

World Wide Witness: Local Church, Global Mission

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[0 : 00] 1005, Acts chapter 13. I'm sorry, I've given the wrong number. Mine says 1005. The correct page is 1107. There we go. 1107 if you're using a church red covered Bible. It's exactly the same, just different colour. On page 1107, Acts chapter 13, verses 1 to 12. Now just a pointer before we start reading. About a year ago, about 18 months ago actually, as a church we looked at Acts chapter 1 through to Acts chapter 12. So now we're starting in afresh looking at Acts chapter 13. So we've done 1 to 12 before and we're starting into

Acts chapter 13. So let's read verse 1 through to verse 12. Let's read together. In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manian, who had been bought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas, the sorcerer, for that is what his name means, opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right. You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to go blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun. Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Well, I'm going to pray and ask for

God's help for us all, and then we're going to look at this section together. So let's pray. Father, we thank you again for all that you give to us, and we thank you that we have your word, the Bible, in our language. Thank you that we can read about things that you have done, and things that you continue to do in the world today. Please help us with the help of your Holy Spirit to understand your word, and how it applies to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there are notes around. You can take notes and ask questions afterwards, and there's some headings on the screen to help us along. Well, this morning, as I say, we are starting into a new series, a new study where we'll be looking at the book of Acts. Acts is all about God's great mission.

[4 : 34] We're told what that mission is right at the beginning of the book. So if you go to chapter one of Acts, back a few pages, Acts chapter one, right at the very beginning, we are told what the mission is all about. We'll pick it up in verse three.

So keep your finger in chapter 13 and chapter one, verse three. So this is Jesus, after his death, his resurrection, speaking to his disciples. Verse three, it says, after his suffering, after his death, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proves that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Well, what did he have to say? Well, go down to verse eight. He gave some instructions.

He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. That's a supernatural power. And you will be my witnesses because they had seen the life of Jesus. They had witnessed his death and they had witnessed his resurrection. And he calls them now to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. So God's great mission is

quite simple.

It's to see the good news of the risen Jesus go into all the world. His plan is that every people group, every language hears about his son, Jesus Christ. And as we read through the book of Acts, we can see this mission begin to take effect. There's a couple of maps on the screen now, which will help you. So chapters one to eight are all about the good news reaching the people in the city of Jerusalem, which were mainly Jewish people. Then when we get to chapters nine to 12, it's all about the good news spreading nationally into Judea and beyond the borders of Judea into Samaria.

And then when we reach chapters 13 to 28, well, it's all about the good news moving out into all the world, into places like Turkey and Greece and into Italy and so forth. It's pushing the boundaries further and further.

[7 : 13] Now what I find fascinating is the fact that we are meeting here today, reading the Bible, 2,000 years after this event, and learning and reading about God's mission, is actually evidence that God's plan is being accomplished.

It's like a stone or rather a rock that has been dropped into a pond and so the good news has this ripple effect, spreading out into new lands and to new people, into new areas.

But Acts is much more than just a history lesson about the spread of Christianity. Acts is really about the good news of Jesus Christ and the need for all people to respond to him.

Now let me show you, let me give you an example of what that good news is. They've been told to go and be witnesses of Jesus and as they begin to travel out to these places, they bring the message of Jesus Christ.

I'm going to give you an example of what that message was. Many places you could go to in Acts, but the one I'm going to show you is in Acts chapter 3, verse 19.

[8 : 32] It comes in in two parts. Acts chapter 3, verse 19. This was the message, the good news that they sought to bring as they travelled from place to place.

First of all, there is the call to personal repentance. Verse 19. This is what he says, verse 19. Repent then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, whom he has appointed for you, even Jesus. So they've been explaining the fact that Jesus Christ had come, he had died on a cross. Now his death was unique. It was different to every other kind of death, because it was a death that was taking the place of us.

Taking the punishment that we deserve for our sins, for the things that we have done wrong, thought wrong. And the message here is simple. Through personal repentance, we can be forgiven of all our sin, and we can be freed from the judgment that we deserve.

[9 : 52] Now that is good news. But there's a second part to the message. There is the promise of universal restoration.

Look at verse 21. They go on to say that he, that's Jesus, must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

Jesus is saying one day he's going to return, he's going to come back again into this world.

Presently he's in heaven, but he will come back and he will restore, he's going to put right everything that is broken in this world.

He's going to put an end to all death. There will be no more funerals. He will end all decay, no more disease, and all destruction will end.

Think about it. No more wars. No more hurricanes. No more suffering. No more cancer.

[11 : 03] No more injustice. Now, whatever background we come from, whether we're from a religious background or a non-religious background, those are the kinds of things we all dream for and we all long for.

That's the kind of world that we all want. And Jesus says, one day I'm going to return, and I'm going to restore everything. Now that is good news for everyone.

The promise of a universal restoration, but the way to be part of that is to respond to Jesus with personal repentance and faith.

And this was the good news that began to spread from the city of Jerusalem, these few people, and it began to branch out into all Judea and to Samaria, breaking boundaries.

But the question to ask is, how would it then get to the ends of the earth? How would it get to a little island like Ireland? How would it reach here? Well, as the story progresses through Acts, God's

plan is to use his local church for global mission.

[12:15] Through the church, God spreads the good news and the mission of God is accomplished. And that brings us to chapter 13, where we are introduced to a church in Antioch, where the good news begins to spread.

So turn to chapter 13, and that's where we're going to remain as we follow through this story together. So first of all, local church is all about sending people with the good news of Jesus. Verse 1 of chapter 13. In the church at Antioch, I think there's a map there, is there? Where's my... No, no. Don't worry.

There it is there. It's kind of in the south of Turkey, on the border of modern-day Syria, so it's probably not a very safe place to be right now, but nevertheless, that's where the church was. You can go back to the original heading. In the church there, there were prophets and teachers. They were the leaders. There was Barnabas. He was from the island of Cyprus. There was Simeon, called Niger.

[13:21] Lucius of Cyrene. That was a city in North Africa. There was Mannion, who had been bought up with Herod the Tetrarch. You might remember Herod.

He was the guy who had John the Baptist's head cut off. They were a mad family, desperate for power, and would kill anybody to make sure they kept it. Well, Mannion, well, he was related to that family.

And also part of the church was a man called Saul. You might remember him as well. He was that religious fanatic who used to go around looking for followers of Jesus, kill them, often by stoning, and then have them put in prison.

So here we have a culturally, religiously, and racially diverse bunch of people. Now, in most cases, that's really not a good mix, is it?

If you're thinking about a mission to reach the world, you wouldn't kind of get this collection of people together. It's a recipe for disaster. They're all going to be arguing and fighting. But what unites them all together is that they have all heard the good news about Jesus.

[14:31] You can see that in chapter 11, verse 20. As people went about with the news, verse 20, it says, Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The good news of what Christ had done. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

So together now, these people who've heard the good news, who've repented, put their faith in Christ, they now form this new church at Antioch. And as we will see, it is central to God's mission. Now, that's not unlike the church here at Carragalline. Although I don't think anybody here has cut anybody's head off or related to anybody who's done that.

But the church is made up of people from Ireland, from England, from Congo, from Togo, from America. We've even let in somebody from New Zealand.

[15:45] Rob, sorry. We all come from different religious backgrounds. Some people from non-religious backgrounds. But together, we are people who've all heard the good news of Jesus.

And we have, in turn, responded in repentance, and we are now united together as God's people. But the question is, what are we to do as a church?

What was this church going to do that have been brought together? And more importantly, who is going to do it? Well, look at verse 2. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, they were praying, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

The work, of course, was God's great mission, what we read in chapter 1, verse 8. The mission to be witnesses. That was God's primary purpose for the church, to send people out with the good news.

And that's why the church exists today. That's what the role of the church is. And so here we have a picture that as this church, as these believers gather together, as they were seeking God by praying, the Holy Spirit motivates, initiates, and begins to direct the church into mission.

[17:12] Because that's what the Spirit does. He's a missionary spirit. He sends the church out. He highlights what Jesus had already said at the beginning.

Reinforces what Christ had said. It was the same spirit that prompted Philip to go and speak to the Ethiopian in chapter 8. It's the same spirit that motivated Peter to go and speak to Cornelius in

chapter 10.

But I want us to notice here that the Spirit is not speaking to an individual who goes off and does their own thing. No, the Spirit here is speaking to the church who together become convinced that this is what God wants.

Verse 3 of chapter 13. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them as an act of identification and they sent Saul and Barnabas off.

Now I think that's a crucial lesson for the church today. Church isn't about a group of individuals all hearing their own private message and going off setting up their own projects.

[18 : 28] No, the church is all about sending representatives of a local church following a deliberate decision by the church and all inspired by the Spirit.

And that's what happened the church in Antioch. And it's the blueprint for every church hereafter including Carigaline Baptist Church.

And I give you an example of that for us here. Peter and Maeve who we know who've been with us well they've just moved to the US to America to study with the purpose of coming back to full time mission.

Peter and Maeve believed that God had been calling them. They've been praying through it. As church leaders we talked with them and we prayed with them and we believed that God by his Spirit was directing them into mission and together as a church we prayed about it and being convinced that this was what was right the church sent Peter and Maeve to America to study to train for future mission work back in Ireland.

But I don't think it should stop there with just a couple of people. We should continually be praying and seeking God about who should go and where they should go because that is what the church is all about.

[20 : 02] It's about sending people out and to do anything else is not really being church as God called us to be. The general command is crystal clear isn't it?

To spread the good news of Jesus throughout all the world. But for each church the specific details of who goes and where they go is worked out as the church prays with the help of God's Spirit as he initiates and motivates and empowers people as they go with the good news.

So first of all the local church is about sending people with the good news of Jesus and that's what that church did and this is what we should be doing. The second thing is this we're about global mission saving people with the good news of Jesus.

Look at verse 4 The two of them that was Barnabas and Saul sent on their way by the Holy Spirit went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

So you can see the little island there of Cyprus where they sailed across to. There they arrived at Salamis which was on the east coast and they proclaimed the word of God.

[21 : 21] The word of God was the gospel the good news about Jesus. And John was with them as their helper. So here we have a church taking seriously the great mission of God.

Now as we go about this work of mission there's two things that we should expect. The first is this opposition to Jesus. Let's meet these characters in verses 6 and 7.

Let's read verse 6. They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos which was over on the west. Incidentally isn't it great that some people get called to a lovely sunny island like Cyprus and others get called to rainy Ireland but that's okay.

While they were there on Paphos there they met a Jewish sorcerer somebody who was involved in the occult. He was a false prophet named Bar-Jesus who was an attendant like a secretary to the proconsul Sergius Paulus.

Now remember Cyprus was all part of the Roman Empire. They were the big force at the time. They were in charge and Sergius Paulus was obviously the man sent to govern or look after the island of Cyprus.

[22 : 43] That was his job. And this Jewish sorcerer Bar-Jesus was an attendant to him. But what was this Sergius Paulus like?

Well look at the rest of verse 7. The proconsul was an intelligent man. He wasn't easily duped. So he sent for Barnabas and Saul because well he wanted to hear for himself the word of God the good news about Jesus.

He wanted to know who is Jesus? What did he have to say? And well if this Jesus is true what should I do about it? But there's a problem isn't there?

The problem is verse 8. This guy Elymas the sorcerer for that is what his name means. He opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

Now it's ironic that his name is also Bar-Jesus which simply means son of salvation. Now you couldn't get anyone further from the truth. Rather than lead people to Jesus his aim was to direct people away from Jesus.

[23 : 53] And that's what he's trying to do to his boss Sergius Paulus. But Saul can see what is really going on. Look at verse 9. Then Saul who was also called Paul filled with the Holy Spirit looked straight at Elymas and said you are a child of the devil an enemy of everything that is right.

You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? real opposition.

Now what happened then I suggest still happens today as the church goes about her mission.

There are those who are in opposition to Jesus and try to deceive people about the truth of Jesus.

There's a little magazine at the back there called Church in Chains. you pick that up and you can read about what it is in some countries for people who love Jesus.

Now we might not face the same kind of pressure and we mightn't meet anybody called Elymas but we do read about the celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins don't we?

[25 : 12] Author of the well-known book The God Delusion. He has a lot of followers and a lot of people listen to what he has to say. Let me quote you what he says. Speaking about Jesus he says somebody as intelligent as Jesus would have been an atheist if he had known what we know today.

In other words Dawkins claims that science has disproved God and we don't have any need for God today. To quote him again he says he that's God is invented by mad deluded people.

Maybe I'm mad and deluded but I don't think so. Well Elimas like Dawkins is a trickster. He's a deceiver. Dawkins has actually been voted as one of the three leading intellectuals in the world.

I don't doubt it. He's a very very clever man. But about his book the same people who voted for him and said he's one of the greatest intellectuals the world has ever seen. about his book The God Delusion they said his book is rambling and self contradictory.

The evidence simply doesn't weigh up. You see like Elimas people like Dawkins who we read about and hear about is a deceiver.

[26 : 35] He's opposed to Jesus and he tries to turn people away from the faith and many people are following what he says. And it makes you wonder if God has actually failed in his mission because atheism is on the rise.

Has God failed in his promise of what he said at the beginning of Acts? Is it really going to reach people? Well as we read on in this section here God has not failed.

He has supreme power and authority over all things and over all people and he will accomplish his mission salvation will come and nothing and no one is going to stop it.

Look at what happens in verse 11. Now the hand of the Lord is against you says Saul to Elimus.

You are going to be blind and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun not blind permanently but just for a time perhaps for him to come to a realization of who Jesus is.

Maybe he would turn in repentance. Immediately mist and darkness came over him and he groped about seeking someone to lead him by the hands.

[27 : 59] See Elimus was one of these men who went around trying to claim to have the truth. He is somebody who claims to have the light. But it's ironic that he is the one who ends up in darkness.

From leading people away by his trickery he is now a helpless man who needs somebody to lead him by the hand. The power that he used to turn people away from God well it's nothing when he is confronted with the real power of God.

In fact in an amazing turn of events Elimus actually becomes the reason for the proconsul's salvation. The one who is in opposition to God is now used by God to bring salvation to this man.

Look at verse 12. When the proconsul saw what had happened he believed for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. The events that he saw that day of what happened to his attendant his secretary convinced Sergius Paulus of the truth.

But read verse 12 carefully. What truly amazed him was look at the end of verse 12 he believed not just from what he saw he believed for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

[29 : 31] He had heard the good news of Jesus remember he was an intelligent man not easily duped he had asked for Saul and Barnabas to come and tell him and he had heard for himself who Jesus is what he had done the call for personal repentance he had heard the promise of a universal

restoration and he believed he trusted and so salvation came to this man you see despite the opposition we face God will accomplish his mission through his church now as we finish I would like us all here to try and identify ourselves in this story who do you most relate to in this story maybe you identify yourself with Saul he was a follower of

Jesus he was concerned to tell people the good news about Jesus he had been sent out by his church to do that well if that's you then I encourage you to do so more and more and as you do remember there will be people who will be in opposition they won't want to hear or they mightn't want to discuss but our job is simply to present to tell to persuade people who Jesus is and to leave that with God but the promise here is that God will bring his salvation whatever the opposition so if you identify with Saul continue on in that same thing maybe you identify yourself with Elimas the Dawkins of this world who rubbish Jesus and stand opposed to him well as we see in this story to stand opposed to

Jesus is no trivial matter it's very serious in fact rather than thinking of yourself as in the light as what happened to Elimas it actually is to walk in darkness to be without life and to be without hope for maybe you identify with Sergius Paulus apart from having a great name he was an intelligent person he wasn't easily fooled he carefully listens to what people have to say he's seeking to discover what the truth is and so he had invited Saul and Barnabas to speak to them and he heard about Jesus and he was convinced maybe you identify with Sergius Paulus as an intelligent person who wants to find out the truth well if that's you well then

I encourage you to read more read one of the gospels read out and find out who Jesus is and all that he has done but let's remember that God has started on a mission he's going to continue that mission and he will bring it to completion the question is are we on that mission with him let's pray together our father god we thank you for this amazing and incredible account of a small church so many years ago seeking to fulfill what you had called them to do we pray that we as a church here would be like minded that we would be people who go with the good news of

Jesus resting and trusting in God knowing his power through the Holy Spirit enabling people to turn to repent to believe and to look forward to that promise of a restored universe where everything will be put right we ask for your help individually and together as a church in Jesus name Amen well we're going to sing together which really ties together a lot of the themes that we've been thinking about there was the theme of the universal restoration and this song is really looking forward to what Christ has done and what we can look forward to there is a higher throne where we will be gathered which is the new creation the new heaven with him if you trust in the

[34 : 47] Lord this is a song that you will want to sing in celebration of what we have so let's stand together as we sing