

# The Spirit-Filled, Missionary Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn to our Bibles now and to the book of Acts, and we're in chapter 13. You'll find on page 921, 921 if you're using one of the visitor Bibles.

So we're looking here at the start of the mission to the Gentile world as the church in Antioch sends out Paul and Barnabas. So we're going to pick up the story at the very end of chapter 12. The church in Antioch have sent Paul and Barnabas back to the Jerusalem church bringing gifts. The church in Jerusalem was in need. And so end of chapter 12, verse 25, and Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manin, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. 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. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews, and they had John to assist them. 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.

He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elimas, the magician, for that is the meaning of the name, opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and 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? And 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. Then the proconsul believed. When he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Amen. May the Lord bless to us his words this evening.

Good. Well, please do turn back to Acts chapter 13. And as you're turning, let me pray.

Grant us grace, almighty Lord, to understand your holy word. With meekness, all its truth receive, and by its light forever live. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 4 : 04 ] Now, if you were to ask the person sat next to you this evening, what is the mission of the church? What is our core task as Christ's church today? What might they say? What would you say to that question? What is the key task of the church? What is our mission? And there is lots of confusion.

There is often lack of clarity, lots of good intentions, but we must be clear, mustn't we, on the key core task of the church, the task of mission. And we see in our passage this evening, what are the marks of the truly spirit-filled missionary church, a church that is engaged truly in Christ's mission to the ends of the earth. We pick up the story here in Luke's accounts, in his account of the continued works of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. And we are here at a major juncture in the narrative. We've seen as we've worked through the book of Acts over recent months, the program of the whole book is contained in the very first chapter, chapter 1, verse 8, where what we see is essentially the contents page for the whole book. The Lord Jesus speaking to his disciples there prior to his ascension. And here is what the Lord Jesus says to his disciples.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Orjadir and to the end of the earth. And that is the pattern of the book of Acts.

That is the contents page for what is about to unfold. And beginning in Jerusalem, the word of God is preached, it multiplies, and it goes out and out, breaking out into Samaria and beyond, and it begins to go into Gentile territory. And it is thrilling reading as you read through, because we see the gospel, despite opposition from outside and from within, we see the gospel grow and grow and grow as many people repent and believe the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And nothing is able to stop it. Not even, as we saw some weeks ago in chapter 12, not even the authorities, not even Herod himself could stop the progress of the gospel. The word of God triumphs.

[ 6 : 41 ] And at the end of chapter 12, we came to the conclusion of a major section of gospel advance. Just look at verse 24 there of chapter 12.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. That's one of Luke's markers. It's Luke's way of saying we've reached the end of a major section and we're about to enter a new one. And so here we are at the start of a new section that runs through to chapter 16 and verse 5. If you flick on a couple of pages, you'll see that the marker is there in chapter 16, verse 5.

It says, so the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily. It's another one of Luke's little markers marking the great growth of the gospel.

And so these chapters that we're in now, end of chapter 12 through the start of chapter 16, they record for us what we would now commonly call Paul's first missionary journey. The apostle Paul ventures out into uncharted Gentile territory. And this little section we're reading tonight, it really does set the tone for all that is to follow in the rest of the book. One writer describes our passage as providing something of a cameo of much that will occur later in the story.

It sets the scene. It establishes the pattern of how it is the gospel is going to go to the end of the earth. And so we'll look at this passage in three sections and we'll note three marks of a truly missionary church.

[ 8 : 24 ] And it's vital to see, let's not miss this, that it is the Lord who is behind this. He is the one driving this forward, directing his church. He is the one who enables his church to do his work.

At each stage in this passage, it is the Holy Spirit himself who is directing and enabling his church. So look there, chapter 13, verse 2, the Holy Spirit said, and again look at verse 4, being sent out by the Spirit. And then again verse 9, Paul filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is the Lord at work. It is his gospel, his church, and he is the one. Luke is making very plain for us, isn't he? He's making this very clear point. He is the one who is pushing the gospel to the ends of the earth.

It is the Lord himself, through his Spirit, pushing his church out, enabling them and equipping them. So let's look then at this passage. We see three marks of a Spirit-led, a Spirit-directed, a Spirit-filled church.

So let's look first then at verses 1 to 3, where we see sending gospel workers as led by the Spirit. The first mark of a truly Spirit-filled missionary church is a church that is sending gospel workers as led by the Spirit.

[ 9 : 53 ] So Barnabas and Paul, they have returned, end of chapter 12, they've returned from Jerusalem, and they are back with the church in Antioch. And it's a church, as we've seen back in chapter 11, it is a growing gospel church, a church that is marked by engagement in mission, its edification in the Word, and its eagerness to love fellow believers.

This church is really crystal clear on its priorities. And in these little verses here, we see that they are willing to send their very best. They're willing to send Paul and Barnabas on the first mission trip out into the Gentile world.

Now, why is that? Why are they so willing to send Paul and Barnabas away? I imagine I would have felt greatly tempted to keep them right there in Antioch.

What an asset it would be for the church to have Paul staying there, don't you think? But they don't do that. Why not? Why don't they do that? Well, look at what this church is clear on.

The first thing we're told is that this is a church centered around the Word. Look at verse 1. Now, there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers.

[ 11 : 20 ] What were they teaching? Well, we're not told specifically here, but just look back to chapter 11 and verse 23, where we see what it was that Barnabas had previously done when in Antioch.

So look at there, he says, When he came, when Barnabas came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

So when Barnabas is taught in the church before, he's been teaching them to remain faithful to the Lord, instructing them in the Word. And it wasn't just Paul and Barnabas.

There was a whole team of teachers, including Simeon, Lucius, and Manin. And this was a real mix of folk from all sorts of places and backgrounds. This was a truly diverse ministry team.

Paul, we know, was of Jewish background. Barnabas, he'd been there from the early days of the church. Simeon was from Africa, most likely. Lucius from North Africa, and Manin.

[ 12 : 27 ] Well, he was a high-level civil servant. He was in the court of Herod, the Tetrarch. Real mix of folk there in Antioch teaching the Word, instructing the church. All focused on the task of teaching the Word of God to the church in Antioch.

And as a result of this teaching of the Word, it is a church focused on worshipping and praying. That's what we see there in verses 2 and 3.

They fasted in order to pray. In other words, they made the necessary sacrifices to enable the corporate prayer life of the church. That was their focus, their priority.

And it is in this context that the Lord himself, through the Holy Spirit, speaks to the leaders of the church there in Antioch, in order to advance the gospel, to push the gospel out.

Now, we're not told the exact content of their prayers, but it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume, given that Paul had already been told by the Lord that his great task would be to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

[ 13 : 38 ] He was God's chosen instrument to take the gospel to the Gentiles. You can read that in Acts chapter 9. It wouldn't be unreasonable to assume that the church in Antioch was praying about this mission to the Gentiles that Paul had been called to.

Perhaps they were seeking their way forward as to how Paul was going to go forward in this great task that the Lord had given him. And it is as the Lord is praying, that the Lord speaks, verse 2.

And he says, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Now is the time, says the Lord.

And verse 3. The church laid their hands on them and sent them off. The Lord, by his spirit, leads his church to send people out to advance the gospel.

David Cook makes a very helpful observation in his commentary on this part of Acts. He observes that this word from the Holy Spirit is one of 22 instances in the book of Acts where we have a direct voice from God.

[ 14 : 55 ] 22 times. And in the vast majority of those, the Lord's words that he speaks are words that remind the church to press out with the gospel beyond the fringe, to break new ground, to go forward with a message from the Lord.

So almost every time the Lord speaks, it's to send his church on, to press them out, to go forward with the gospel. And that is what the Spirit does.

That is the fruit of the work of the Spirit in the life of the church, going forward with the gospel. A truly missionary church is one which sends out people in order to advance the gospel.

It's just as Jesus said back in chapter 1. You will be what? You will be my witnesses to the end of the earth. And here is the Spirit of Jesus speaking to his church, urging them on, directing them to keep on with that great aim of witnessing to the gospel.

And so the evidence of the Spirit at work in the church is not warm, fuzzy feelings or repetitive worship songs. No.

[ 16 : 14 ] It's this, Acts chapter 13. It is the best gospel communicators being sent out. Barnabas, he had been part of the church from the very earliest days.

A hugely valuable member of the team. He's been sent out. And so those who we as a church send out to other places, they must be able in terms of witnessing to the truth, wasn't they?

They must be doing that here first and recognized by the church here as it was there. We must recognize them here and then send them out.

Those who are fit for that, fit for that task, excuse me. And we must be willing to send out the very best. No easy thing, was it, for the church there in Antioch to send out Paul and Barnabas, two of their best men.

Off they went. And that is the mark of a Spirit-filled missionary church then and today. It is a church willing to send out gospel workers to do the work of the gospel.

[ 17 : 22 ] And we'll see in a moment exactly what that work entails. But for us, the Tron church today, if we are to be such a church, then we must remain fixed on being truly Spirit-led, committed to the teaching of the word, dedicated to prayer, and willing to make sacrifices, willing to send the very best, those who have demonstrated in our midst clear gospel convictions and clear gospel abilities.

Well, let's look on then to the nature of the work that Paul and Barnabas get down to as they are sent out. Two things that we see as the church is powerfully equipped by the Spirit for mission.

And they go and they speak the gospel and they safeguard the gospel. Those are the two tasks, speaking the gospel and safeguarding the gospel.

And these two priorities, these two tasks, they are going to shape the rest of Paul's ministry, the rest of the book of Acts, as they continue to be the, and they continue to be the key tasks for the church today.

That work of taking the gospel to the world around us. So we'll look at these two key things. Firstly, in verses 4 and 5, the second mark of a truly mission-focused church, speaking the gospel word as directed by the Spirit.

[ 18 : 57 ] Speaking the gospel word. So Paul and Barnabas, they've been set aside and verse 4, they are sent out on their journey. And they're sent by who?

The Holy Spirit. Again, it's the Lord who's directing. He's the one leading and sending out the gospel. And they set out and they head down to the coast and they go to Cyprus.

And that was the first logical step in many ways. It was Barnabas' homeland. He would have known it very well. And there was a good staging post from which to sail onwards as they seek to reach out to the world.

God. And when they arrive, they get down to the task. Look at verse 5. They arrive and they proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

And this is what Paul does in every place he goes. He proclaims the word of God, the news about the fulfillment of the scriptures in the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who died and rose again, who ascended to the right hand of the Father, who will one day return in judgment.

[ 20 : 07 ] The one to whom all people in all places must one day account to. The person they must believe in and repent. Now it was Paul's pattern to preach first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

This is what he does. He goes to the synagogue if there is one and he will start there. If you look on down to the end of chapter 13 you will see why he does this.

Verse 45 When the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what was spoken by Paul reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly saying it was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you that is to the Jews.

Since you thrust aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life behold we are turning to the Gentiles for so the Lord has commanded us saying I have made you a light to the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

You see it was always the role of God's people Israel to be a light to the nations to the Gentiles. And so Paul goes first to the Jews seeking to equip them to be the people of God to be that light to the nations.

[ 21 : 33 ] And so he proclaims to them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ so that they can believe it and then proclaim it. And if the Jews reject it well he turns to the Gentiles.

He spells that out in his letter to the Romans chapter 1. He says for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and then also to the Greek.

That is Paul's task his pattern and together with Barnabas they dedicate themselves to that task there on Cyprus. They go through the whole island doing the same proclaiming the word of God.

Now we're not given any details until we get to verse 6 until when they arrive at Paphos.

And there in Paphos there is the proconsul Sergius Paulus and he summons Paul and Barnabas because look at verse 7 he's eager to hear the word of God.

[ 22 : 40 ] So clearly Paul and Barnabas have been so single minded in their work such that the proconsul the senior civil servant of the Roman Empire there in Cyprus a Gentile he's heard about their work and he's eager himself to hear the word of God.

That was their task. That is the work of mission speaking the gospel word. And if you're not fundamentally doing that then you're not a missionary church.

of course there will be lots of other things that a missionary church needs to have in place. But if the big goal of speaking the gospel word is absent then it isn't mission.

Now that's not to say that that is the only thing a church does. Mission isn't everything that God is doing in this world. But for the church with its limited resources its limits on time it must be crystal clear on its core task.

We will not be effective in our mission if everything is mission. So we must be clear on what mission is and what it isn't. We must be clear on who we send out and what we send them to do.

[ 24 : 07 ] And we must if it's to count his mission we must send folk who have as their core task speaking the word of God. That is what Paul and Barnabas do here.

That is what we're told. They go through the whole island doing what? Proclaiming the word of God. That is what Sergius Paulus hears them doing.

Word is spread. This is what this is about. And that must be mustn't it? One of the key marks of a truly missionary minded church.

So that's the first of the two things we see speaking the gospel word. And the second in verse 6 to the end we see the second of those two things safeguarding the gospel witness strengthened by the spirit.

Safeguarding the gospel. So the real focus in this little episode it really is on the events there in Paphos. the whole island of Cyprus gets a verse and a half but Paphos that one place gets the rest of the section.

[ 25 : 16 ] And the real focus here is on two men in particular and we see two contrasting responses to the word of God spoken by Barnabas and Paul. Determined opposition on the one hand from an apostate Jew and believing acceptance from a senior Gentile politician.

And Luke draws our attention immediately doesn't he? To the opposition from Bar Jesus the Jewish magician. In particular it's Paul's response to that opposition and it's a response that safeguards the gospel.

Paul is clear on his task isn't he? Yes it is about speaking the gospel but that also involves safeguarding that same gospel.

there can be no fudging it no accommodation of untruth which is why he takes the steps that he does here with Bar Jesus. So let's look at this encounter more closely look at verse 6 we're told that this man was a magician a Jewish false prophet and he's managed to worm his way into the office of the proconsul he was right there with Sergius Paulus and he was at least for a time the state sponsored approved religious guru speaking all sorts of who knows what mumbo jumbo that must have sounded pretty compelling and in keeping with the politically correct dogmas of the day certainly it was nothing to do with the Christian gospel he was a false prophet but he had the ear of the powerful but just how quickly the tables are turned he perhaps felt his position threatened when

Barnabas and Saul walked into town and the proconsul's curiosity was certainly piqued we're told that he was an intelligent man inquiring thinking he's eager to hear Barnabas and Paul perhaps bar Jesus doesn't want to lose his position his influence so he opposed them we're told that in verse 8 seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith now what would Paul do would he just shrug his shoulders move on what sort of impression would that leave the proconsul with certainly he'd be no clear on the gospel would he no Paul doesn't do that he takes this magician this false prophet head on and filled with the Holy Spirit verse 9 he looked intently at him and he said come come I think this has all been an unfortunate misunderstanding all religions are fundamentally the same after all let's establish a multi-faith group here in

[ 28 : 10 ] Paphos we can talk general niceties and talk about nothing of any real substance come now bar Jesus don't get so upset I think that's what many Christians in the West today would expect Paul to say but that's not what he says is it look at verse 10 you son of the devil you enemy of righteousness full of deceit villainy will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord steady on now Paul that's really not terribly nice is it let's be more reasonable what would Jesus do well here's an example from an encounter between Jesus and a group of Jews you can read it in John chapter 8 here's what gentle Jesus meek and mild said if God were your father you would love me for I came from God and I am here I came not of my own accord but he sent me why do you not understand what

I say it is because you cannot bear to hear my word you are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires well it seems to me that Paul is absolutely of one mind with the Lord Jesus Christ don't you he is absolutely right to speak as he does to bar Jesus because to oppose the gospel as he does is to do the work of Satan himself and Paul strengthened by the spirit speaks as he does in order to guard the gospel to safeguard it the salvation of many is at stake certainly the salvation of one man in particular was at stake the proconsul if Paul doesn't take on bar Jesus the proconsul is in the dark isn't he a failure to stand for the true gospel here will mean others falling for a false gospel down the line if

Paul destructors and walks off then the proconsul is going to listen to bar Jesus isn't he Paul had to expose the anti-gospel work of bar Jesus and to demonstrate the unique power of the only true gospel bar Jesus is temporarily blinded at the end of our passage verse 11 he's blinded he's got to stumble around asking others to help him find the way it's a very vivid physical picture of his spiritual reality he is totally lost foolishly opposing the gospel he's the one in darkness and we don't know what happens to him in the end but we do know what happens to the proconsul look at verse 12 then the proconsul believed when he saw what had occurred for he was astonished at the teaching of the

Lord now that is a surprising sentence we expect him to be astonished at the blinding of Jesus wouldn't you be if you saw someone suddenly blinded right in front of your eyes but that isn't it is it he sees all that happens yes but what astonished him what leads to belief was the teaching of the Lord that is where the real power of the Holy Spirit is at work it is in the preaching of the word of God the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is where the power is that is what turns this man this intelligent powerful man that is what turns the light on it wasn't the impressive sign it was the preaching of the word the teaching of the Lord that's where the power is and because that is so you and I we as a church we must be totally dedicated to the speaking of the truth of the gospel and the safeguarding of that gospel the gospel we proclaim must be the true gospel not a false one and that is why

Paul does what he does here and so that may mean that may require church leaders having unpleasant conversations like the one Paul has here with Bar Jesus no one relishes that sort of thing but from time to time in order to safeguard the gospel it is necessary churches will from time to time have to take a very difficult painful stance in order to safeguard the gospel but don't miss this what great encouragement there is it is the power of the gospel that is what brings salvation to people an impressive intelligent powerful man came to faith through hearing the word of God sergius paulus the pro consul and that is what will bring salvation to those that you've been praying for it is through the teaching of the

[ 33 : 46 ] Lord the proclamation of the word that is where the power lies that is where God will be at work opening blind eyes bringing people from death to life so bring your friends along to church that is where the teaching of the Lord is that is where they will hear the gospel week by week open open up with them the bible use the word one to one walk through john's gospel together see the teaching of the lord at work in front of your eyes God means the way the way he brings people to life the way in which he opens blind eyes and brings people from death to everlasting life is the proclamation of the gospel it's only through the proclamation of the gospel that people are saved so that means as we think about mission and what we do as a church it means that eco mission whatever that is isn't going to save people from eternal damnation it may be a good thing to do to look after our world to be good stewards it's a good thing to do but on its own without the gospel it can't save people social justice mission is not going to save people from eternal damnation it may be a good thing to do but on its own without the proclamation of the gospel it cannot save people. There are many good things that we can do, but there is only one thing the church must do, and it's advancing the gospel. As Kevin DeYoung puts it in his excellent book, *The Mission of the Church*, if you're looking for a picture of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for societal renewal, and strategies to serve the community in Jesus' name, you won't find them in the book of Acts. But what we do find is preaching and teaching and the centrality of the word. It's all over the book. That is what we see in the book of Acts. Now don't mishear me.

Some of the things I've mentioned are good things. Indeed, they ought to be, wouldn't they, they ought to be the fruit of the mission as lives are transformed. That should be what you see. But they can't be confused with the mission of the church. They can't be confused with the one thing the church, with its finite budgets, its finite people, don't confuse all that with the one thing it must do, the one thing it must push forward, the one thing it must dedicate itself to, speaking the truth and safeguarding the truth. Willie Still said this, although in itself a good thing, a little temporary alleviation of the conditions of man on earth is as nothing compared with the task of building a house of God, of human living stones, and a kingdom of redeemed humanity come to Christian maturity. Those things are good.

But there is nothing compared to building an eternal kingdom of God's people. And the only thing that can do that is the word of God. Only through the news about the Lord Jesus Christ are people saved. That is the focus of mission. It was for the church here in Antioch, sending out Paul and Barnabas, and it remains so for us today.

And this is what God, by his spirit, equips and enables his church to do. And so you and I, as well as speak the gospel, we must safeguard it.

And as we do that, we will have the great privilege of seeing men like Sergius Paulus, friends of ours, come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our task for the city, and through those we support in partnership to the end of the earth, to Pakistan, to India, to all those places where we have gospel partners. That is the task of a truly spirit-filled missionary church. Let's pray, and then we'll sing.

[ 38 : 44 ] Our Father God, we thank you for the clarity of your words, for the clarity of the task you've called us to.

And Lord, we do realize our own frailties, our own weaknesses, our own limits. And so we thank you that the great Paul, the great apostle, he didn't do these things on his own. He was sent out, he was equipped, he was enabled by your spirit, the very same spirit that indwells each one of us who knows and loves you.

So please, would you encourage us and help us to go in the strength of your spirit to the ends of the earth.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.