

Mission - For the praise of God's glory

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 January 2023

Preacher: David Calderwood

[0 : 0 0] We're going to read some sections in Acts of how the gospel spread to and from Antioch. And we're going to start in Acts 11, starting in verse 19, going to verse 26, and then we'll read a couple in Acts 13.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen, travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

[1 : 1 8] For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now we'll read from Acts 13, 1-3.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

And now verses 47-49. Well, the things Dave said to us earlier, wonderful principles, and yet they set the bar impossibly high, it seems to me.

Since the goal of mission is to create true worship. That is to see people everywhere in our world discover true joy and gladness in the greatness and love of God.

[2 : 5 7] Since that's part of mission. And since the fuel of mission is worship. That is, we can't commend that which we don't already cherish for ourselves.

And the third thing that Dave mentioned is that people aren't neutral. The people we will speak to in their natural born state are hardwired to autonomy.

To rebellion against God. Determined to pursue their own glory, not God's glory. Determined to seek life apart from God, not in God.

Determined to seek life apart from God's glory. Since those three things are already on the table, then the question we have to ask is, Who on earth can have the confidence to do mission?

What people, what person, what community could think they could possibly do mission? Why would we possibly think and proceed with confidence to make people see and do that which they neither want to see nor do?

[4 : 15] In the moment, can we venture with confidence into this new partnership with Matt and Grace in a far away land? Well, the answer, thankfully, this morning is a resounding yes.

We can have confidence. And I want just briefly to reference the church in Antioch that Jess has just read to us about this morning as a model for our confidence.

And it works like this. We get God's sovereign purpose in salvation dovetailing precisely with what the ordinary believers were doing on the ground.

The backstory of the church of Antioch catalogues a series of unremarkable people. Unremarkable people who had been confronted by the gospel of Jesus, spoken to them by equally unremarkable people.

Some of them Jewish, some of them non-Jewish. But in common, they were followers of Christ. And they were all fleeing persecution. And wherever they went, and particularly into the city of Antioch in Syria, they just naturally overflowed.

[5 : 39] They gossiped the gospel. We believe it was a relatively young church at this stage. But when you flick to Acts 13, verse 1, we see immediately this church was quite ethnically and culturally diverse.

And in the day, that would have been a recipe for disaster and division. But notably in this church, it was their new identity in Christ that dominated their thinking.

In Acts 11, verse 26, we're told that for the first time, they were united around the term Christian. Each a servant of Jesus, each a believer, each a Christian, that trumped all other natural divisions, ethnically, culturally, and even gender terms.

And it was the basis, this new identity in Christ was the basis for a deep unity. A unity of mind and purpose in a diverse community. And we see that another thing about this church, therefore, because of their backstory, they were actually deliberately and prayerfully missional in outlook.

What does that mean? Well, it means very, very simply. They were so excited by the gospel that they'd experienced themselves and so radically changed them from the inside out. That, as Dave said, their excitement just overflowed.

[7 : 25] And overflowed into a passionate desire to hand on the baton. To be on mission for Jesus. To see others experience the same thing that they themselves had experienced when the gospel came to them.

And the new delight in the Lord as their greatest treasure was not just expressed by a few individuals, but it characterized the church.

The church got together and under the leading of the Holy Spirit, determined to send out Paul and Barnabas. To repeat the job that they had experienced for themselves in Antioch.

At a very, very practical level, I think we can say this, that the believers in Antioch were passionate to do what they could do.

That is, pull the resources, pick suitable people, and send them out to wherever they could go to speak about Jesus, to speak about gospel.

[8 : 33] Now, why did they do that? Well, I think the other side of the story, the other side of the coin, the dovetail part, is that they did it because they were confident that the Lord would do what only he could do.

The Lord would do what only he could do. That is, change hearts. Give new life to spiritually dead people. And we're told in Acts chapter 11, that many were converted in Antioch as God's purposes in salvation and the efforts of the believers dovetailed.

That's Acts chapter 11. Then when we come to Acts chapter 13, we see the same thing happening down the track. Acts chapter 13, verse 47, 48, and 49. And as many as were appointed for eternal life believed.

Brothers and sisters, Matt and Grace, these are the principles to hang our hats on. These principles are still true today. They're the only reason for confidence in a world, as we speak the gospel, into a world that doesn't want to hear it.

It's the reason we have confidence to speak the gospel into our own families, into our local community here, and into a faraway land.

[10 : 08] It's the confidence we have underpinning this partnership that we're still early days, but we're growing into and excited about with Matt and Grace.

It seems to us a very simple thing. We are sending them out. That's what we can do. That's what they can do. And our confidence is that that will dovetail with God's purposes in salvation, with as many as are appointed to believe in that particular part of the world.

We have a wonderful motivation and unlimited opportunity. The whole of the story of Acts, especially Acts chapter 1, is about, as Dave's already highlighted, our God is committed to making his name great in his own world.

He's a missionary God. We see in Acts 1, he's got big plans, a big horizon, his whole world, the ends of the earth. He will be worshipped.

He will be adored by a vast multitude of redeemed sinners or rebels. He will, as he tells us in other parts of Scripture, build a great resurrection community called the church, a community of died-for people, each individually brought in through the process of the gospel, brought into the kingdom.

[11 : 38] So, my friends, our mission, our engagement and mission, must have the same big horizons.

We must be bold and have the same big plans to the ends of the earth. Why?

Well, because it simply reflects who we are in Christ. God. And it's a reflection of our great God in us. And as Dave said before, as those who have experienced the full extent of God's saving grace, even when we were lost, even when we were in full pursuit of autonomy and not in the least interested in worshipping the Lord, for those who have experienced God's grace in that situation, well, we would naturally, we will naturally overflow with desire to see others in our world experience exactly the same rescue and renewal.

people. So, my friends, we ought never to think about mission primarily in terms of duty or responsibility.

that just won't last. that just won't last. Mission is primarily about ourselves overflowing in worship.

[13 : 17] a particular expression of that worship is in our partnership forming and growing and deepening with Matt and Grace.

And my friends, it also means that mission is not just for keen beings for the people who might just have a particular bent for mission in the church.

Mission is for all of God's people because it's something that should overflow from each of us. we shouldn't have to drum up support.

We shouldn't have to whip people into ongoing resilient continuation of this stuff. It should be bubbling up.

And we can be confident in that situation that God will gather his people powerfully through ordinary folk. I just think this is a beautiful scenario here in Antioch.

[14 : 24] The believers, and I remember I said at the start that they were unremarkable. The unremarkable believers in Antioch, in the church of Antioch, had every qualification necessary for mission.

What are those qualifications? Well, they themselves had experienced forgiveness and renewal in Christ. they themselves had experienced the joy of turning to the Lord in thankfulness and new delight for new life.

They spoke out of the overflow of their hearts. They knew the gospel. They knew that it worked. They felt resourced and equipped by Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapter 11.

They were there and taught them for a year. It's not told specifically what they's taught, but my guess is that Paul and Barnabas filled in the gaps with, well, now you're Christians.

Let's go back and look at the back story from the very start from Genesis and see God's plan right the way through. These guys now felt resourced and equipped having been instructed in God's plan of salvation focused on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 33] We're told in Acts 13 verse 2 they were in tune with the powerful work of the Holy Spirit within them and leading them as a church family. They overflowed in prayer asking the Lord to act for his own glory by rescuing and renewing many others through their efforts to get the gospel out far and wide.

Do you hear what the qualifications were? They wanted what God wanted and they used the spiritual tools that the Lord had provided them.

That's not too complicated is it? Their excitement and determination to be on mission for Jesus dovetails as I said before with God's purpose and plan of salvation.

Let me bring you back to Acts 13 47 to 49 again. And we see the scope again of mission picking up a quotation from Isaiah.

I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. God's long time plan for salvation God's big horizon and when the Gentiles heard this they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed and the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

[17 : 09] the church in Antioch pretty young sent Paul and Barnabas out to speak the gospel to long that people might experience the same gospel renewal that they had experienced to be converted to see new resurrection communities or the church birthed and what do we see?

God graciously used their efforts to bring the gospel to specific people appointed to salvation and eternal life. the church's job get people to hear about Jesus that's something we can do the Lord's job bring them through Jesus into the kingdom forever how good is that Triss?

and so we see a repeat the very thing that they themselves had experienced as these rag tag people coming into Antioch fleeing persecution from down around the Judean region they just walked into town and suddenly they were hearing this guy called Jesus and suddenly they were converted and suddenly there was a church and then suddenly the church was taken up by the Holy Spirit and they wanted to repeat it and here it is they're reproducing themselves as it were and nothing brings greater glory to the Lord that's Paul's point repeatedly in Ephesians when he writes to the believers at Ephesus particularly in chapter 1 we see over and over again he says all spiritual blessings are ours in Christ to the praise of God's glory everything in the world has been made for the sake of Christ and the church to the praise of God's glory and so it goes on and on over and over again every church has formed according to

Ephesians that crosses the natural boundaries of hostility and division and brings a new unity in identity in Christ in Christianity for the praise of his glory Matt and Grace brothers and sisters in this church family we can reach out boldly and with confidence with the renewing freeing gospel of Jesus knowing very well that our world is not interested in the message it most needs to hear and most likely will despise when they first hear it why well because God will go before us to create his own glory we have great motivation we have wonderful opportunity both in our local community and in a distant land now with

Matt and Grace we have all the weapons required for the task the living word of God the enabling power of the Holy Spirit blasting unbelief out of hard hearts weapon of prayer so my friends let's let's be excited let's be bold in our commitment commitment to and support of Matt and Grace make no mistake it will cost us but in my experience and I presume in your experience we don't quibble over the cost of things that we're really passionate about there always seems to be money for those things doesn't there so that means the question is what's our passion we commend that and grace to God's goodness and God's keeping in the next weeks and months and we urge them to pursue faithfulness rather than success in our world's terms