

Session 6



A Mission Without Boundaries

THE POINT

Sharing the message of Christ is a privilege that could take you anywhere.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We live in a unique time in history as modern air travel allows us to arrive nearly anywhere in a matter of days or even hours. Consequently, people are migrating all around the world. With the advance of technology, the gospel has advanced. Yet of the approximately twelve thousand unique people groups known to exist, more than seven thousand remain less than two percent Christian—and of those, roughly three thousand remain unengaged with the gospel. How will the millions of people who are part of these people groups hear the good news?

America itself has become an amazingly diverse country of ethnicities and backgrounds. We can be thankful for the many opportunities to do “international missions” in our own backyard.

The nations have come to us, but that doesn’t negate the call for us to go to the nations. The world needs to know about Jesus, and we have a role to play in that. The church at Antioch understood its role in the Great Commission and has much to teach us today.

QUESTION 1:

Where are some places you’ve been that you will never forget?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ACTS 13:1-3

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.² As 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.”³ Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

From Acts 11:19-20, we learn that the church at Antioch was intentionally sharing the gospel beyond the Jewish community: “Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.”

In terms of biblical prophecy and salvation history, the significance of what is communicated in Acts 11:20 could hardly be overstated. The Old Testament records God’s unique relationship with Israel, God’s covenant people. But going all the way to back to God’s declaration to Abram in Genesis 12 that “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” the Bible is filled with prophecies and declarations about God gathering the redeemed from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. Since redemption comes through the gospel, the proclamation of the good news to Greeks by these men from Cyprus and Cyrene who had come to Antioch marks both the fulfillment of

biblical prophecy and the church’s obedience to Jesus’s Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

In Acts 13, we find another important step of obedience to the Great Commission, again being taken by the church at Antioch. Luke, the author of Acts, notes five of the leaders in the church as being Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Barnabas was known as an encourager who often traveled with Paul, especially early in Paul’s ministry. Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen, we know little about. Saul, or Paul, who we know the most about, had been brought to Antioch by Barnabas to teach the new believers and remained there for a full year (Acts 11:25-26). Presumably, near the end of that year, we read in Acts 13:2 that the Holy Spirit called out Barnabas and Saul for a specific mission God had for them. We learn later in the chapter that an important part of Paul and Barnabas’s mission would be to take the gospel to the Gentiles (vv. 46-47).

Paul and Barnabas were called by God to go out from the church, and even the community where they had settled, to take the gospel to

those who had yet to hear it. That's the call of a missionary. The church at Antioch gave their full support to Paul and Barnabas through fasting, prayer, laying on of hands, and sending them off.

Every follower of Jesus has a role to play in God's global mission, but the roles aren't the same for everyone. What are those roles? We have been called to be either missionaries or mobilizers for the mission. The church at Antioch obviously understood that since, as Luke indicated, "after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off." (v. 3). Through fasting and prayer, the Antioch church acknowledged the dependence of the missionaries and the mission itself upon God. Missionary work is spiritual work and genuinely fruitful only when the Spirit of God works through the missionary.

By laying their hands on Paul and Barnabas, the Antioch believers were following a common biblical practice of showing their full support and giving their blessing. All of this was a part of intentionally sending the missionaries out, with the acknowledgment that they go not to represent themselves, but the church—which supports them and holds them accountable.

Like Paul and Barnabas, believers today who have heard God's call to go to the nations should joyfully answer that call and go. Believers who have not heard God's call to go to the nations have the calling to send to the nations. As mobilizers, we are to fast and pray for our missionaries, give generously to meet the financial needs of our missionaries, and send them out with our blessing.

QUESTION 2:

What's the role of the local church in sending and supporting missionaries?

QUESTION 3:

How would you describe the Holy Spirit's role in reaching the world with the gospel?

ACTS 13:44-47

⁴⁴ The following Sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what Paul was saying, insulting him. ⁴⁶ Paul and Barnabas boldly replied, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Having been commissioned by the church at Antioch for the ministry to which the Holy Spirit had called them, Paul and Barnabas were faithfully sharing the good news. As crowds gathered to hear them proclaim the gospel, Luke informs us that “when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what Paul was saying, insulting him” (Acts 13:45). Answering God’s call to go where He leads doesn’t always result in a warm reception when we arrive.

Paul and Barnabas endured the same travails and abuse common to missionaries across the ages. Though some rejected them and refused to believe their message, they weren’t dissuaded. Instead, they sensed the reaction of the Jews was an indication that they had fulfilled their obligation. It was the same obligation that Jesus felt when he declared, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt. 15:24). Similarly, Paul and Barnabas told the Jews, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first” (Acts 13:46).

Having been rejected by the Jews, rather than quit the work, Paul and Barnabas announced their intent to now share the gospel with the Gentiles “to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” (v. 47). As was true when the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch began sharing the gospel with the Greeks (Acts 11:20), the significance of this announcement of Paul and Barnabas could hardly be overstated. Biblical prophecy and salvation history was being fulfilled in their midst. These moments,

recorded by Luke, would result in the world being turned upside down by the good news. Birthed from a fledgling movement within Judaism, Christianity has now advanced literally around the world and has been embraced by billions of people.

Revelation 7:9 reveals the end result of what started here in Acts. Having been shown a vision of heaven as it will someday be, John recorded, “After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Though many in each generation since the resurrection of Jesus have rejected the gospel, someday—after it has been proclaimed to the ends of the earth—heaven will be filled with people from every nation, tribe, people, and language who heard and believed. They will have heard and believed because those who proclaimed weren’t willing to give up when some rejected them and the good news they shared.

QUESTION 4:

What are some common reasons people reject the gospel today?

Engage

PRAYING, GIVING, SENDING, GOING

Develop an action plan for taking part in the Great Commission.

Next to each word below, write a sentence describing your involvement in His work to reach the nations.

Praying -

Giving -

Sending -

Going -

Other _____ -

ACTS 13:48-52

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the prominent God-fearing women and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their district. ⁵¹ But Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

As Paul and Barnabas began to share the gospel with the Gentiles, they were blessed to see fruit from their labors. As Luke described the salvation of the Gentiles, he referred to them as those who “had been appointed to eternal life.” The Bible is consistent in giving credit for salvation to the grace of God. No one is deserving of it. That was as true of the Gentiles who were receiving salvation as it was of the Jews who were rejecting it. It’s no less true of any human being who has ever lived. We are responsible for our sin, and we must respond to the gospel with repentance and faith, but all credit goes to our merciful God.

When the Jews continued to create problems, Paul and Barnabas followed the Lord’s instructions to his disciples (Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5) and shook the dust from their feet as they departed for their next destination. But the best part of this passage is that they refused to be discouraged by the trouble caused by the Jews. Luke noted, “And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit” (v. 52).

I regularly try to remind myself and my coworkers in the missions organization where I serve, that we have the privilege of being a part of the most important work in the universe. Those who are part of sharing the gospel with people who

have never heard, are impacting eternity. But you don’t have to be an overseas missionary or work for a missionary sending organization to be a part of the most important work in the universe. In fact, every follower of Jesus is called to be part of that work. By regularly sharing our faith and answering God’s call to mobilize missionaries to the nations through our prayers, generosity, and sending, we join in that great work. What a cause for joy!

Luke observed that, not only were the disciples filled with joy, but they were also filled with the Holy Spirit. As the disciples were used to spread the gospel throughout the region, this moment was another one of those times, like those we’ve studied earlier, when the filling of the Holy Spirit was evident. May we continue to see the same thing in our day!

QUESTION 5:

What does this passage teach us about joy in the life of a Christian?

LIVE IT OUT

Sharing the message of Christ is a privilege that could take you anywhere. Choose one of the following activities:

- **Reflect.** In what ways could you be a greater part of the Great Commission? Commit to pray for missionaries, generously support them, and be a part of sending them out.
- **Rejoice.** Spend some time in prayer thanking God for His work in your life, in your church, and in our world. Ask God to allow your heart and mind to be filled with joy in knowing Him and being a part of his work, and to protect you from discouragement and negativity, even in the midst of difficulties or painful circumstances.
- **Respond.** If you sense God is calling you to be more than a mobilizer for overseas missions and that He may be calling you to go, tell Him of your willingness and seek the counsel of one of your pastors or a mature believer to help you discern God's leading.


