

THE MISSIONS MODEL

Text: Acts 13:1-4

Introduction:

1. The events that lead to the founding of the church at Antioch are recorded in Acts 11:19-26.
 - The dispersion over Stephen (Vs. 19-21)
 - The church at Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch (Vs. 22-24). Barnabas disciples and strengthens the converts and the church experiences further growth (Vs. 24b).
 - Barnabas seeks out Saul and brings him to Antioch and they minister together for a year. The disciples are called “Christians” (Gk. ‘Christianos’) first in Antioch (Vs. 25-26).
2. The church at Antioch would become the mission base for the Apostle Paul. We do not find one word of censure against this church in the New Testament.
3. The local church is God’s vehicle for the training and sending out of servants to the harvest fields of the world – “the **church** that was **at Antioch**”. This was a local, visible, New Testament assembly. The authority for sending out servants for the harvest field does not reside in a denomination, a “universal church” or a para church organization. It resides in the local church under the headship of Christ and the leadership of the Spirit.
4. This passage provides us the pattern for sending out servants for the harvest field. It also shows us the kind of church we need to be in order to be an effective missions base. May God help us to be like the church at Antioch!

The church at Antioch was...

I. A SINGLE-MINDED CHURCH (VS. 1)

There is a wonderful spirit of unity evident in this church from the leadership through to the church as a whole.

A. Unity despite their Diversity (Vs. 1)

1. The Principle – there was diversity in this church but at the same time a wonderful unity.
 - a. Diversity of background, gifts and function is permitted in the local church. There is the **right kind** of diversity in a local church. There are different gifts (Acts 12:4; Rom. 12:6). That is why the local church is likened to a body with different members (1 Cor. 12). The diversity is one of **function not doctrine**.
 - b. Diversity of doctrine is prohibited in the local church (1 Tim. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:10). There is the **wrong kind** of diversity in a local church. The modern concept of diversity that embraces

everything contrary to the Word of God is wicked. The idea that diversity of doctrines is a basis for unity is unscriptural.

2. The People – Five men are mentioned who were in the category of “prophets and teachers”. Evidently, they were the spiritual leaders of this church. These men had diverse backgrounds, gifts and personalities and yet they were of one heart and mind in doctrine and practice.
 - a. Barnabas – A Levite from Cyprus (Acts 5:36). Being from Cyprus, a Gentile area, Barnabas was likely a Hellenistic Jew; that is a man with Jewish ancestry but influenced by Greek culture.
 - b. Simeon – a black man from North Africa (the word Niger means “black”). Evidently there was no racial prejudice in this church. The color of your skin should not be an issue in the local New Testament Church. In Christ there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)
 - c. Lucius – from Cyrene which was in North Africa. Lucius is a Roman name so he was likely a Roman who had been stationed to that part of the Empire.
 - d. Manaen – had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. He was from high society, a social elite. God had lifted Manaen out of Herod’s court, saved him and set him apart for service in the local church.
 - e. Saul – a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees and former persecutor of the church of God now wonderfully transformed by the Gospel.

B. Unity in their Ministry (Vs. 2)

We see these men working together. In the church at Antioch, we could say there was unity in the **pulpit** and in the **pew**. There was unity in the **leadership** of the church and in the **membership** of the church. Note the evidence of their unity.

1. Ministering together – “ministered to the Lord”
2. Fasting together – “and fasted”
3. Cooperating together – “Separate me Barnabas and Saul”. The laying on of hands was symbolic of their united heart for the mission (Vs. 3).
4. Note: The unity of the early church is one of the key themes in the Book of Acts (See Acts 1:14, 2:1, 46; 5:12, 15:25). Unified local churches can be powerfully used in the work of world missions. Disunified churches will be ineffective as a mission’s base. Divided local churches are a missionary’s worst nightmare!
5. C.H. Spurgeon wrote, “It is not likely we should all see eye to eye. You cannot make a dozen watches all tick to the same time, much

less make a dozen men all think the same thoughts. But, still, if we should all bow our thoughts to that one written Word, and would own no authority but the Bible, the Church could not be divided, could not be cut in pieces as she now is.”

What kind of church does God use in missions? A single minded (unified) church.

The church at Antioch was...

II. A SPIRITUALLY-ACTIVE CHURCH (VS. 2)

This was a church that was:

A. Serving the Lord (Vs. 2a)

1. **Sacrificial Service** – ‘ministered’. The word was used to describe voluntary service rendered to the state. The same word is used in Hebrews 10:11 to describe the ministry of the Levitical priests. Thus, the idea is that of willing, voluntary service. Service for the Saviour involves sacrifice.
2. **Spiritual Service** – “to the Lord”. Their service was to the Lord, not to men. Christ-centered, Christ-focused service is what is needed in the local church. Service done unto Christ and for Christ’s glory.
3. **Note:** God called men who were active in sacrificial, spiritual service. Note the word ‘**as**’. Faithful service in the local church is a vital pre-requisite and qualification for the full-time ministry. God does not call lazy men to the ministry! He calls faithful men to special service. Take **Paul** as an example. There was a period of preparation before he was sent out on his first missionary journey. He spent 3 years in Arabia¹. More time elapsed after that. We know he ministered for at least a year at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Bible students who have studied the chronology of Paul’s life suggest it was approximately 10 years from his conversion before he was sent out on the first missionary journey.
4. **Note:** If you believe God has called you to the ministry, it is vital that you wholeheartedly embrace the current season of service and preparation in the local church the Lord has for you while you wait on confirmation on how and where He would have you serve.

B. Seeking the Lord (Vs. 2b, 3a)

1. The church at Antioch was a church that knew how to fast and pray. Fasting coupled with prayer reveals they were serious and earnest in prayer. This church was serious about seeking God! No wonder it

¹ Christ trained his disciples for three years. This is where we get the concept of spending at least 3 years of intensive Bible college training.

was such a powerful church! Prayer was one of the hallmarks of the early church (Acts 2:42).

2. There is power in prayer but there is special power in prayer coupled with fasting in certain contexts (See Matt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29). **As the physical appetites are denied, the spiritual senses sharpen.** Fasting helps maintain a spirit of prayer and dependence on God for the period of fasting. Extra time can be given to prayer that normally would go to eating.
3. A praying church is a powerful church; a prayerless church is a powerless church. When men work men work but when men pray God works. Prayer is the engine that drives any ministry.
4. Andrew Murray wrote, "Great advances in missions are always connected with a deep revival of spiritual life and a higher devotion to the Lord Jesus."
5. Note: This kind of spirituality is the environment in which missions can thrive. The spiritual environment of this church was such that the Holy Spirit of God had great liberty to call men to the ministry of the Gospel. A carnal, worldly, prayerless church won't do much for the cause of world missions.

What kind of church does God use in missions? A spiritually active (serving) church.

The church at Antioch was...

III. A SPIRIT-LED CHURCH (VS. 2b-4)

Missions is the great burden of the Spirit of God. His work of conviction is outlined in John 16:7-11. His activity saturates the Book of Acts, the great missions Book of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit is the main Character in the Book of Acts.

A. The Spirit Called (Vs. 2)

1. The context of the call (Vs. 2a). The call came in the context of serving, fasting and praying. It is within this kind of spiritual environment that the Holy Spirit delights to move.
2. The candidates of the call (Vs. 2b). Paul and Barnabas were 'separated' to the Gospel ministry by the Spirit of God. All Christians are to serve the Lord but we need to recognize that some are set apart by Divine appointment to give themselves more fully to the work of the ministry. Romans 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, **called** to be an apostle, **separated** unto the gospel of God."
3. The content of the call (Vs. 2c).

- a. The Spirit of God had a “work” for Paul and Barnabas to do. The word means “toil”. A call to the ministry is a call to work and work hard!
- b. Some think of the ministry in terms of prestige and position but it is a call to labor for the Master. Some wrongly think the ministry is a comfortable, cushy, one day a week job. Nothing could be further from the truth! It is the most **demanding** and at the same time the most **rewarding** work one can ever be involved with. It is work that bears eternal fruit.
- c. Illustration: My “Five B” week – A burial, baby, battle, birthday and a baptism.

B. The Church Cooperated (Vs. 3-4a)

1. They submitted to the Spirit (Vs. 2).
 - a. The fact they heard the Spirit shows that they were sensitive to His gentle voice.
 - b. This would not have been an easy command to obey. Paul and Barnabas had been a significant part of the leadership of the church. They had had a ministry of teaching and preaching in the church. No doubt a deep bond existed between them and the flock. But the church was yielded to the will of God.
 - c. Sending out choice servants involves surrender and sacrifice for the local church but it is blessed of God.
2. They sought the Lord (Vs. 3a).
 - a. Notice that even though the mind of God was clear (Vs. 2), they still sought the Lord. This is the right approach. God’s will was made known but it could only be accomplished by power through prayer.
 - b. We also see that ordaining and sending men out for the Gospel ministry is something that must be approached carefully and soberly. The flippant, “don’t bother about Bible college, grab your Bible and jump on the plane” approach is not in keeping with the spirit and order we see here and has set some up for failure in the ministry.
3. They sent out the servants (Vs. 3b-4a)

Paul and Barnabas were:

 - a. Sent by the Church (Vs. 3b). The laying on of hands speaks of ordination. The following three things are signified by the laying on of hands:²
 - i. Ordination is the church’s recognition of God’s call upon a man. God is the Lord of the Harvest, and the churches must follow His leadership. He is the only one who knows the hearts of men.

² Excerpt from David Cloud’s Advanced Bible Study Series (Acts), p. 98.

- ii. Ordination is to set apart a man for a special work (Acts 13:2 “separate me”) and to release him for that work (Acts 13:3 “they sent them away”)
- iii. Ordination is a pledge to stand behind the man and support him in the work God has called him to.
- b. Sent by the Holy Spirit (Vs. 4a). There is no contradiction here. They were sent by the church and sent by the Spirit. The two go together.
 - i. There is an important safety mechanism here. It is the role of the local church to review a man’s call with a view to recognizing it if there is clear evidence it is genuine. Therefore, one should never have an independent “I know I’m called and I don’t care what my pastor and church have to say” attitude. Submit to the training, proving process of local church. Have an open ear for counsel from the leadership and membership of the church.
 - ii. Dr. Stephan Olford suggests at least five “tests” of a call that should be considered:
 1. Do I meet the qualifications of a preacher as set forth in the Word of God?
 2. Have I the witness of the Spirit in my heart that God has called me?
 3. Has the gift of the preacher become evident in my life and service?
 4. Has my church recognized and confirmed my preaching gift?
 5. Has God used my preaching gift to the salvation of souls and the edification of saints?
 - iii. On the church’s side, it must be careful not to obstruct the Spirit’s leading in an individual’s life. Some churches stifle a man’s call to the ministry and carnally hinder him from fulfilling God’s will for his life.

What kind of church does God use in missions? A Spirit-led (surrendered) church.

Conclusion:

1. Are we the kind of church that God can use to fulfill the Great Commission?
Are we striving to be a unified, serving, praying people?
2. Are you surrendered to the calling of God? If the Spirit of God was to move in your heart to surrender to the full-time ministry, would you submit?