

Acts 13:1-13 (PM)

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: 07 May 2023

Preacher: Dr. Ross Hastings

[0 : 00] It's a great privilege to be part of this lovely occasion of the commissioning of a church plant. And I have to say, the passage that's been chosen here, I understand there was some intentionality about this passage, but I'm not sure that you could have known how much intentionality or how much the parallels between what we are doing tonight and what happened in this great passage. It's actually unbelievable.

And I want to try to unfold some of that with you. I may encourage you to keep your Bibles open. Acts 13 and Acts 11 and my Bible, they're on the same page.

But it's so important for us to look at the background to the origin of the church at Antioch, for us to get a sense of what's going on in this remarkable passage when two people are sent out, along with many others for the first missionary journey.

The book of Acts may really be viewed as the tale of two churches. Jerusalem Church, which took a long time to understand its missional nature as inclusive of the Gentiles, and Antioch, which gets it right from the beginning.

We could actually call it the prototypical missional church. The idea of the term missional church may seem maybe a little bit faddish. Sometimes we'll even go to churches and assess how missional you are.

[1 : 39] And I'm not sure that's really appropriate. I would argue that the missional church and its concept of being the sent and sending church is foundational.

It's not a fad. I believe that all truly Christian churches are missional by their very identity and nature. They can't help it. Why? Because they are in union with the sent Christ.

And they are in communion with the sent Holy Spirit. So every congregation and every child of God is missional in a very significant way.

I want to take you back just a moment, for just a moment, to John chapter 20, where we get the principal ideas of the concept of the church as missional. And that great phrase where Jesus says to the apostles, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

The word for sent in Latin is *missio*, from which we get the English word mission. And what Jesus is saying is that his church would be the continuation of his sentness.

[2 : 47] His *missio* would become theirs. So mission, folks, is a participation. It's not something that we do for God. It's something that we do with God.

It is a participation in his mission. That's what gives us hope and encouragement. And that passage in John 20 highlights that Jesus first made them a community of his presence by standing in their midst.

They were a community which he constituted by speaking peace or shalom to them. As the risen one who had been crucified, the risen once crucified, one stands in their midst, speaks shalom and constitutes them the church.

And then Jesus speaks the word shalom a second time. Not so much for impartation to them, to calm their fears and to constitute them the church. He speaks a second time in order that they would be a people of dissemination to the world.

And he breathed the spirit into them as God had done in Genesis chapter 2 verse 7. Making this little community the community of the new creation. Empowering them for their mission to the world.

[3 : 59] Both evangelizing and humanizing people. A helpful way to think about the church as missional is that as such it is a church that is both deep and wide.

Jesus constitutes the worship of the church by his words, by his speaking to that little community, and by directing attention to the scars in his hands and side.

As if to say the church is made up of two main things. It's word and sacrament. Word and communion. And so the church is first of all to be a deep church.

The missional scholar Burkhoﬀ calls this duality intensive and extensive. It is, if you like, other missional theologians have called it the bidirectional, even the bipolar church.

Nothing to do with mental health, folks. The bipolar church as in it is both deep and it is wide. The missional church is meant to be deep in its gathering and wide in its scattering.

[5 : 09] It is a church in which mission is the organizing principle. A church that equips its people to understand that the church does not exist for itself. A church which understands that mission is the identity of the people, not a program.

A church that understands that every believer is a missionary if they belong to the missional Christ. That every believer is to be engaged in evangelism, discipleship, love of neighbor, social justice, creation care.

But one in which that outward mission flows from deep life in God. Missional does not mean shallow. It is built around and flows from the deep life of God, characterized, communities characterized by deep teaching, deep practice of the Eucharist, and deep fellowship together. Now, we do see this in the first church of Jerusalem. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers.

Acts chapter 2, verse 42. And what's the result of them being deep? They are wide. The Lord adds to the number daily those who are being saved. And that's our wish and desire that you will experience that as a church plant.

[6 : 22] But great as that was in Jerusalem, the inward pole of the bidirectional church is more evident in Jerusalem. It seems to take them forever to realize that the gospel was not just for Jewish people, but for the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

And the Spirit has to poke and prod them all the way to get them on mission. And by contrast, the Antioch church shows evidence of the outward pole right away.

In fact, Ray Anderson, in his book, *An Emergent Theology for the Emergent Church*, boldly states that the New Testament ideal model for a missional church is actually Antioch, not Jerusalem.

In sum, Anderson notes how the Antioch church adds the dynamic sending power of the gospel by the Holy Spirit to the quality of shared life. Nevertheless, whether it be Jerusalem or Antioch, Acts is the tale of two churches.

And others which are formed everywhere the gospel goes. And I want to just point out, make a general observation here, that God's way for evangelism and mission is through the church and not apart from it.

[7 : 37] Church planting is God's way of mission, it seems to me, always has been. Now, the evidence abounds in our day that many in North America have opted not to do church at all, call themselves Christians.

George Barner's 20 million revolutionaries who apparently live a first-century lifestyle based on faith, goodness, love, generosity, kindness, and simplicity, and who zealously pursue an intimate relationship with God, apparently without the help of the local church.

I cannot imagine a notion more contradictory of the communal and ecclesial nature of humans created in the image of a communal God.

Or more in violation of the biblical notion that if we belong to Jesus, we belong to everyone else who belongs to Jesus. It is a notion incongruent with the reality that the Spirit of God brings every Christian into union with Christ and into union with His people so that each is organically connected to the historical church, which is the continuous embodiment of God's covenant with humanity, stretching across the centuries of Jewish and Christian tradition.

Let me just sum up my introduction by saying this. Leslie Newbigin, the great theologian of the missional church, sets the church in right perspective when he states the following, How can this strange story of God-made man, of a crucified Savior, of resurrection and new creation, become credible for those whose entire mental training has conditioned them to believe that the real world is the world which can be satisfactorily explained and managed without the hypothesis of God?

[9 : 13] He says, I know of only one clue to the answering of that question. In other words, modernity, the age of the Enlightenment. What's the answer? He says, I know of only one clue to the answering of that question.

Only one real hermeneutic of the gospel. A congregation which believes it. Certainly Jerusalem church and Antioch church were congregations that believed it. And the planting of the gospel. And the planting of King's Cross by our Paul and Barnabas. I'm not sure which of you, Jeremy and Joel, would like to identify with Saul and Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas. But we believe that you're going out in faith in a wonderful way. And you really believe it. And those of you who are up here and are part of this great starting church, I know that you believe it too. You're a congregation that believes it. And if you really believe it, you will be effective, I believe, in mission to the world. I think there's actually a progression in Acts on how the church should look like.

[10:17] That climaxes actually in this Antioch church. And I want to suggest that Antioch church only came into existence because of the change in Jerusalem people.

Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church's practice of mission of the whole people of God is what actually led to the planting of this church. So we don't want to be too hard on the Jerusalem people. It's in fact Jerusalem people who plant the church at Antioch. They got the mission after a while. And considering Acts 13, 1 to 12, we must recap what has happened in its planting. And so in light of that, I want to give seven signs of ascending and sent church. Seven signs of a missional church. Number one, its origin was missional. The church at Antioch had a missional origin.

Its DNA seems to have been that, therefore. It was birthed by people scattered from Jerusalem's persecution. Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

[11:22] Some of them spreading the word only to the Jews. They've still got this notion, it's only for the Jews. However, and note, these were not the apostles, folks. These were the lay people, for want of a better term.

Some of them, however, people from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks. That's a huge phrase in the book of Acts. Also telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

So the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. It's quite remarkable that the persecution that's instigated, I'm sure, by satanic forces actually rebounds.

It kind of reminds me of a moment in my life when a family member in my family, after my first wife passed away, this family member wanted to make me some chips in the Scottish way, which is to put them in Greece.

A lot of oil like this. And unfortunately, she didn't realize you don't keep the lid on that when you heat it. And so the fire erupts.

[12:27] And what does she do? Instinctively, she did what we know we shouldn't do. She poured water over it to try and quench the fire. And the billows of smoke went right throughout the house.

It's okay, insurance paid. But it reminds me so much of what's happening here. Satan pours out the water as if to quench this movement.

And all it does is it continues to grow. A minority of people who take the risk of preaching the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch.

And so this was a church birthed by risky faith. As you are birthing your church in risky faith. And with a missional heart.

And because it was birthed that way, it continues to be that way. It's birthed missional and soon it's sending Paul and Barnabas out. It stays missional. That's its DNA.

[13:27] And there are two things I would comment on with regard to the DNA. When I say DNA, the missional nature of this church. They were highly apostolic and highly Catholic.

Now by the word Catholic, I mean small c. You know, we say the creed. There's one holy Catholic and apostolic church. If you look at this church in Antioch, once it's formed, it is characterized by two great things.

An apostolic environment is in Antioch. They have two habits.

Number one, they teach the apostles' doctrine. And secondly, they've caught the spirit of the apostles. The word apostles simply means sent ones.

And they've caught the spirit of the apostles in sharing the gospel. And in addition to that, they are also Catholic. This is the first church that's going to embrace both Jews and Gentiles in a oneness of community, in a wonderful way that's so important for the life of the church.

[14:38] So that's number one. Number one point is the missional church. It was missional as to its origin. Secondly, it was missional as to its unity.

It's characterized by great unity. So they're birthed by some saints from Jerusalem, but they remain in unity with the Jerusalem church, just as this church plant will remain in unity with St. John's. There's a connectedness here. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, that people had come to faith in Christ, especially those that were Greek people, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. They couldn't have sent a better person than Barnabas. And Saul and Barnabas later on continue this wonderful harmony amongst the churches, even caring for the Jerusalem church because they were in financial need.

So missional by its origin, missional in terms of its unity. You know, when it comes to knowing how God blesses mission, I think we often underestimate the importance of unity.

[15:54] Jesus said in his prayer in John chapter 17, My prayer is not for them alone, my disciples alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

So the unity of the church reflects the unity of the Godhead, of the triune God. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

When we think about mission and evangelism and justice and all of those things that are part of mission, we often don't think that perhaps the most crucial principle that Jesus outlines for his church is that there be an express unity amongst the people of God.

Third, its Christ-likeness was missional. You may have noticed that this is the first time disciples are actually called Christians in Antioch, literally meaning those belonging to Christ.

And as such, they imitated Christ, and they were attractive to people. You know, in that sort of missional church kind of lingo, people say we shouldn't be attractionale, we should be incarnational.

[17:07] And I suppose there's something to that, but I honestly think if we're not supposed to be attractionale, in other words, we don't create a big program and invite people in that way, I do believe we're meant to be attractive. And when we exude the person of Christ in our character and in our community, we will be, I believe, fulfill God's mission to the world.

But I want to say that that's not all about warm fuzzies. There ought to be something about the character of the church that, yes, it's attractive, but it also needs, in my opinion, to be awe-evoking. If you go back to Acts chapter 5, you have this remarkable passage where Ananias and Sapphira are disciplined, taken out. And then verse 11 says, great fear seized the whole church.

I guess so. And then it says, the apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people, and all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade. And then these words, no one else dared join them.

They were scary people. People died if you were disobedient. And I'm glad that Jesus didn't keep doing that throughout Acts. It says, no one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

[18:27] But then, very next verse, nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their numbers. You see a powerful tension of they're attractive. The love of God is there alongside of the fear of God.

And it's that, if you like, that wonderful tension of the holiness and the grace of God that charges the atmosphere of the church and makes it missionally effective. Four, its holism and generosity were missional.

During this time, some prophets come from Jerusalem. One of them predicts a famine. The disciples, as each was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Jerusalem. So now, they're helping the mother church. There's a mutuality about this. They've been planted by people from Jerusalem church. Now, Jerusalem church is in a bad financial state.

They have famine, and there's a mutual giving back. My point was simply, it's an extension of the theme of unity between the churches, but in addition, you get the idea that, folks, the gospel involves the whole person.

[19:36] The gospel involves our whole lives. Yes, there is a primary call of the gospel to reconciliation with God, but there's also a call for reconciliation amongst the people of God and

reconciliation for people who are in great conflict in the world.

I simply want to, this fourth point is just simply to say that the gospel has a huge scope. I believe that the Great Commission is at the core of the gospel, our core of mission, but it is placed in the midst of another commandment given by Jesus, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Love your neighbor as yourself. That involves justice, compassion, advocacy, all of those things that are part of God's mission, and that in turn in the biblical narrative is in line with the cultural mandate that is a call for us to be human and to have a theology of work, to have a theology of family, all of those things.

Fifth, its leadership was missional. There are a number of things said here about the leadership of this great church. First of all, the character of the leaders.

This is all important. When Barnabas arrives, he sees the grace of God. He's so glad. He isn't jealous. He's just so glad for what God is doing.

[21 : 00] And it says, he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. I think there's a connection there between his character and his effectiveness for the long term.

Sadly, too many examples of leaders in churches who have massive charisms, but not the character to bear the charisms. And the church today is dealing with the fallout of that all over the place.

So, what does a missional leader look like? They're people of character. Secondly, leaders who are missional are people who are in a plurality of leadership.

Barnabas knows he can't do this on his own, so he sees an opportunity to get Saul involved. He finds Saul and will always be grateful, eternally grateful, that Barnabas did what he did here.

Previously, he had advocated for Saul when the Jerusalem leaders were very suspicious of him.

And now he goes down and he knows his limitations. I'm an encourager, I'm an exhorter, but I'm not a teacher like Paul.

[22 : 06] And we need that in the church. So, then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. So, you get this idea that from the beginning, there's a belief in plurality of leaders. And then, in chapter 13, verse 1, there is a flat-out statement about the plurality of leaders.

Now, in the church in Antioch, there were prophets and there were teachers. Barnabas, Simeon, Niger, Lucius, Manan. The apostles are never alone.

They're always in twos on mission. And there's always a plurality of leaders within the churches. In other words, having a plurality of leaders is not a luxury.

It's essential, I think. And it reminds me of the fact that leaders also are an image of the triune God. There is, Michael Jenkins compares leadership to a skilled jazz ensemble as the performers play their music.

[23 : 20] It flows from them and among them, moving them as they respond to one another. The music has a life of its own, a life that draws the musicians together while not diminishing their discreet identities.

The music draws the observers into a very real participation in and through the music. Regardless of the shape of a particular ministry, all of us need to be involved in perichoretic teams like that. And it's my prayer, as I pray for you folks, that that will be the kind of wonderful unity that you have together as leaders.

So as we're thinking about the leadership of the missional church, character, plurality, thirdly, diversity. Barnabas seems to have been your people-loving pastoral pastor, extrovert, I suspect. But Barnabas knows his limits and the benefits of complementing his gifts with those of the solid teacher. The teacher is Saul, and he's invited to strengthen this team along with other prophets. It's interesting, it's prophets and teachers. Many years ago, I was pastoring in Montreal and Michael Green came to talk to our church and he was commenting on this precise verse and he said that every church needs a combination of prophets and the prophetic type of people and the teaching type of people.

[24 : 42] he says, and he said the reason is that prophets swing from the chandeliers and teachers sweat the footnotes. Pastoral teams should have a diversity of gifting. Fourth aspect of the leadership is that there should be a spirit-led ethos for decision-making.

This is a group of people, and I'm going to tell you this, I've longed for this. I've been a pastor for more than 20 years and I longed for elders boards that would function the way this group functioned.

Leaders who function the way this group because they do some very courageous things, but they heard the voice of God as they were worshiping the Lord and fasting.

And God the Spirit spoke to them about sending Paul and Barnabas. And even after hearing this, they continue in prayer and fasting. Verse 3, and it is in that spirit that they commissioned Barnabas and Saul, such as the spirit sensitivity, or better, participation in the spirit of this group, that their act of sending in Verse 3 is adjudged to be synonymous with the sending of the Holy Spirit in Verse 3. It's important to have orderly meetings. I'm not against Robert's rules of order. but I really believe that leaders need to be on their knees worshiping the Lord and he will speak.

[26 : 17] Sixth, the courage of the people here was incredibly missional. Now think about this. Your two most prominent pastors, Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas and Paul, are as a result of this group of leaders meeting together, they are commissioned to leave this church, making it the home base for missions to Asia Minor.

I'm sure some of the people of congregations have said, are you folks sure you didn't eat too much cheese in that meeting? Are you sure you got this right? Paul and Barnabas are to leave. apparently there were no rumbling at all. There was no rumbling at all. And now I come full circle to the whole idea that everybody's involved in mission, not just those who go, but those who send. They all participated in the risk and in the support of Paul and Barnabas. Ultimately, mission comes down to you and to me. Are we willing to participate in the great mission of God to the ends of the earth and until the end of the age?

I can't imagine a better cause because I can't imagine a more glorious Christ and a more needed gospel in our time. My last point, the seventh sign of a missional church is its spirit-derived authority over the evil one.

[27 : 48] The last part of our passage, somewhat a frightening passage, but apparently Saul and Barnabas are not afraid of a power encounter, which is then used by God to draw Sergius Paulus, the Roman leader, to himself.

And I want to say to you, those of you involved in the church plant, don't underestimate demonic opposition to your church, planting work, and to you as leaders as well.

Don't overestimate it either. Don't underestimate it, but don't overestimate it because you are on the winning side. Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are so many references to being filled with the Holy Spirit in this great book, but here is one example. Paul filled with the Holy Spirit and he strikes this person blind and when the proconsul sees, he believes.

And so I want to encourage you to put on the whole armor of God every day of your lives and pray and pray and pray that you will be preserved from the power of the enemy and greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

[29 : 09] Amen. Amen. Amen.