

Sent to the Cities

Acts 13:1-13; June 17, 2018

Sermon Series Introduction:

- This Sunday, we're continuing our study through the Book of Acts but we're calling this new series, "In Boston as in Heaven" because we're going to move from focusing on the mission advancing in our neighborhoods to advancing in particular cities in Boston. It stems from how Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, you will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10), "In Boston as in heaven."
 - Sidebar: Keep praying for your neighbors and look to engage them this summer with the gospel.
 - *Story:* I was super encouraged again last week with a story from one of you. A person told me that they had lived in the same place for years but were ashamed to admit that they didn't know their neighbors names. Recently, they broke through the awkwardness of that and asked them their names. That's a huge win (level 1).
 - *Pray for me:* A young girl just bought the house right beside me and she's moving in over the next month. Her name is Emily. Pray for us to move beyond level 1 with her.
- Introduce a Tension: Dream with me. Can you see the day when we start seeing neighbor after neighbor profess faith in Jesus? Isn't that going to be great!
 - How are we going to respond as a church?
 - What is that going to require from us?
 - What opportunities is that going to open for us?
 - Solutions: new small groups, new churches, new culturally relevant expressions of the gospel, sending some back to their home country as missionaries.
- This new sermon series is going to challenge us as a church to consider the implications for our calling as witnesses in Boston and to see the gospel go forth from us.

Context:

- Last week we learned about God's sovereign work to save Cornelius, a God-fearing centurion by sending Peter to share the gospel with him and this paved the way for the gospel now to spread to the Gentiles (read Acts 11:18). I'm going to summarize briefly what happens from Acts 11:19 to chapter 13.
- Antioch:
 - 11:19 (read) connects all the way back to 8:1 and the persecution surrounding Stephen's death that caused the believers to scatter to the nations. It says that the gospel spread as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.
 - When news of this came to the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch (11:22 - show map)
 - Barnabas, after visiting Antioch and encouraging them (cf. 11:23) went to Tarsus and found Saul and brought him to Antioch (cf. 11:25-26). They stayed in Antioch

- an entire year teaching (cf. 11:26).
- At Antioch, there was a prophet named Agabus who foretells of a great famine to come over the entire world. As a result, the disciples agreed to send relief to the believers in Judea by means of Barnabas and Saul (11:27-30).
- Jerusalem:
 - Persecution continues: Herod the King killed James, the brother of John, and arrested Peter also (12:1-5).
 - What happened? The church prayed (12:5) and while they were praying the Lord sent an angel to rescue Peter (12:6-17).
 - Herod was so infuriated that he had the sentries who were supposed to be guarding the doors put to death (12:18-19).
 - The text then tells us that Herod, dressed in his royal robes, gave a speech from his throne and an angel of the Lord struck him dead because “he did not give God the glory” (12:20-23).
- Read Acts 12:24-25
 - In spite of this persecution, Luke lets us know that “the word of God increased and multiplied” (cf. 12:24).
 - This section ends with a note that Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem after completing their service and brought John Mark back with them to Antioch.

Read Acts 13:1-3

Explain the setting:

- *What’s going on in this text?* Let me first lay the setting:
 - “The church at Antioch”
 - This is where Barnabas and Saul had spent at least a year together
 - “Prophets and teachers” (cf. 11:27-28; 15:32; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28-29).
 - God had gifted those within the church to prophesy and instruct and teach his will and way. Specifically, five are mentioned here and the text doesn’t tell us who did what, so there many have even been an overlap between the two roles of prophet and teacher.
- *Who were these five men?*
 - Barnabas
 - Simeon, who was also called Niger
 - Niger in latin means “black” or “dark,” thus many think he came northern Africa
 - Lucius of Cyrene
 - He was also most likely from northern Africa because Cyrene was a Roman province in Libya, on the northern coast of Africa (cf. 2:10).
 - Manaen, a lifeline friend of Herod
 - Most likely he was raised with the Herod who reigned during Jesus’ ministry from 4 B. C. To A. D. 39. It was Herod’s nephew who was just killed in Acts 12. As a result of this connection, he would’ve had a high

social standing.

- Saul
- While we're not told a whole lot about these guys, what's significant is the Greek names that are mentioned. God was gifting the church without ethnic distinctions (Bock).
- *What was happening in the church?*
 - The text says "they" were worshiping and fasting
 - While it's not explicit who "they" refers to, the most likely scenario is that this was a gathering of the entire church at Antioch.
 - The reason this was probably the case is because when Saul returns at the end of this journey that he's about to embark on, he reports back to the entire church (Read Acts 14:25-28). In another similar account, it's the entire church selecting the seven who were to serve (6:2-6).
 - If this is the case, then the entire church was gathered together and this was congregational worship and fasting.
- What does this passage have to teach us about how we at RHC are to think about engaging in God's mission?

The point: A worshiping and Spirit-filled church discerns the Spirit's call and sends out laborers for God's mission.

I. Worship will fuel you for God's mission.

- One of the truths that's been extremely clear as we've studied Acts is that God, in particular, the Spirit of God, is driving this mission forward but what we also see is a church engaged in devotion, ready to respond to God's leading.
- Do you know why it's important that we gather regularly together like what we're doing today to hear God's Word, pray God's Word, sing God's Word and respond to God's Word?
 - We're feeding our souls with the greatness and glory of God displayed through Jesus Christ.
 - We're reminding each other that Jesus is the Cornerstone. We're made strong through his love. Where sin runs deep your grace is more. God's grace is unchanging. Jesus, you're my one defense and my righteousness.
 - We're aligning our hearts with the heart of God.
- If, as a church, we are seeking after God in personal and corporate worship, our lives will be fueled to overflow and engage in God's mission. You are going to long to see the nations enjoying and delighting in God like you are.
- John Piper, in his great work on missions called *Let the Nations Be Glad!* Is famous for saying, "Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory....But worship is all the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish.

Missionaries will never call out, ‘Let the nations be glad!’ who cannot say from the heart, ‘I rejoice in the Lord. . . . I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High’ (Ps. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship” (Piper).

- Application:
 - What’s threatening to steal your worship?
 - Where are you being deceived and chasing temporal things?
 - What “other things” are distracting you?
 - What’s stealing your enjoyment of God

II. A Spirit-filled church discerns the Spirit’s call.

- The text is clear about some things and vague on others.
- What’s clear:
 - The Holy Spirit spoke and called out Barnabas and Saul for a special work.
 - The church discerned the Holy Spirit’s call, fasted and prayed and then obeyed.
- What’s unclear:
 - How did they discern and hear the Spirit’s prompting?
 - We’re not told.
 - One likely possibility is that the Spirit mediated his message through the one or more of the five prophets and teachers and then they relayed it to the entire congregation.
 - John Stott notes another possibility: “[H]is call could have been inward rather than outward, that is, through the Spirit’s witness in their hearts and minds” (Stott).
 - What exactly were Barnabas and Saul to do?
 - The Spirit doesn’t yet reveal the exact nature of this work. The text is pretty vague.
 - John Stott observes that this call is similar to Abram’s in Genesis 12:1 where he says, “Go...to the land that I will show you.” The call to “go” is clear while the land and work is not (so Stott).
 - Stott concludes that sometimes God’s call requires an adventurous step of faith (share about God leading me to Boston).
- What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and church in discerning and affirming this call?
 - Who sent Barnabas and Saul off? The church or the Holy Spirit?
 - The Holy Spirit (cf. 13:2, 4).
 - The church (cf. 13:3).
 - The Spirit sent them out but he did it through the church.
- What does this mean for RHC?
 - Our role isn’t a passive role. As a church, we must be seeking God’s face to hear and discern who among us the Spirit is setting apart to be sent out for a special purpose. It is our responsibility to discover gifting and calling. We must identify, assess, equip and send.
- What does this mean for you as an individual?

- Don't try to discern God's call in isolation. Can the Spirit speak directly to you? Yes. But one of the best ways to test and discern a highly subjective internal sense of calling is to flesh and work it out in the context of the local church with an external call that brings validity to your internal call. As a church, we want to help others discern:
 - Does their sense of calling align with God's mission?
 - Does their sense of calling seem to be in line with the person's gifting and abilities?
- There is a healthy confidence in ministry that comes when one's internal sense of calling is affirmed through one's local church.

3. We must send laborers for God's mission to be fulfilled.

- By God's grace, the church at Antioch was able to look beyond their own needs and their own community to see the gospel spread. The gospel has spread even as far as Boston, MA as a result of commissioning and sending Saul and Barnabas.
- By God's grace, they sent their best people. Do you think they would've loved to have kept Saul and Barnabas?
- In order for "Boston as in heaven" to become a reality, the Spirit in cooperation with the church is going to have to send people.
 - Send Boston Vision:
 - In 2005, there were only 2 church plants (Hope Fellowship in Cambridge and Grace Church in Avon).
 - In 2018, there are currently 72 church plants (we are one of these).
 - Our prayer is that by 2030 there will 300 church plants.
 - How is this going to happen? We're going to have to raise up and send out some of our best leaders.
 - Tim Keller, in his massive work called *Center Church* talks about churches that have what he calls "movement dynamics." He argues from the Book of Acts that church planting is a movement dynamic that must be the natural mind-set of church leaders. But if this is going to be the case, he says there are three key mind-set shifts that have to happen:
 - 1. You must be willing to give away resources and lose control of your money, members, and leaders.
 - 2. You must be willing to give up some control of the shape of the ministry itself.
 - 3. You must be willing to care for the kingdom even more than for your tribe.
- How did they send?
 - More fasting and prayer and laying on of hands.
 - The laying on of hands is a visual commissioning that symbolizes the Spirit's internal work and power in them (cf. 6:6; 8:17; 9:17; 19:6).
 - What happened? Check out 13:4-14:20 (show map).
 - Paul and Barnabas cover 895 miles, covering roughly 15 miles a day by

foot (Schnabel) and the gospel spreads from Antioch to the region of Galatia and back and churches are established (read Acts 14:21-23, 27-28).

Conclusion

- Here's how we're going to respond today. I want Dan to come up and begin playing and I've got some people that I've asked to come down front for us to have a time of prayer together as a church.
- What are we praying for?
 - God, fuel my worship!
 - What's threatening to steal your worship?
 - Where are you being deceived and chasing temporal things?
 - What "other things" are distracting you?
 - What's stealing your enjoyment of God
 - God, what might the Spirit be setting me apart for?
 - God, where who are you gifting and setting apart in our church?
 - God, what cities in Boston are you sending us to next?