

The Church Is Sent to the World

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel of Jesus to the entire world.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Acts 13–14

Many have called William Carey (1761-1834) the “father of modern missions.” But the impact of Carey’s missional endeavor never would have been known if not for his dear friend, Andrew Fuller. Through the reading and study of God’s Word, Carey and Fuller came to the conviction that every church and every believer were commissioned by Jesus Christ to share the gospel, even—and especially—to those who lived in the furthest reaches of the earth. Carey acted upon this conviction by embarking to India. Before leaving, Carey memorably told Fuller, “I will go down [into the mine], but remember that you must hold the rope.”¹



Voices from Church History

“If it be 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.”²

—William Carey (1761-1834)



How can “rope-holders” support others in their missionary efforts?

Group Time

Point 1: God raises missionaries from the church (Acts 13:1-3).

¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² As 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 they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

From chapter 13 onward, the epicenter of Christian influence and missions in the Book of Acts moves from Jerusalem to Antioch. Church leadership, and the membership, at Antioch was diverse across ethnic and socioeconomic lines (11:19-26). Just as the church was birthed in diversity by the Holy Spirit (2:5-11), the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people of every ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and educational attainment. All sinners are welcome at the cross.

Through persecution, the Lord brought together the church at Antioch—“the Lord’s hand was with them” (11:19-21). With their growth and the miracle of God in their diversity, it would have been easy to settle in and coast, even become complacent. But they remained true to their Lord, worshiping, fasting, and praying. In the midst of their devotion, the Holy Spirit called the church to set aside two of their leaders to continue the work of spreading the gospel. This is a vital aspect of the mission of the church—spreading the gospel and planting churches to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).



What role does the church have in the calling of people to ministry and missions?

Mission of the Church: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by _____ in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the _____ in the power of the _____ and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel.

Point 2: God guides missionaries to proclaim the gospel (Acts 13:4-8).

⁴ So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ Arriving in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant. ⁶ When they had traveled the whole island as far as Paphos, they came across a sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (that is the meaning of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

It is a misconception to think that being led by the Spirit is a matter of just showing up at a random time or place. It is true that God can and does use our “happenstance” and even missteps from time to time, but be assured that planning and purpose are equally a part of God’s plan. After Barnabas and Saul were sent out from the church in Antioch, they didn’t just find themselves on the shores of Cyprus. First, they had to get to Seleucia, a port sixteen miles away. Then they had to find a ship sailing to Cyprus, pay the fare, secure provisions, and engage their plan for sharing the gospel once on the island.



What plans does your church have to share the gospel both locally and around the world?

Following the lead of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul met their first recorded resistance to the truth of God’s gospel message. They began their ministry in Jewish synagogues, but they were not exclusive in their proclamation. The Gentile authority over the island wanted to hear their message. What an open door offered to them to influence a leader and all the people he was responsible for! But then stepped in their opposition—Elymas, a man who should have known better but who was devoted to his own deception and selfish gain.



What are some reasons people may oppose the spread of the gospel?

Point 3: God gives missionaries power to validate the gospel (Acts 13:9-12).

⁹ But Saul—also called Paul—filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at Elymas ¹⁰ and said, “You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery, you son of the devil and enemy of all that is right. Won’t you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ Now, look, the Lord’s hand is against you. You are going to be blind, and will not see the sun for a time.” Immediately a mist and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

¹² Then, when he saw what happened, the proconsul believed, because he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Paul declared that Elymas was “full of all kinds of deceit.” A similar expression is found in Jeremiah 5:27. The evil among God’s people described in Jeremiah 5:20-31 is a reminder that though times change, opposition to God’s Word remains unchanged. Jeremiah spoke of God’s opponents as rebellious, wicked, appalling, and horrible. They were like hunters lying in wait with a trap to catch men; they excelled in evil matters and prophesied falsely while ruling by their own authority. Paul encountered these same realities in the person of Elymas. And just as with ancient Israel, the Lord would punish and avenge.

Paul’s response to his opponent may appear harsh on the surface, but allowing wicked opposition to go unchallenged results in great harm, especially when eternity is at stake. So the one who falsely claimed to be able to see into the future would be stricken blind in the present at the word of Jesus’ apostle. It would be easy to point to Elymas’s blindness and Sergius Paulus’s subsequent belief and think, *The people I want to reach don’t see miracles like that happening today.* But this sentiment fails to take into consideration that “the teaching of the Lord” astonished the proconsul, not simply the miracle.



What are some ways the gospel message is validated today?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Acts 13:1-3

The role of fasting often takes a back seat to prayer as a practice in the church. Although fasting is mentioned, commanded, and expected in the Old and New Testaments many times, many Christians do not fast. Fasting is a discipline that sharpens our ability to know and do God's plan and purpose. It was while worshiping and fasting that the disciples heard what the Holy Spirit was saying.

Fasting, worship, and prayer are three of the tools God has given to believers and the church to know and discern His will. Whereas prayer and worship take time, fasting provides you with time. If you are like many people, time is one of the most scarce resources in your day. Fasting is a discipline that provides time to pray and worship by forgoing your daily mealtime routines.

The setting apart of Barnabas and Saul was revealed when the church worshiped and fasted. Shortly thereafter, the church sent them off with prayer and fasting.



What plans will you make to incorporate fasting as a part of your worship?

Voices from the Church

"Fasting can be used as a wonderful gift and spiritual discipline, which God has given to his people in order for our godly affections to be awakened and sharpened so that we'll have a greater awareness of God."⁴

—Stephen Um

Day 2: Read Acts 13:4-8

Having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, the missionaries Barnabas and Saul, with John as their helper, enjoyed smooth sailing and success in the early phase of their journey. However, in Paphos the missionaries encountered resistance in the person of Elymas. One must not mistake ease and large audiences as evidences of God's favor, just as hardship and resistance are not reliable indicators of His displeasure.

Resistance often accompanies the gospel proclamation, as seen when Sergius Paulus desired to hear the word of God. Many believers can recall opposition when witnessing to a coworker, family member, or acquaintance. We always should expect individuals to oppose both verbally and actively the gospel being shared. Therefore, the Great Commission task requires the faithful and *regular* sharing of the gospel. Let us not be surprised when the opposition shows up at the most inopportune time and in the most disruptive manner, and let us never fail to fulfill the mission the Spirit has for us.



What can you learn from this passage about external circumstances when sharing the gospel, such as ease, success, hardship, and resistance?

Day 3: Read Acts 13:9-12

Paul's words of rebuke seem harsh until one realizes they were uttered by the missionary as one "filled with the Holy Spirit." Later, Paul would write, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). One must remember that love never endorses deceit, nor can kindness allow false hope. The eternal destiny of a man was at stake, and this was no time to speak words of comfort.

The punishment of Elymas was physical, appropriate, and symbolic. The blindness was real and caused him to depend on others to lead him. It was appropriate as the blindness the false prophet experienced was akin to the false counsel he had offered. And the darkness spoke of one who needed light. It can only be hoped that when his season of blindness ended, Elymas followed in the footsteps of Sergius Paulus, who believed not simply because of the miracle he observed but through the amazing power of the teaching of the Lord.



What guidelines should believers have for rebuking an unbeliever who is obstructing the proclamation of the gospel?

Day 4: Read Acts 13:13-52

Luke's narrative through the Book of Acts follows a specific pattern. This passage reflects that broader pattern: first to the Jew (v. 43), then to the Gentile (v. 48). God placed in Paul and Barnabas's path both Jews and Gentiles who, upon hearing the gospel, responded in faith, but there also were those who rejected and opposed the gospel message. Still, Paul and Barnabas were faithful to speak the truth.

It is tempting to focus on the negative consequences of sharing our faith. Just as Paul and Barnabas were insulted (v. 45), rejected (v. 46), and persecuted (v. 50), those who share the gospel today will be rejected by some. Don't let the fear of failure or opposition keep you from the joy of being used by the Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission task of making disciples (v. 52).



What are some ways you have experienced joy in your evangelistic efforts?

Day 5: Read Acts 14:1-28

The first missionary journey in the Book of Acts comes to an end with these words: “the work they had now completed.” What God had begun through the Holy Spirit's call upon the church in Antioch, He saw through to its completion (Phil. 1:6). We are reminded that being in the center of God's will is not without hardship. That is why Paul and Barnabas took time to visit the new disciples of Christ on their return journey. Just as the early church needed encouragement and strengthening to remain true to the faith, so does the church today.

Paul and Barnabas reminded their hearers that they must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. This was not faith by works, however. Rather, it is a reality that true faith will be accompanied by difficulties, resistance, and at times physical distress. But we are never alone on this journey. Not only is God with us, He has also given us His church and trusted leaders to help us through this journey of faith to which we are called.



How do the experiences of Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey help to inform the journey of faith and obedience you are on?

