

## The Sending Church: 4) Missions-Active

### Acts 13:1-3

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#### Sermon Series & Scripture Introduction

We will be closing out Missions Month today. We have been in a sermon series called, "The Sending Church," looking into scripture regarding God's mission and living in His mission. In Part 1 (Acts 1:6-8), we saw how all believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witnesses. In Part 2 (Ephesians 6:16-20), we looked at how we can stand strong in prayer for gospel work. Last week, in Part 3 (Philippians 4:14-20), we learned how we are gospel friends on gospel mission with one another and with our God, who gives us the privilege to serve His mission.

Today, we'll see how a sending church is a missions-active church. We'll be looking at a church in the city of Antioch in Acts 13. This is a pivotal chapter in the entire book of Acts because this is when the church intentionally sends out the first gospel workers to reach the lost. So this passage is completely relevant to our church today as we are trying to be faithful on God's mission as well.

#### Scripture Reading

##### Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

#### Sermon Introduction

As we've been going through Missions Month, I wanted to ask us an important question that I believe we all should be asking ourselves. And the question is this: "What is the most significant way that you can personally participate in God's mission?"

Is it praying for world missions and for missionaries? Is it studying and learning about missions history and the ongoing missions work? Is it giving financially to cover the cost of doing missions? Is it learning a new language to share the gospel in a foreign country?

Well, while all these ways are important, I see from scripture that the most significant way that we can participate in God's mission is actually to be part of a local church. This is because all these missions-driving spiritual activities become highly effective and fruitful for God's mission when done together as a church as opposed to being done alone.

As we strive together to be living members of the living body of Christ, everything else that we do intentionally for God's mission--prayer, learning, giving, discipling, sending--will then be in line with how God intends to reach the nations. Because the church is the vehicle that God uses to save the lost in our "Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth." We see this clearly in scripture. There are no lone Christians, there are no lone missionaries. Disciples were always a part of a church, then sent out to evangelize and then establish more local churches. These churches would then grow, get healthy, and continue to go out to the lost in the great harvest of souls. In other words, to be part of God's mission means being part of a missions-active church.

#### The One Thing

The One Thing for us today is this:

*Strive together as a missions-active church  
who carries out God's work to the ends of the earth!*

#### Overview

We'll cover today's text in three parts, three prominent aspects of a missions-active church from Acts 13:

1. Diversity that springs up from faithful gospel-preaching (v.1)
2. Worship that strives in faith-filled serving and seeking (v.2)
3. Partnership that stirs on fellow missions-active living (v.3)

## Sermon Outline

### I. Diversity that springs up from faithful gospel-preaching (v.1)

#### Acts 13:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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.

- In v.1, Luke directs our attention to Antioch, specifically on how the church is developing: Because before, only Barnabas and Saul were the leaders. Now, there are 3 more men added to the leadership team. And together, this team of prophets and teachers, had the responsibility to feed the church with God's Word: Prophets delivered divine messages from God to His people that are in line with God's Word. Teachers instructed, explained, and applied God's Word to the lives of the members in the church.
  - But the important detail here that we cannot miss is that we are given the names and some specific information regarding the 3 new leaders.
    - The first new leader is Simeon. Simeon is a common Jewish name but he also had a Latin name, Niger, which means black or dark-skinned. So, his unique ethnicity seems to be highlighted here. Simeon might be Jewish, African, or both. He may have been darker-skinned than others where he was from. And if he spoke Latin, he probably came from one of the Roman provinces in the northern parts of Africa.
    - Lucius is a common Roman name, and his hometown is highlighted. He is from Cyrene, which is in northern Africa. He may have been one of the first people who preached the gospel in Antioch.
    - Lastly, Manaen is the Greek form of a Jewish name. And he has an additional detail that he is a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch (Herod Antipas). This Herod is the one famously remembered for having John the Baptist beheaded and mocked Jesus during the trial before his crucifixion. So, Manaen grew up in the circles of political authority and influence in society, but was walking a completely different path in life compared to Herod.
    - Barnabas and Saul are not given a description but we can highlight similar types of information about them from the rest of scripture: Unlike the other 3 men, Barnabas and Saul were distinctly Jewish. Barnabas was a Jew: more specifically a Levite from the one of the twelve tribes of Israel. And though he was from Cyprus, he was part of the early church in Jerusalem.
    - Saul was an elite Jew as a Pharisee. Being a religious leader of Israel, he had reached peak religious and social status among the Jews, before he surrendered it all when he believed in Jesus. We know that Saul was also a Roman citizen by birth, which is why he had a common Roman name, Paul.
  - In summary, from the information that we gather about these men, we see that Luke is highlighting the diversity of this leadership team. Just in this leadership team, among these five men, there were layers of diversity: ethnic diversity, cultural diversity and social diversity. Different shades of colors and upbringings, which inevitably translates to a variance of values, perspectives and preferences.
- We see that diversity is a key characteristic of a missions-active church. What does this mean for our church today as we strive to be missions-active? There is a lot to be said about this but I'll highlight 2 points of relevance for us:
  - We must be ready and willing to do personal evangelism to anyone, anywhere and anytime.
    - I say this because the diversity at the church in Antioch was a result, not a strategy. They did not just simply try to get a group of people as diverse as they can be and call it church. They did not hold interest-based events in order to target specific demographics and get them to

come out to church. No. What the church did was that they faithfully preached the gospel. And diversity *happened*.

- Back in Acts 11, we read about how the church got started in Antioch. It started with everyday disciples, not church leaders, or apostles or gifted evangelists. Just everyday disciples running away from persecution in all directions away from Jerusalem. Some reached Judea and Samaria, and others went further north to Antioch. Now, those who fled were Jewish-believers and the norm was that they spoke only to other Jews in the new cities they came to. But there were some who decided, “Hey, let’s try reaching out to my non-Jewish, Greek-speaking neighbor, coworker, football buddy because they need to hear about Jesus Christ, too” (11:20).
  - These everyday disciples were ready and willing to share the gospel to anyone, even if it meant crossing ethnic, cultural, and social barriers. They were ready and willing to share the gospel anywhere, in their everyday places of life. And they were ready and willing to share the gospel anytime, even in the face of persecution. As the gospel was preached in Antioch, we see that “the hand of the Lord was upon these believers and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21). So it makes sense that in Antioch that disciples of Jesus Christ were first called “Christians” (11:26). There is such a diverse group of people who declare and demonstrate their love for Christ.
  - So brothers and sisters, be ready and willing to share your faith. Practice having spiritual conversations, proactively love others outside the church who have yet to believe in Jesus, and persuade them that this gospel is true and can transform any life. And God’s hand will do the work of saving lives and adding people into this church, developing us to be a diverse, missions-active church.
- Second, we must be ready and willing to practice corporate transculturalism as a body of Christ.
    - Transculturalism is one of our HMCC values. We used to talk about it all the time as a younger church but I believe it’s appropriate to bring up again now.

Transculturalism is, “To make the decision to go through discomforts and difficulties, in order to develop understanding and delight in people from a different culture.”

It means to embrace diversity because God embraces the nations. It means to sacrificially love others as Jesus Christ shed his own blood to ransom and rescue people from every tribe, language, people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

- But diversity is hard to embrace. I can tell you from personal experience, as a Korean-American married to a Chinese-Indonesian. There have been many incidents of miscommunication and misunderstanding between me and my wife, as well as with our parents, who are more culturally Korean and Chinese. I am already confused where Korean values clash with American values, and then trying to explain Korean values as an American to an Indonesian just ends up producing more confusion. If we did not love each other, we wouldn’t be able to laugh it off together, forgive each other and move on. But that’s just between a handful of us.
- I know that on one hand, our church is not that diverse. There are churches that have 50+ nations represented in their congregation. But at the same time, I know that we are diverse enough to be tempted to form our own comfortable groups even in our small church of about 100 members.
- And so, what happens if we take diversity even on this scale and then pack it into a tangible, confined group of people? Into a church where we interact with one another on a regular basis? Well, there are two natural results when you increase the density of diversity: It’s either superficiality or hostility. Either people just put on a smile from a distance, unwilling to engage. Or people do get “real” and end up burning each other with their personal preferences and judgments.
- I know that we have experienced either superficiality or hostility to some degree, even in our church. Which means many of us are also guilty of responding to our diversity with superficiality or hostility as well. How can a church possibly be missions-active, living on God’s mission to love the nations if we’re struggling to embrace people different from us within

our own church? Well this is the bad news.

- The good news is that the diversity in the church at Antioch was a miracle of God. During biblical times, it was a well-known fact that Jews did not interact with non-Jews to the point of hatred and disgust. They even hated half-Jews and they avoided other nations and people groups. Any interaction would be superficial or hostile. You would never ever see a Jew with a non-Jew. Until Jesus Christ came. Not only did he show us an example of how to cherish diversity but he made powerful, spiritual unity possible among people when he died on the cross.
- When Jesus Christ died on the cross, not only did he reconcile our relationship with God. But as Jesus took upon himself our sins and the sins of the world, he reconciled our relationships with one another (Ephesians 2:11-22). He destroyed that dividing wall of hostility between different people. So, the gospel of Jesus Christ can destroy any barrier that divides one member from another in our church. The gospel transforms superficiality into sacrificial love, and turns hostility into humble gratitude as we delight in one another as spiritual family and friends in the gospel. This is why as the church, we are “one body” and our diversity is evidence to the power of God.
- As a missions-active church, this is the gospel we must continue to preach, even to ourselves and one another. A crucial way to do this is in the next mark of a missions-active church, which is...

## II. Worship that strives in faith-filled serving and seeking (v.2)

### Acts 13:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup>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.”

- V.2 brings us right into one of the church’s worship gatherings. The word “worship” is such an interesting word in scripture because the original languages actually use several different words that end up being translated as the word “worship” in English. People generally think of “worship” today as singing praises with closed eyes in a dimly lit room having a moment with Jesus. But there is a lot more to what “worship” is. Even here in v.2, the Greek word means “to serve or to perform a regular or formal service” (from λειτουργέω). This is why this word was generally used to describe the regular service and work of the priests in the temple of God.
  - So Luke is highlighting here that this church was in regular “serving.” With that, the church was also in regular fasting, seeking the will of God and discerning the next steps as a missions-active church. It sounds like such normal activities of the church in Antioch. And it is in this context of regular and general “serving” where the Holy Spirit instructed how Barnabas and Saul would serve in a unique and specific work outside the church.
- Now, what does this regular serving and regular seeking mean for our church today as we strive to be missions-active?
  - Regular serving as a missions-active church means that we do not passively wait to serve the Lord until we find something that satisfies our desires.
    - Let’s pause for a moment because we really need to get this order down: Regular and general serving is the context in the church where we discover our unique and specific serving outside the church. But we often go about “serving the Lord” the opposite way. We are tempted to not serve regularly and generally in the church, until we know the unique and specific work that God wants us to do. And we often think that our calling is somewhere out there in the world that we need to find. But scripture teaches us that an important part of our calling is to the church that God places us in and to the church that we commit to.
    - Back in Ann Arbor I used to serve on the Worship Team. I was just starting out so before even stepping foot on stage, I was responsible for duct-taping the music cables down to the floor around the room. So that people won’t be tripping and falling over them. I understood the purpose but it still felt like such an inferior task—I literally needed to get on my hands and knees around the room to put tape on the cables. And I know God spoke through my leader back then when he said to me, “Even though you’re just taping down cables, remember that

you are taping cables for the Lord. You are preparing this place to be a holy sanctuary where God meets with his people.” I remember feeling so rebuked because it was so true. I thought too highly of myself thinking I was too good to be doing such a common task anyone else could do.

- Of course, this doesn't mean we should avoid using our unique giftings and talents that God has given to us to serve. But we have to understand that God trains our hearts in Christ-like humility so that we can best serve God in our special abilities. Our pride comes before our fall, especially in areas we know we are good at.
- All the more, let's look to Jesus Christ. How much has Christ served us? And how humbly Christ has served us! That he would put aside his heavenly throne to come and die for selfish, undeserving sinners like me and you. And how thankful we are that our humble King was not passive to serve us on the cross, but willingly bore our sin and our shame as a crown of thorns upon his head!
- So will you choose to serve God by faith in Christ, in this church, in any way possible, with this kind of heart? Even if that exact role or serving does not highlight your skills? Will you choose to cover whatever needs that our church has knowing that God is making us to be servants like our humble King, Jesus Christ? Let's strive to be servants who will gladly sacrifice our personal desires in order to serve God's desires. And God will use such servants for a variety of work He will call us to do in His Kingdom. We see this in the next point, where...
- Regular seeking as a missions-active church means that we passionately seek the Lord's will, fully surrendered to His desires.
  - If you're like me, I'm not a fan of fasting. What God produces in me through fasting is great. But the actual practice of fasting is not enjoyable. So as I'm studying this passage, I've been questioning: Why is this church fasting at this time? The church was developing new leaders. They were growing in God's Word. They were faithfully preaching the gospel and experiencing God's power through their diversity in the church. They were worshiping and serving God. They were obeying Jesus' command to be his witnesses in Antioch. Which by comparison to Jerusalem seems like the end of the earth (1:8). So everything looks as it should be. What's the point of fasting during this fruitful time of ministry?
  - Well, ironically, they're fasting because they are hungry. Think about this: They are still hungry for God and the things of God. And even though they're stomachs are empty, their hearts are full as they feast on the love and grace of Jesus Christ. And as they were passionately seeking His will, they were learning to be surrendered to whatever God would ask of them. At this point in time, no one knew exactly what this special work of God was going to be. But it was ok, because God had their hearts.
  - By reading the rest of Acts 13-14, we know God wanted the church to be in a posture of surrender for the work of reaching the nations even further out than where they were. They needed to be surrendered because God was calling the church to give up two/fifths of their gifted leaders. But they were willing. And God was calling Barnabas and Saul to surrender their comforts, leaving their spiritual family who they have been investing in. They would also have to face persecution and suffer for Jesus' name. But in this, they too were willing.
  - From my personal experience, it has always been in this posture of surrender when I sense the Holy Spirit speaking to me. It's not an audible voice, but an inner conviction checks off with God's Word and also with God's people. Especially in the key turning points in my life, God put me in this posture of surrender to be able to hear His instructions for me and then to step out in faith. Like when I received God's call to come here to Indonesia 12 years ago. I didn't know what to expect but I just had two certainties that I was holding onto: One was that I was saved from my sins by the grace of God. And, two, that I would do anything God would ask of me because I trusted Him with my life. I didn't have any other details worked out--I knew nothing about Indonesia, nothing about cross-cultural ministry, nothing about missions work. But God didn't want me to get lost in those details. He wanted my heart and all that mattered was that I would be willing to give up all of myself to Him.
  - I find myself in this posture again as our family and two other team members, we are preparing to be set apart for the work of going to an unreached people group. I have a much better idea now than 12 years ago on how we should approach God's mission but I still don't

have all the details. But what is the clearest for me is what we have to surrender: like, giving up the comforts of living here in Tangerang. And that our going will take away one-third of the pastoral leadership. And I still worry what life will be like in a new city, with two young girls. With my language skills not in the best shape and as foreigners to this people group. But I am encouraged as I have been studying this passage, that God desires my heart. My passionately seeking and surrendered heart. This heart is what the Lord desires from each and every single one of us here who say, "I follow Jesus." So, by faith in Christ, may we commit as a missions-active church to be seeking God's will and surrendering to his desires.

- This last point will clarify how we are making this commitment together. So, a missions-active church is marked by diversity, worship, and finally, partnership...

### III. Partnership that stirs on fellow missions-active living (v.3)

#### Acts 13:3 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

- In v.3, we need to take note of how they sent off Barnabas and Saul to this specific work that God had called them to do.
  - We notice that this church can't get enough of fasting. After hearing from the Holy Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul, the church decides to fast and pray some more. But now, it's the kind of fasting and praying to demand of God, "God, are You sure about this?" And to ask themselves, "Are we sure about doing this?" All the more fasting and prayer is not just to get answers from God.
    - By fasting and praying, the Antioch church is sending off Barnabas and Saul with complete dependence on God. Because the church's mission is God's mission. God is so committed to His mission to bring people from every nation, people, tribe and tongue that He has been faithfully working through all of history to make it happen. No matter how His people disobey and disregard God's mission, He presses on to save people for His pleasure and His glory. God's mission required Him sending His Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for all of our sins, so that whoever would believe in Jesus, that person would receive eternal life. And as much as Barnabas and Saul needed to depend on God as they went out into the harvest of lost souls, the sending church needed to depend on God with them.
  - We also see that the church laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul. This was a symbol of their commitment to them. It was a way of saying, "Barnabas and Saul, we are with you every step of the way." So, by placing their hands on them, the Antioch church was sending them off with their full support.
    - Back in Acts 11, Barnabas and Saul had invested at least a year, committing to this young church in Antioch: They served this church. They taught God's Word. They shepherded and guided them to remain faithful to Jesus (11:23, 26). And now, it's crystal clear that this commitment is mutual.
    - Later in the end of Acts 14, we get a bigger glimpse of their relationship. Because after all that Barnabas and Saul did out there in the harvest field, they returned to Antioch to report "all that God had done with them and how the door of faith was truly open to all the nations" (14:26-27). And we see the continued relationship in the rest of Acts. Because from this point on, the church at Antioch would be the origin for more missionary journeys as well as the homebase where they would return from those journeys (15:36-40, 18:22-23).
- So, what does this sending off gospel workers with complete dependence and full support mean for our church today as we strive to be missions-active? It simply means gospel partnership. It means being gospel friends on gospel mission.
  - We understand that not everyone in the Antioch church was called this specific work to be sent off. It was only Barnabas and Saul who would be travelling from city to city, preaching the gospel in the public spaces and making disciples out there. But it was still a partnership because the rest of the church will also be going somewhere.
    - After this worship gathering, after the serving and seeking, fasting and praying, what is the

rest of the church going to do? They're gonna go home to their families. They'll go to their communities and their corner of the city. Then they'll go to their workplaces. And then go to the recreational areas. And until the entire city is reached with the gospel, the sending church has much work to be done "here" as there needs to be work done out "there."

- This is exactly what it means for our church to be "missions-active." It means, "Every member being an active witness of Christ and an active participant in the work of missions, each directly involved in "sending and going, there and here."
  - "There" "at the ends of the earth" is usually where we often think of missions work.
  - And yes, a missions-active church is committed to sending gospel workers out there to make disciples of all nations. We send them by supporting them financially and in prayer. And we send them to go to strategic places where they can effectively reach an unreached people group with the gospel.
  - And while all that is happening out there, this is only half of what a missions-active church does. We need to remember that Christ calls us to make disciples of all nations not only "there" at "the end of the earth" but also in our "Jerusalem," where we are right "here" (Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8). This is the other half of missions work of a missions-active church.
  - Here, we also make disciples of all nations. And as we disciple one another on God's mission. And as we encourage one another to utilize the power of the Holy Spirit we have to be Christ's witnesses, we mobilize one another on God's mission. And we send one another, right here in our city, in Tangerang and Jakarta, and the rest of the metropolitan area where we work and play.
  - So, by sending out the BDH team to go make disciples out "there", our partnership in the gospel will remind us to faithfully make disciples right "here" in our city. And as our church faithfully makes disciples "here," we hope that our faithfulness will encourage those we have sent out "there." This is the dynamics of the gospel partnership that we see throughout the rest of the NT scripture. Between a missions-active church and those sent out on God's mission.
- Church, not all of us are going to the same place once we dismiss today's Sunday Celebration. But I pray that each one of us goes somewhere that we would go in this missions-active mindset as faithful and obedient disciples of Jesus Christ!
  - So how do we do this?

### *Life Application:*

- Connect with a member in our church you might not naturally connect with.
  - Let's live out this Christ-like value of transculturalism. Brothers, share with a brother who seems different than you. Sisters, connect with a sister who might not enjoy the things you do.
- Serve a need that you see in our church that might be outside your skillset.
  - As you realize how much Christ has humbled himself to serve you, I hope that in response, as your worship to God, you can humbly serve and fill a need you see in our church.
- Fast and pray with others to discern how you can participate in God's mission.
  - I believe God has been speaking to many of us how we can be missions-active. Not only do I encourage you to share with others in your LG and with the pastors, but I also encourage you to invite others to fast and pray with you. And may we be a church that loves one another more than we love our stomachs being full even though fasting is so hard. But let's seek God's will and learn what it means to surrender our lives for Him together.
- Speak to someone about God, or speak to God about that person.
  - If you can speak Indonesian and English, you can pretty much talk to anyone in Indonesia about Jesus. So let's start, or continue, having spiritual conversations with others, here in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, with family and friends who have yet to believe in Jesus Christ. With anyone, anywhere, anytime.
  - And if we're feeling nervous, or that person doesn't seem open yet, let's speak to God about that person. Asking God for opportunities, for boldness, wisdom and love. And try again to speak to him/her about God.

Closing comments:

HMCC, we have come a long way since our churches were planted in TGR and JKT. Especially, in these past few years, I have been so encouraged to see our churches grow and get healthier. And though I won't be that far away, I do really want to stay right here with you to witness all that God will do in and through our churches to reach our cities with the gospel. But together, as gospel friends on gospel mission, just like how we saw in the book of Acts, I believe we are about to embark on a key moment in God's mission in Indonesia. And we have many places to go and a lot of work to do. So again...

The One Thing:

*Strive together to be a missions-active church  
who carries out God's work to the ends of the earth!*

God bless you as you go back to your live gathering and close out in prayer and worship together.