and made new.

(Pastor Prays and shares the Gospel invitation)