

Missions

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Ooh, that works. I've known Jeff Simpson. We were back here in November and I mentioned that I've known Jeff since I was a freshman in college about 15 years ago, which sounds gross to say out loud. And yes, Jeff did have this beard in eighth grade is what I've been told. I've been doing my best to keep up with him to mix results. But yeah, my name is Chris. My wife Emily is here with me. Our three boys are downstairs, Azari who's nine, Killian who's about to be seven, and Josiah who's four. And we are thrilled to be back. We were back here in November kind of sharing initially who we were and what the Lord is calling us to do. We were missionaries for a little bit in Moscow, Russia from 2014 to 2017. And for the last few years, we've been stateside doing some ministry. We serve as elders at our local church up in Frederick. And we're excited to go back into the mission field again, hopefully and faithfully and prayerfully for the long haul with our three boys.

And so that's a little bit about us. And I will say even with sort of all those marks of spiritual maturity in our lives, there are still some nights that I will go to sleep unsure if I've had any water on that day. So that's me, a little high and low. Yeah, there you go. A little high, a little low. We're going to be in Acts 13 today. I encourage you to open your Bible. There's some verses in your pamphlet, in your brochure, in your program. But we're going to be zooming through the rest of the chapter as well. If you're unfamiliar with the book of Acts, it is most simply the record of the early church. It's a book that catalogs how the gospel began its spread across the earth. And a good summary of this book comes from the very first chapter where Christ, before he ascends to heaven, he declares to his disciples, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Put another way, simply, you will tell people about me here, there, and everywhere. But before we get to the everywhere, we're going to start here, in this local body of believers, in this church here in DC.

A question as we start, what is your dream for your church? What is your dream for your local church here? Do you dream for this place to be filled with new people? Have you been dreaming just for that one friend to finally walk through the doors?

Do you dream that your church would grow and have multiple services or a snazzier social media presence? Are you dreaming for the day that you will one day worship in your new building? What is your dream for your local church? Do you dream at all? Do you have hopes and longings for this group of people here? Or maybe you find yourself a part of church for so long and you've been disappointed time and time again that you've learned to keep your dreams and your hopes and your expectations low? So low that maybe a worm could crawl over them? Or maybe there's a third group of people here. Maybe you're just checked out altogether. And maybe you didn't even know that you could or should dream for your local church. And regardless of where you find yourself in the process today, I want you to see this morning as an invitation. An invitation to dream. And an invitation to dream really, really big.

[3 : 41] And so we're going to be in Acts 13. Like I said, we're going to start this morning with some prayer. I'd invite you to pray for me that as we go through this, that I would say the words that the Lord would have me to say. Pray for yourself, for your brothers and sisters here, and we will get into this. And so if you would, let's pray together. God, I give you these next few minutes. We are hopeful that you will do something sweet with them. And so we pray today, as today we think about world missions, as we think about your presence, not only here, but around the world, would you stir our hearts? Would you change the way that we think? Would you transform what we believe about ourselves, about you, and about the world? God, we give you these next few minutes. We pray that you do something sweet with them. We love you and thank you that you first loved us.

Amen. Amen. All right, so Acts 13, it starts with, now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger,

Lucius of Cyrene, and Manan, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. Our setting is Antioch. The chapter opens with a description of this local gathering of believers. There's a local church going on in the city of Antioch, which is located in Syria. It is the capital of the Roman province of Syria at the time, and it is home to half a million citizens. It is the third largest city at New Testament times, with Rome and Alexandria being the only cities in the modern world that are bigger.

We see back in Acts 11 how this church got started. Verse 21 of Acts 11 says, the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Verse 24 of chapter 11 says, a great many people were added to the Lord. Verse 25, and so Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him back to Antioch.

So the background of what's going on, we have a local church that is beginning in Antioch. The hand of the Lord was clearly with them. They are growing, and the Jerusalem church, sort of the mother church, hears about this, and they send Barnabas to see what's going on, to see if their faith is legit or not. So Barnabas goes and says, yes, it is legit, and in fact, I need some help, and I know who to call. I'm going to go to Tarsus. I'm going to get my buddy Saul, also known as Paul, and so ministry begins at this local church in Antioch. But what else do we know just from this first verse about this local church? We know for a fact that it was diverse in every sense of the way. Racially and socioeconomically, we see that we have Barnabas, who's a Jewish native of the island of Cyprus.

[6 : 28] He's wealthy enough to own land. We see this back in Acts chapter 4. We have Simeon, who was called Niger, who was a believer from Africa. We have Lucius of Cyrene, who's another African believer, this time from the Roman capital of Cyrene in Libya. We have Menaeon, who's a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch. This guy is a childhood friend of Herod Antipas, who reigned in Galilee during Jesus's ministry. This is the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist, one of the chief enemies of the church.

This guy's friend is a part of this church here in Antioch. So we see that it's diverse in its backgrounds. It's also diverse in its spiritual giftings, who's present, who is serving. It says there is prophets and there is teachers, these sort of offices of spiritual giftings. Barnabas was originally called Joseph in Acts, but the apostles renamed him to Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. So we have this spiritual gift of encouragement going on. We'll see that Paul will teach extensively on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. So we know that he himself is bringing a whole smattering of spiritual giftings to this local church as well. They were diverse.

They were also devoted to worship, verse 2, while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting. While they were worshiping. The implication here is that this is a common occurrence. While they were doing this thing that they always do, they devoted themselves to worship. They spent time worshiping the Lord and fasting. This regular practice of denying themselves the comfort of food in order to seek the Lord. Fasting is always deeply intertwined with the discipline of prayer as well.

And so at the outset of this morning, we have a local church that is diverse, that is genuinely following the Lord to the best of their ability, that is following rhythms of worship and praising the Lord, rhythms of seeking the Lord through fasting and prayer. And while this local church was devoting itself to worship and to fasting and to praying and to the Word, we see that the Holy Spirit said, verse 2, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. The Holy Spirit says, put another way, that God shows up to the party that they're having. Like he issues a simple command, like I hate to interrupt your regularly scheduled worship ceremony right now, but I need those guys to come with me. And as we see, they were ready.

They didn't say no. The people didn't say, but like wait, like Paul and Barnabas, like they're our teachers. Like we need them to stay. Like we're in the middle of growing as a local church. Like we're in the middle of doing things. We're in the middle of carrying out our own vision for how the gospel is going to be spread locally here. Like you can't take those guys. Acts 11 24 describes Barnabas as a good man who is full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Paul is going to go on to write 13 of the New Testament books. These guys were vital to the operations of this local church. And if they go, who is going to do the things that they did?

I don't get the sense that any of this sort of arguing happened because verse 3 tells us what happens. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and they sent them off.

[10:09] We have a local church that was diverse and reflective of the many people in their city, which was committed to worship and to fasting and to praying. And then we see it was open to the leading and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was ready to move when they were called on to act.

And so as we kind of start thinking about bleeding into this idea of missions, before we get there, as we begin to dream about this local church, are we committed to worship? Are we committed to fasting and to praying? Are we open to the leading and the guidance of the Holy Spirit? My assumption as a visitor is yes, based on my friendship with Jeff and all the things that he talks about the church, but also just in our time here, I see a commitment to worship. I see a commitment to prayer and to the Lord and to faithful teaching of his word. And so if those things are true, really the only question for us is, are we ready to move if and when we are called on to act? Are you ready to move when called on to act? Are you setting yourself up to be used by the Holy Spirit? Are you committing yourself personally, not on Sundays, but Monday through Saturday to worship and to praying and to fasting and to the word? Do you dream about how God might want to use you as an individual to build up his body?

Because we see these next few verses that we're going to go through, God does not want to use us just for us. In these four walls, here in the local, God wants to use us as individuals in the there and in the everywhere. We see this, verse 4, this church had a global reach. Verse 4, so being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. They head south to the closest port city from Antioch and then they set sail to Cyprus, which is an island about 130 miles away. They land on Cyprus at the port town of Salamis. We continue in verse 5, when they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And when they had John there to assist them, verse 6, and 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. And you see in your program, what follows is a confrontation between Paul and this magician. It ends in verse 11 with the magician being blinded by God. And the Roman regional leader sees this and he believes the gospel as a result.

In verse 12, you see that he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. And what we see here in this first instance is the start of a pattern of work that the Holy Spirit has called these men to. You're going to sail far from home. You're going to preach the word and you're going to push back the darkness. They leave from Antioch, they head south, they sail to Cyprus, they travel across the whole island preaching along the way, and in Paphos, this Roman procouncil is saved. Now that, by any standard of a missionary trip, is mission accomplished. Like we went, we shared the gospel, somebody received it, like we did it. Let's go home. But it doesn't end there. Verse 13. Now Paul and his companions, they set sail from Paphos, and they come to Perga and Pamphylia. And John left them and he returned to Jerusalem.

[13:46] But when they went on from Perga and they came to Antioch in Pisidia. Now this is another city named Antioch. In fact, there was like 17 cities called Antioch in New Testament times because the Assyrian king who had conquered the land, you know, hundreds of years before, he loved his father, and he named 17 cities after him. But this is a different Antioch, far in the north.

This is in the province of Galatia in modern-day Turkey. So our home church is in Antioch in Syria. Perga, we've gone to Cyprus, we've shared the gospel, an individual has been saved, and now we're going far north. We stop in Perga, and we continue on land straight north until we get to Antioch in Pisidia, in Galatia, or modern-day Turkey. And once again, we see that these men, they settle into the work that they started in the local church back home. The local church that was diverse, that was devoted to worship in the Word, and they continue these practices on. They do the same thing in Cyprus, and we're going to see how they do this in this new city of Antioch in Pisidia.

We're in verse, yeah, verse 14 now. Verse 14 of Acts 13 says, On the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue, and they sat down. And after reading from the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them. It says, Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement to the people, say it. These believers, bless their heart, had not heard of the golden rule, which is do not give a pastor the microphone. Like, you are in for a world of waiting and listening and preaching. Because what happens is for the next 25 verses, Paul preaches to these men. For the next 25, he starts with, Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. And then from verses 17 through 42, he just

preaches the Word. We don't have time to go through all of those verses there, so I'll summarize them. But we see that basically what Paul does is he'll go through the whole history of his people. He goes through the history of his people laid out in the Old Testament, from Egyptian slavery to the Exodus to the judges and the time of the kings. He talks about Saul, the first king, and David, the second king of Israel. And in verse 23, he brings the past into the present.

And he says, Of David's offspring, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, as he promised. Jesus, Paul declares, is the promised one. The ancient of days, made flesh, the cornerstone that the builders rejected. In verses 27 through 37, Paul captures the life, death, and resurrection of this man, Jesus. And in verses 38 through 39, some of the most beautiful verses in the book of Acts, he says, Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man, Jesus, forgiveness of sins, is proclaimed to you. And by him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. This is a bold declaration and a fearless proclamation of the gospel. Verse 42, As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them on the next Sabbath. We were joking about, before this, that if I ended up going long, just play like the Oscars speech music, so that way I knew when to get off. And I was told that, you know, oftentimes people are never wishing that the pastor or the preacher would have spoke longer. And yet, these people begged Paul and Barnabas to come back and to continue preaching, to continue this message about this man, Jesus, through whom freedom is possible. Would you come back and tell us more? The next Sabbath, verse 44, almost the whole city gathers to hear the word of the Lord. [17:55] The whole city gathers to hear the gospel preached. And in typical fashion, if you follow the spread of the gospel across Judea and Samaria and beyond, we see that the leadership, specifically the Jewish religious leadership, does not like what's going on. And so, because they are jealous and because they are against the gospel message, they stir up trouble. They kick Paul and Barnabas out of the city.

And it might seem like, at this point in the missionary journey, like, okay, like, you know, we've done our job. We've been blacklisted from Galatia. You know, they took our passports. Like, we can't continue on. Like, I know missionaries who have been kicked out of different countries and, you know, they kind of have like a book report or a report card of like, hey, I can't go there anymore. I can't go there anymore. I can't go there anymore. And it's like this badge of honor that they were. And for Paul and Barnabas here, like, they should go home at this point. Like, they're out of resources. Like, they've been kicked out. They've been almost killed a couple times. But it's not the end for them. Verse 46 says that Paul and Barnabas, they spoke out boldly, saying that it was necessary for the word of God to be spoken first to you, to the Jewish people. Like, this was always the plan. This had to be the plan, that salvation would come through the Jewish people. And as a result, it would come to them first. But since you thrust it aside and you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are going to turn to the Gentiles, people who are not Jewish, people who are outside of the faith family that was originally instated with Father Abraham. Like, we're going to go where this message has not gone before. We're going to turn opposition into opportunity. And if you guys don't want the gospel, we're going to go to those who do.

Verse 47, because, for, so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And if we're reading along this story, like, we should pause. We should think, like, I thought these guys, Paul and Barnabas, were just going on, like, a short-term mission trip south. I thought maybe they would do some island hopping in the Mediterranean. I thought maybe they'd meet with some local believers and be encouraged. I thought maybe, you know, they would take some photos and they would post them and they would get some likes and then it would be game over and they would return to their local church as heroes. But God has other plans for his church. He has other plans for his local church. God has designed the local church to have global reach, reach, to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, it says. After chapter 13, we'll see that

[21:07] Paul and Barnabas, they head off and they go to Iconium, to the cities of Lystra and Derbe, before they decide to head home finally to give the report. All in all, they visit 10 cities in three countries in 18 months. And this is Paul's first missionary journey. But, like, let's not lose the thread here.

We started with a local church that was devoted to God's word and to worship and to fasting and praying. And now we see that this church somehow has global reach that spans towns, cities, and

countries. But the goal is not just to travel and to see the world. Lastly, we're going to see that this church has eternal impact. Recap the chapter with me so far. Verse 12, Paul and Barnabas, they get to Cyprus, they preach the word, and one person is saved, the Roman procouncil. Verse 48, in response to declaring that Paul and Barnabas were going to turn their attention to the Gentiles, we see that all the Gentiles who heard this began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many as were reported to, appointed to eternal life, they believed. This chapter ends with the word of the Lord spreading throughout the whole region. Chapter 14, when they get to Iconium, they enter the Jewish synagogue, and they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed salvation for the individual would have been worth it. If all they did was spend 18 months pursuing one person, and that person came to Christ, it would have been worth it. The party in heaven would have happened either way.

And I tell people, like, if my family goes to Europe, and we spend the next 30 years, and one person is rescued from darkness and brought from death to life, it will have been worth it. But the inspiration and the encouragement, it's not only ever just one person, because we see that there's salvation for the many offered and applied to as well. A great number of people come to the faith through Paul and Barnabas in these new cities when they turn their attention to the Gentiles. And the result of this work is not temporary. When we tell people the gospel, we do not offer short-term fixes for long-term problems.

We do not give people band-aid cures for deep brokenness. What we give people is the word of God, the truth of the gospel, that God has brought not just to Israel, not just to a select few, not to the people who are lucky enough to be born in a certain place, but to the world, a Savior, Jesus, the Son of God and man, through whom the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and by whom we are finally set free from the things we were not able to be freed from before.

Do we believe this? Do we, here in D.C. and beyond, we want to be a church that has eternal impact, that has global reach, that starts with committing ourselves to the word and to worship and to fasting and to praying. If this is not your dream for your church, then the invitation is to dream bigger.

[24 : 35] Dream about what the Lord might be doing here locally. Dream about what the Lord might do through you that would shape the faith of unreached people groups across the world. Luke 10.2 says, you know, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Three and a half billion people with a B are unreached right now, which means that they live in a place with less than 2% of a faith presence there. The harvest is plentiful.

Ask the question, Lord, would you send me? Would you dream that? Would you be bold enough to ask that question? Dream about going.

I've been in enough churches and I've attended enough missions conference that typically, when this time wraps up, the invitation is always like, man, I hope that one or two of you would feel the call to go.

But what if a few of you were called to stay and the rest went?

[25 : 46] Can we imagine the impact on the Great Commission might have if dozens or hundreds of believers left? Dream about going. Dream about supporting those who go.

What would it look like if our purpose and our goal and our aim in life was to know God and to make him known here, there, and everywhere to the ends of the earth?

Would you pray with me? God, you are good and you've called us to do good things, not just here, but across the earth.

God, as we see the history of how your church started, we can see how you use ordinary people to accomplish incredible things.

God, we want to expect great things from you and we want to attempt great things for you. God, would you give us the strength and the courage to do that? God, would you give us the faith to say the words, here I am, Lord, send me, I'll go.

[27 : 02] Because we see the way that you've laid out for your church to expand over the face of the earth. Would you be calling people here and now to go and to support those who go and to continue the work that started in Acts, but will not stop until you come again?

Lord, we love you. Thank you that you first loved us and have invited us to participate in this work alongside you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen.