

The Spirit-Filled, Missionary Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 June 2019

Preacher: Paul Brennan

- [0 : 0 0] Well, a warm welcome to you to our afternoon service here at the Tron. You're very welcome indeed. It's great to have you with us. Let me begin with a word of prayer, and then we'll turn to God's Word in just a moment.
- Let's pray, shall we? Our Father God, we do thank you so much for the opportunity to gather here this lunchtime, to sit together under your Word and to listen to what you have to say to submit ourselves, that we might obey your command.
- So please help us now. Would your Spirit help me as I preach, as all of us together listen? Would you help us to go from this place with not just our minds interested, but our wills stir to obedience?
- So please help us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Good. Well, please turn with me to Acts chapter 13. Acts chapter 13.
- And as you're doing that, you can turn your phones off, please. Acts chapter 13. And we're looking at the first few verses there. Page 921, if you're using one of the blue Vista Bibles there.
- [1 : 2 0] Acts chapter 921. I'm just going to start at the very end of chapter 12. So I'm going to start in chapter 12, verse 25. And we'll read the start of chapter 13.
- So this is Barnabas and Saul. This is the beginning of their first missionary journey, as they're sent out from the church in Antioch. And back in chapter 11, Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church in Antioch to bring a gift to the church in Jerusalem.
- And here at the end of chapter 12, they return from that journey. So that's where you pick up the story. So 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 member of the court 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've called them. Then after fasting and praying, they laid hands on them and sent them off.
- [2 : 4 5] So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Cilicia. And from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.
- And they had John to assist them. When they'd 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 Elemas, the magician, for that is the meaning of his 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 powers of the Lord?

And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind, 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.

[4 : 13] Then the proconsul believed. When he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to us this afternoon. Now, if you were to ask the person sat next to you this lunchtime, what is the mission of the church?

What is the core task of the church today? What do you think they would say? What would you say to that question? What is the mission of the church?

There is, I think, a real lack of clarity quite often when it comes to that question. A lot of confusion. When it comes to thinking about the mission of the church. And that is why we need God's word, isn't it?

We need God's word to bring clarity where there's confusion. And that is Luke's whole purpose in writing his accounts. He wrote his gospel and the book of Acts in order to bring clarity and certainty.

[5 : 22] And here in this passage at this lunchtime, we are shown the marks of a truly spirit-filled missionary church. It's a church that is engaged with mission to the ends of the earth just as Christ instructed them back in chapter 1 of Acts.

Luke means for us to be clear and confident with regard to that question. What is the mission of the church? And it's vital to note, let's not miss this as we look at this passage, that it's the Lord who is behind everything that happens here.

It is the Lord who is the one driving and directing his church. At each stage in the passage, it's the Holy Spirit himself who is directing and enabling.

Just look down there. Look at verse 2. Who's the one leading on? It's the Holy Spirit, verse 2. And then again, verse 4. Paul and Barnabas being sent out by the Spirit.

And then again, verse 9. Paul fills with the Holy Spirit. This is the Lord's work. His gospel. His church. And he is the one.

[6 : 29] Luke is very clear. He's at pains to make us see this. He is the one who is pushing the gospel to the ends of the earth. He's the one equipping and directing his church. So let's look then at three marks of the Spirit-led, the Spirit-directed, the Spirit-filled church.

So firstly, verses 1 to 3, and more briefly, a mission church is a sending church. It's a church sending gospel workers as led by the Spirit.

And look there, verse 1. This has a result of teaching of the Word. That's very clearly what's going on there in the church. Prophets and teachers.

We get the list of those who are there teaching. It's quite a diverse bunch. But what does that teaching lead to? Well, it's a church focused on worshipping the Lord 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 in order to focus on the corporate prayer life of the church. And it's in that context that the Lord himself, by the Holy Spirit, speaks to the leaders of the church in order to advance the gospel.

[7 : 45] Now, we're not told the exact content of their prayers, are we? 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.

He was God's chosen instrument to take the gospel before the Gentiles. You can read that in Acts chapter 9. It wouldn't be unreasonable to assume, would it, that the church, knowing that, were there praying about this mission to the Gentiles.

Perhaps they were seeking the way forward from the Lord as to how Paul was to go about that task. But it's there as the church 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, they already know what that work is. Paul's been told is to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. But now is the time, says the Lord. And so, verse 3, the church, they lay their hands on them and they send them off.

The Lord, by his Spirit, leads his church to send people out to advance the gospel. The Lord speaks directly, like this, in the book of Acts, just over 20 times.

[9 : 06] And in almost every instance, that speech is directing his church to press out with the gospel, to take the gospel on to the next place, to go beyond the fringe.

Every time the Lord speaks, it's for that aim, to go out, to bring the gospel beyond the fringe. So the Lord sends his people, his church, out to advance the gospel.

But what does that involve? What are the non-negotiable aspects of that work that Paul has called to? Well, two things that we see in the next section. Two things that the church is powerfully equipped by the Spirit to do.

And the two aspects of mission that we see here are speaking the gospel and safeguarding the gospel. Those are the two priorities, the two tasks that are going to shape the rest of Paul's ministry, the rest of the book of Acts, as they continue to be and they continue to be the tasks for the church today.

That work of bringing the gospel to the nations. Two things, speaking and safeguarding. So let's look at the first of those in verses 4 and 5. The second of our three marks of a truly mission-minded church, first it sends, secondly, it speaks the gospel word as directed by the Spirit.

[10 : 27] So look there, verse 4, they are sent out on their journey and they're sent by the Holy Spirit. Again, it's the Lord who's directing and leading. And so they set off, they head down to the coast and they set sail for Cyprus.

And when they arrive, we're told what they do there in verse 5. They go about proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. Now that is what Paul does in every place that 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 God the Father and who will one day return in judgment.

The one to whom all people in all places must believe in and repent. That's Paul's message, that's his gospel. You can read it over and over and over again through the book of Acts.

And it's also Paul's pattern to preach first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. That is what he does here. He goes firstly, where does he go?

[11 : 32] He goes to the synagogues, wherever he finds them on the island of Cyprus. If there's a synagogue, that's where Paul goes. And he does that because it was always the role of God's people, Israel, to be the light to the nations.

And so Paul seeks firstly to equip the people of God, Israel, for that task. 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, Paul turns to the Gentiles, doesn't he? He spells that out in his letters to the Romans, chapter one. He says, for I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek.

And this is Paul's task. And together with Barnabas, they dedicate themselves to that task there on Cyprus. They go about proclaiming the gospel.

They go through the whole island doing the same thing. Now, we're not given any details. That's all we're told until we get to Paphos and the narrative slows right down here, doesn't it, as they get there in verse 6.

[12 : 51] And there in Paphos, there is this man, the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. And he summons Barnabas and Paul because, verse 7, he's eager to hear the word of God.

So clearly, Paul and Barnabas, as they've been going around Cyprus, they've been so single-minded in that task such that the proconsul, the senior civil servant of the Roman Empire there in Cyprus, a Gentile, he's heard about their work.

He's heard about what they've been doing and saying and he wants to hear himself. He's eager to hear the word of God. And this 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'll be a lot 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 isn't to say that that is the only thing a church does.

[14 : 01] Mission isn't everything that God is doing in this world, but for the church, with its limited resources, its limits on time, its limits on people. It must be, mustn't it, crystal clear on its task.

We will not be effective in mission if we deem everything to be mission. It's got to be narrow and focused, just like Paul was here, single-minded in his task.

So we must be clear, mustn't we, 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.

There's no good sending people to do any old thing. It must be the one task, the mission of the church. And we must, if it's to count as mission, we must send people who have, as their core task, speaking the gospel word.

So that's the first of the two things that Paul and Barnabas do as they go around on their mission, speaking the gospel word. Secondly, verses 6 to 12, the second mark is the safeguarding of the gospel witness, strengthened by the Spirit, safeguarding the gospel.

[15 : 14] Now the real focus in this episode on Cyprus is the events in the town of Paphos. And it's two men in particular that are focused on. We see two contrasting responses to the word of God spoken by Barnabas and Paul.

On the one hand, there's determined opposition, from an apostate Jew. But on the other, there is believing acceptance from a Gentile senior politician.

And Luke draws our attention to this opposition from Bar Jesus, which ironically means son of Jesus. He's a Jewish magician.

And Luke draws our attention in particular to Paul's response to that opposition, a response that safeguards the gospel. You see, Paul is really clear on his task, isn't he?

Yes, it is about speaking the truth of the gospel. That also involves safeguarding that same gospel. Speaking it, but also safeguarding it from untruth.

[16 : 17] There can be no fudging it, no accommodation of untruth, which is why Paul does what he does here. It's why he takes these steps with Bar Jesus.

Now we're told that he was a magician, verse 6, a Jewish false prophet, and that he had managed to worm his way into the office of the proconsul.

And it seems that Bar Jesus was, at least for a time, the state-approved religious guru, speaking who knows what in the ear of Sergius Paulus.

No doubt it was whatever was in keeping with the politically correct dogmas of the day. And certainly, it was nothing to do with the Christian gospel, was it? He was a false prophet, but he had the ear of the powerful.

But just how quickly the tables turn here. He perhaps felt his position threatened when Barnabas and Saul walked into town, and the proconsul's curiosity was piqued.

[17 : 21] He wants to hear more. We're told that Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man. He was a thinking man, inquiring. He's eager to hear what Paul and Barnabas have to say. But Bar Jesus doesn't want to lose the position of authority.

He doesn't want to lose his influence, perhaps. But whatever it was, he opposes them strongly, we're told in verse 8, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

What would Paul do? Would he just shrug his shoulders and move on? What sort of impression would that leave the proconsul with? Certainly he had been no clear on the gospel, would he?

If Paul just shrugged his shoulders and moved on. No, Paul doesn't do that. He takes the magician on, doesn't he? Filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked intently at him. And he said, Bar Jesus, come, come Bar Jesus.

I think this has all been a terrible mistake and unfortunate misunderstanding. You see, all religions are fundamentally the same, aren't they? Let's establish a multi-faith group here in the city. We can talk general niceties.

[18 : 29] We can talk about nothing of any real substance. We can just get along. Come now, Bar Jesus. Don't get so upset. Well, I think that's what many Christians in the world today would expect Paul to say.

But that's not what it says, is it? Look at verse 10. What does Paul say to the son of Jesus? You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight powers of the Lord?

Steady on now, Paul. That's really not terribly nice, is it? Let's be a bit more reasonable. What would Jesus do? Well, here's an example from an encounter between Jesus and a group of Jews who are opposing him.

You can read it in John chapter 8. Here is what gentle Jesus meek and mild says. If God were your father, you would love 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 what your father desires.

[19 : 43] Well, it seems to me that Paul is absolutely of one mind with the Lord Jesus Christ, don't you? He's absolutely right to speak as he does to bar Jesus here because to oppose the gospel as bar Jesus does, that is to do the work of Satan.

And Paul, strengthened by the spirit, speaks as he does in order to guard the gospel, in order to safeguard it. The salvation of many people is at stake, isn't it?

A failure to stand for the true gospel here, well, that will mean others failing and falling for a false gospel down the line, won't it? If Paul just allows bar Jesus to go on as he does, confusion will reign.

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.

He has to stumble around looking for help, asking others to show him the way. It's a very vivid picture, isn't it, of his spiritual state. Totally blind, totally confused.

[20 : 59] Bar Jesus is totally lost, isn't he? Foolishly opposing the gospel. Now, we don't know what happens to him, this is all we're told. But what we do know is 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, isn't it?

We expect him to be astonished at the blinding of bar Jesus, but that isn't it, is it? He sees all that happens. But what astonishes him what leads to belief is the teaching of the Lord.

Isn't it? That's what it says. He was astonished at 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. Christ. And because that is so, you and I, we as a church, must be totally dedicated to speaking the truth of the gospel and of safeguarding that same gospel.

[22 : 12] Speaking and safeguarding. The gospel we proclaim must be the true one, not a false one. And so that may require church leaders having unpleasant conversations like the one here with Bar Jesus.

Nobody enjoys that sort of thing. Nobody relishes that sort of confrontation. But sometimes, from time to time, in order to safeguard the gospel, it's necessary. Sometimes churches will have to take a difficult stance.

Nobody enjoys doing that, but it is necessary to safeguard the gospel. So there's some tough realities here, but there's also great encouragement, isn't there? What great encouragement in the power of the gospel that brings salvation to many.

Look at Sergius Paulus. He's a very impressive, intelligent, powerful man. And he comes to faith through hearing the Word of the Lord Jesus. And that is what will bring salvation to those that you've been praying for.

It is the Word of God. So bring them along to church. Bring them along here on a Wednesday where they will hear the gospel week by week. Open up with them the Bible.

[23 : 24] Use the Word one-to-one. We've got the resources outside. Walk through John's gospel together. Because only through the proclamation of the gospel that people are saved.

Isn't that right? There's no other way that people are saved. Many of you in this room wouldn't be here unless it was for the Word of God being proclaimed. That is what changes lives.

That is what brings eternal salvation. And that is the mission of the church. Luke is being clear here for us, isn't he? He's showing us what are the marks of a truly mission-minded church.

Speaking the gospel, safeguarding the gospel. That's the mission of the church. And so that means that things like eco-mission, whatever that might mean, that isn't going to 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, can it? You see, there are many good things that we can do.

[24 : 57] Lots of good things, but there is only one thing that the church must do, and it's advancing the gospel. Nobody else is going to do that. Only the church is going to do that, isn't it? But as Kevin DeYoung put it in his excellent book, *The Mission of the Church*, he said this, 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. And that's right, isn't it? That is what the book of Acts is about.

Now, don't mishear me. Some of those things I've just mentioned, they are good things. And indeed, they ought to be the fruit of mission as lives are transformed.

But they can't be confused with the mission of the church. They can't be confused with the one thing the church must do with its finite budgets, its limits on people, the one thing the church must push forward and support.

Let me redo this from Willie Still. Although in itself a good thing, a little temporary alleviation of the conditions of men on the 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.

[26 : 34] Some of these things are good things, but they are as nothing compared to building the eternal kingdom of God. Only through the proclamation of the gospel 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 so as well as speak the gospel, we are to safeguard it. That is the task of a truly spirit-filled missionary church.

And that's the message of these first paragraphs of Acts chapter 13. Let me pray before we finish. Amen. Father God, we do thank you for the clarity of your word.

We thank you for Luke compiling this narrative for us in order to bring us clarity and certainty about these things. So please would you help us to not only be clear about these things but to be courageous that we would be a church that truly does speak and safeguard the gospel.

[27 : 47] it is the only hope for our world. It's the only hope for our friends who are walking in darkness. So please help us to be your people bringing your gospel to the ends of the earth.

Please help us to that task we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.