

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR BIG MISSION

A Devotional Theology of Mission part 4

Acts 13

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

THAT is our BIG mission! This morning we’re in our 4th installment of a mini-series that is essentially a collection of “little thoughts about our big mission”; thoughts born in my devotional reading through the **book of Acts** while Valerie and I were on vacation.

The big idea behind the series is this: The way 1st century Christians **lived in** the mission of Jesus should shape the way you and I process the idea of “mission” in the 21st century — shape the way 21st century Christians live and breathe as citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus living in the mission of our King!

REVIEW

In our last two Sunday’s together we thought about the way the Mission of Jesus invades big, dark places with the light of the Gospel — like it invaded 1st century city of Antioch. We thought about how God loved that very dark city that He *moved* His people — a bunch of no names — into that dark place so that the light of Jesus in them, and the light of the Gospel proclaimed by them would shine in that darkness.

We thought about how the mission of Jesus requires the hand / the power of Jesus — and how mission happens in response to mission

Our last two thoughts about our big mission were drawn from a guy named Barnabas: Mission = Nurturing and Building and how Humility Advances Mission.

Barnabas was a blessing to the mission of God in Antioch. But he knew that the continued mission of Jesus in Antioch was beyond his own gifting and resources. He knew that he needed help if the church in Antioch was going to continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus he needed help — and the FIRST man he thought to ask was Saul of Tarsus. He knew that God had especially gifted and called Paul to teach and proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was so

convinced of the need and so convinced Saul was the man to meet the need that he went to Tarsus to look for him; literally *to hunt him up*.

This morning we're picking up with the account of how THAT church in THAT city became the launching pad for the mission of Jesus breaking into Europe, literally changing the course of Western Civilization.

Here's our first little thought about our big mission —

1. Jesus builds mission and missionaries within community (the local church)

Acts 13:1 Now there were **in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**

For the believer to live on mission — for a community of believers to live in the mission of Jesus requires the presence of men and women in whom and through whom these gifts operate.

That's because Jesus has designed His church — which is the agency of His mission — to be served and matured through people operating in a variety of leadership roles and gifts as they are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit. (Rom, 12:3-6. 8b; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5).

In Ephesians 4 and 2 Timothy 3 Paul unpacks and explains how and why teachers and prophets were present within that community of believers in Antioch.

Ephesians 4:11–12 And he gave the apostles, **the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,** ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

2 Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and **profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

Remember — In **Acts 11:26** we're told that Barnabas and Saul had been teaching in that community of believers for a year! That church was being equipped and built up to **send people** out on mission. People within that church were being built up **to go**.

2. The Holy Spirit *Sets Us Apart* For Mission

the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” They were to be in HIS hands for HIS work.

Set Apart is not Christian cliché or church-speak. These are words God used over and over again in the Bible. We literally get the picture of what this phrase means in the Old Testament in connection with the tabernacle, and later in the temple. There were items involved in the worship of God — instruments and vessels. Those vessels weren’t for just anybody to use whenever and wherever they wanted. Those vessels were *set apart* for a specific use in the Temple.

If you’re a Christian — YOU have been *set apart* by the Holy Spirit — *set apart* for the Holy Spirit — *set apart for the work* He has called you to.

Some are set apart for the work of the Holy Spirit in your home. Some are set apart by the Spirit to be students. Some are set apart by the Holy Spirit for mission in the workplace. More thoughts on that in a bit.

3. Mission is Birthed in Corporate Worship

Acts 13:2 **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.”**

Today there is a trend away from ekklesia. People say, *I’m not really a fan of the church gathered. I can just listen to a podcast. I can be built up without having to gather.* But a podcast can’t replace corporate worship.

The first organized missionary endeavor was birthed in corporate worship and involved the spiritual discipline of corporate fasting.

It was in **THAT** context that the Holy Spirit spoke very clearly to the church gathered in Antioch and told them that He had set these men apart for Himself and for the work He had for them.

Those He wanted to use were in the midst of a community. They’d been there for over a year serving that community of believers with the spiritual gifts the Lord had given them. In fact — in light of Ephesians 4 **THEY** were gifts to that community.

When the Holy Spirit said, “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them,*” the community of worshippers in Antioch knew exactly who the Holy Spirit was talking about. A podcast is not the medium for that!

That leads us to our next little thought about our big mission

4. Missionaries are not independent contractors

Acts 13:3 Then after fasting and praying they ¹laid their hands on them and ²sent them off.

Those **going out** on mission **belonged to** — were **sent by** — and **came back to** the community of men and women they worshipped with and had sent them. There were no “para-church” mission organizations in 1st century Christianity. The local church was — and still is — the mission organization established by Jesus and gifted by Jesus to equip men and women to live on mission locally — and be sent out on mission.

5. Mission Is Frontloaded with Prayer and Fasting

Acts 13:3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

6. Mission = Being *Sent Out* by the Holy Spirit

Acts 13:2–4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

If you’re a Christian — YOU have been *set apart* by the Holy Spirit — *set apart for* the Holy Spirit — *set apart for the work* He has called you to.

And the Holy Spirit is the one who **sends you out** into that mission.

If you’re *set apart* by the Holy Spirit to be a part of His work in your home He is going to send you out — to the store; to pick your kids up at school; sit with other parents at soccer games or little league games — all the way to high school or even college games.

If you've been *set apart* by the Holy Spirit to a part of His work in school He is going to send you to a campus; a student body; specific classes; specific teachers/professors.

If you've been set apart by the Holy Spirit to be a part of His work in the work place — He is going to send you to a specific employer in a specific city/town; in a specific office space; surrounded by specific people; under specific management; engaging specific clients or customers.

More thoughts on that in a bit when we get to [verse 14](#)

7. The Mission of Jesus Faces Opposition

Acts 13:6–8 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) **opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.**

God has His agents (the individual believer) and His agency (the church) to advance the Gospel — Satan has his agents and agencies to oppose the mission of God. We must never forget that! Sometimes we forget that there is a very real devil who employs demonic agents to directly turn men and women from faith in Jesus. He also uses human agents to oppose the saving plans and purposes of God. Individuals who taunt and mock anyone for considering Jesus or for proclaiming Jesus. Spouses, siblings, parents, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends who try influence people away from Jesus; who put pressure on others to turn away from Jesus

8. Living on Mission Demands the Empowering and Enabling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 13:9–12 But Saul, who was also called Paul, **filled with the Holy Spirit,** looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul believed,

when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

That little passage is exactly why Jesus said “GO” — but first “WAIT.”

Acts 1:4–5; 8 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . . ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

*Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and **continued** to speak the word of God **with boldness**.*

The scope and the nature of the Great Commission — and the reality of spiritual opposition **demands** boldness and spiritual gifts (in this instance the gift of discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)).

9. Mission = The Confluence of the Truth of the Gospel and the Power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13:12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Modern church culture has done a pretty good job of confusing the power of sonic and visual production with the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s also done a pretty good job of getting believers to consign the supernatural and the extraordinary to the category of weird.

THAT is not the way the mission of Jesus rolled out in the book of Acts. Boldness and Power were the constant in the record of the mission of Jesus in the 1st century.

Here’s a little thought with important implications for anyone living in the big mission of Jesus.

10. Mission Involves People!

Acts 13:13 Paul and his companions then left Paphos by ship for Pamphylia, landing at the port town of Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

The mission of Jesus involves people — that means the mission of Jesus involves the strong and the weak. Mission is hard! Some people can't stand up under the hardship. That has outcomes relationally and which require hard decisions. We will see those outcomes that John Mark's weakness resulted in.

Here's the little thought about our big mission I alluded to earlier

11. Mission Involves Opportunity!

Acts 13:5; 14 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.....¹⁴but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

The word *synagogue* appears some 20 times in connection with where Paul proclaimed the Gospel. There's a reason — and it's tied to verse 2.

These guys were *set apart* by the Holy Spirit and **for** the Holy Spirit **for** the work the Holy Spirit had for them. They were vessels handcrafted for their role in the Mission of Jesus.

Saul, now known as Paul, was a scholar of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The synagogue was to Paul what a recording studio is to a great musician; what the design department at Apple Inc. was for Jonny Ives.

The synagogue was the open door of opportunity for Paul by way of **ethnicity** and **education**.

Acts 22:3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

By the way — Paul had no idea that he was being trained as a child for **this** moment! God had been preparing HIS vessel for THIS moment in THESE places.

What is **your** “synagogue”? What unique opportunities do you have by way of childhood experience, or education, or skillsets, or things your passionate about? I remember when I was first getting to know Danny Donnelly he was wondering whether he should go on tour as a guitar player and vocalist with Kenny Loggins. I told Danny that Kenny Loggins tour bus door wasn’t open for me — but it was wide open for him to walk through. Like Paul — Danny had no idea that the thousands and thousands of hours he practiced guitar and singing BEFORE he met Jesus would make the recording studio, tour bus and stage his synagogue.

We ALL have that place we’re at home in — that place we fit in and we can walk into. We ALL have that person or persons we can talk to. Paul told the Ephesians that every Christian is God’s works of art — crafted by Him for good works that He’s already prepared for us to walk in.

But here’s the deal — our last little thought about our big mission

12. Mission Involves Readiness for the Moment!

Acts 13:15-16 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” ¹⁶**So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.**

It’s one thing to have that open door — have access to a person or persons; but there comes the moment when you have to speak. There comes the moment with a verbal or non-verbal cue — With words or with a look or by a situation that says: “You’re on!”

Paul was ready!