

The strategy of the Spirit

Acts 13:1-13

April 22, 2018 – Easter 4

Big idea: God opens our hearts and empowers His people for ministry

What is next?

The church that once was centered in Jerusalem has fanned out into Syria and beyond. Persecution in Jerusalem and the faith of hearts on fire for God has spread the gospel to new lands. First Antioch and later Rome will become the center of the church as the church moves out to the Gentiles.

And so we find these five men praying about what is next. They are men from Cyprus, Africa, and modern Turkey. They fast and pray because they want to share the message of salvation, but are not sure how. Lord show us what we are to do is their plea.

What is next? It is the question that many churches struggle with and that many churches have given up on the question. Our world is changing just as theirs did. We see people struggling with busy lives and fractured families. We see people struggling with their work and often their health. We wonder what to do.

This is a turning point for the church and it can lead us to a turning point today. It begins with a people in prayer whose hearts are burning for the lost. It shows a God who opens those hearts and moves them forward with his power as He plants the seeds of what they are to do in their hearts.

Called by the Holy Spirit

Called while using their gifts v.1 *In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers*

Look closely at the group God has assembled. We have met some of them before. Barnabas and Paul you know. Simeon is thought by some to be the Simon who carried Jesus' cross on Good Friday. Manaen is the adopted brother of King Herod. Notice how they are busy serving and using their gifts.

The call of God comes not while they are sitting waiting for something to happen, but rather while they are busy teaching and preaching. They have busy ministries to the people of Syria as they build the church. "What is next" will be an extension of what they are already doing.

You will not find your call if you just sit in a cave and wait for it. Those whom God calls are the ones who are busy using their gifts already. Their time of service is training that God uses to prepare them for future ministry. This on the job training develops their talents and live by faith.

God calls the busy for further service. He takes people who have shown that they are faithful to simple things and calls them to greater things. He takes those who are willing to walk by faith into the land of miracles. He prepares them for greater things by using the service they are doing now.

Called while seeking God's will v.2 *While 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.*

He calls them while they are fasting. These are not men on a diet, but men whose hearts are burning for the church. They have set aside food for a time to focus in prayer about what the Lord wants. They see the lost and feel like the church needs to move in new directions, but are not sure what.

It is their submission to the will of the Lord that will allow them to do miracles. They do not ask God to bless their plans but humble themselves as they seek His direction. They are convinced that God alone knows where the church must go.

Oh that the church today would pray with that vigor because their hearts are burning to know what the Lord's will is for their lives. Let us not wring our hands because times are uncertain, but fold them in prayer submitting ourselves to make the sacrifices that it may take for his will to come.

It often starts with just a few. Here we find five who are mentioned. Imagine what could happen if five gathered today in prayer with hearts are burning with a desire for the lost. The angels in heaven would celebrate and God would move mountains to help them to accomplish the plan He had for them.

Called and supported by the whole church v.3 *So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

The five will not change the world by themselves. Here the whole church gets behind Barnabas and Saul. They lay their hands on them in support of the ministry they are about to go on. They pray for them and supported them financially so that they could focus on ministry.

Those in ministry should not serve alone. Throughout Paul's ministry, churches in Antioch, Philippi, and Ephesus would support him and pray for him. He went as their representative into the world as well as God's representative. Paul's letters make it clear that God had given them partners.

When God speaks to the leaders who have fasted and prayed about the ministry, all of us need to get behind them. I can tell you from experience that the ministry is sometimes lonelier than the Maytag repairman. Pray for your leaders. Give them words of encouragement. No one should do ministry alone.

I would ask that you would do the same for Jamie and her ministry. Pray for her as she works with the college students and faculty. Maybe it is time we find ways to support her ministry financially and to lift her up personally as she faces the struggles that missionaries face. No one will go far if they are alone.

The path made obvious

Go to those you know v.4 *The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

With the entire world before them, there never seemed to be any doubt in the minds of Barnabas and Saul where they would begin this ministry to the world. They went home. This first missionary journey is a trip to Cyprus, the home of Barnabas and to Asia Minor where Paul grew up.

It was natural to want to share the gospel with the people who were dearest to them. Their people needed the message and God blessed their ministry to people in the areas where they grew up. They would use the natural contacts of family and friends. They reached people they understood and loved.

We often think of missions as going out to Africa and Asia and it can be. Yet, when our heart is burning for the salvation of others, often those others are near our home. They are relatives and people in our community who we want so much to have this salvation we do.

They are people who we meet when we work in our lawn or who are in a group we belong to. You understand the community that they live in and face the same struggles that they do. It is those common bonds that present opportunities and make it natural for you to share God's love. Know that God will be with you.

Go in the power of the Spirit v.11 *Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."*

Just never go anywhere without the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Saul didn't know all the details about what this ministry would be like; they just trusted the Lord to take care of things as they went along. Every day was a new adventure. Every day, God through prayer would give them direction for the day.

And when they came upon sorcerer and mobs who threatened their whole ministry, Paul called upon God to move the power of Satan out of their way. The Lord responded with such power that a proconsul came to faith on Cyprus and churches were planted across Asia Minor.

Sometimes, we expect God will give us all the details before we begin a ministry. God is smarter than that because he wants us to trust Him through the challenges ahead. He wants us to daily ask Him the next step in prayer so that we lean on Him and his power in ministry.

We can't overcome Satan and his problems by our own might. We need to trust God and let Him deal with challenges as we bring them to Him in prayer. He wants our ministry to succeed for it is His ministry. Lean on the power of the Holy Spirit and nothing is impossible.

Let us pray God's call and power

You can't beat God's strategy. He calls those who are already using their gifts in service to Him and who are willing to seek His will and not demand that God do ours. He calls people to go into ministry together with the support of the whole church's prayers and finances.

What's next? You need to get into ministry. Find a place where the Lord can use you and let him prepare you and build you using the skills that He has given you. If you can teach, go teach. If you want to reach the community, go do that. Let God preparing you by serving in a way true to yourself.

They pray don't plan. Pray to the Lord about His desire for you. Let the Lord burn into your heart a desire for the lost, a desire for our children, or a desire for ministering to those who are hurting. Pray, pray, pray and as you are in contact with the Lord, he will give you the direction for ministry.

Finally, go and do ministry asking for the support of others and trusting the power of the Lord. You can not work out all the difficulties or expect to know the whole plan. Go forward bringing daily needs to the Lord in prayer and counting on the power of the word to work miracles.

God is the only one who knows the strategy of how to reach a city, a county or a nation. Serve the Lord by using His gifts and He will prepare the ministry for you. He will open your heart to serve in a place that excites you. He will empower you to do that ministry and even do miracles in His name. Amen.

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Church at 9 PM
Sunday school at 10:15
Everyone is welcome