

"What Makes an Effective Ministry?"

Acts 13:1-13

As we come to Acts 13, some major shifts have happened in the Jerusalem church. The church that began in Jerusalem had spread throughout the Roman Empire because of persecution led by a zealous rabbi named Saul. However, God miraculously saves Saul and tells him he will suffer much as he takes the gospel to the Gentiles. God opened this ministry to the Gentiles with a vision to the apostle Peter that a Roman Centurion named Cornelius was coming to Peter to hear the gospel. Cornelius is saved and word spreads that the gospel is now reaching Gentiles.

Another major shift occurs in Acts 12 when Herod (same Herod who killed John the Baptist) arrests both Peter and has the apostle James killed. By this Herod was sending a message to the church. A message however that God reverses because at the end of Acts 12 Peter is miraculously released from jail, God strikes Herod down for allowing people to worship him as if he was a god and the *"word of God continued to increase and spread"* (12:24). In spite of the martyrdom of James, the chapter ends with Barnabas and Saul/Paul returning from Jerusalem after delivering a gift for the poor and taking on a new helper named John Mark.

While Jerusalem is still the southern headquarters of the church another shift has taken place. Antioch in Syria has become the northern headquarters of the church. Ch. 13 opens up telling us that the church had five prophets and teachers. These include a Jew from Cyprus named Barnabas, a Jewish black man named Simon (Niger means black), a man from Cyrene named Lucius, a former colleague or adopted son/slave of Herod's named Manaen who got saved and a Jewish rabbi trained under Israel's most famous Rabbi named Gamaliel, Saul of Tarsus. Quite a diverse crew of leaders. So the church has some good leaders who are teaching and discipling the believers and that obviously has to be a crucial element to having an effective ministry:

A Diverse Team of Spirit-Minded Believers **(13:1-3)**

These five men are designated as leaders and obviously leadership is crucial to effective ministry but as we'll see the entire church takes part in the decision to reach out beyond their four walls. Here we are in the context of a worship and fasting gathering of the church. These 5 men are a microcosm of the entire church. Different races, different upbringing [Barnabas was a Levite and Saul a Pharisee, and a family friend of Herod!] all worshipping together. Why? They are

United in Christ (v.1)

Jesus unites us to himself and to each other. He is what brings us together, our common bond as His disciples. Elsewhere Paul describes us as Jesus' body; the hands, feet, legs, etc of the body of Christ. But Jesus is the head. One of Paul's favourite phrases to describe our relationship to Jesus as being "in Christ" [Ephesians especially] where he also tells us we are sealed in Christ by the Spirit. And this is why Paul begins most of his letters with thanks for his fellow members of Christ.

1 Cor. 1:4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— ⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ

to be revealed. ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

And even though Paul has to chastise the believers in Corinth for some selfish issues, he thanks God for their partnership in Christ. And when we are growing together in our relationship with Jesus and each other we will be

Open to the Spirit's leading (v.2)

The Spirit of God somehow makes known God's will (possibly through one of the 5) that Barnabas and Saul should be set apart for the work which God has called them. So they fasted and prayed, laid hands on them [as an affirmation that they were in agreement of God's leading] on them and sent them off – obviously in agreement with how the Spirit was leading.

This meant sending them away. This meant losing good, godly people to go elsewhere to reach others with the gospel. A growing effective ministry doesn't mean we just get more people in our doors, it means we produce more disciples who will serve God and we send them out our doors. And that's a hard thing to do, to say goodbye to friends whom we've worshipped with and grown together with and now they are moving away for work or family or to serve in another ministry. But we do it because we're in Christ and Christ's purpose overrules our desire to have them stay. And we go ourselves or send them away because we both share ...

A burden for the lost (vv.3-4)

If we are "in Christ" and growing in Christ then it is for the glory of Jesus Christ that we send people out so that more will become in Christ. If we share a burden for the lost we will share in the responsibility of going to the lost. Paul and Barnabas are sent 'by the Holy Spirit'. Now we're not told how that happened or if it was a general or specific sending to a specific place. Even if it was to a specific place I think it makes sense. Where do they go?

They were in Antioch, in Syria 300 miles north of Jerusalem. They go Seleucia on the Mediterranean coast and from there sail southwest to the island of Cyprus about 100 miles. Who was from Cyprus? Barnabas (4:36). The Spirit works in people's hearts who already have a burden for their own people (your race/country/origins) or who develop a burden for a people group that they have come to know. Cyprus isn't that far and kind of makes sense to support Barnabas by helping him reach his own people. And as we read Ch. 13 when they share the gospel of Jesus Christ, they get noticed. And it's something we need to be a little more prepared for at times that

An Effective Ministry Will Attract Attention **(13:5-13)**

As Barnabas and Saul arrive in the capital city of Cyprus, Salamis, (about 100,000 people) they start their ministry by attending synagogues. As Jews they would have been welcomed and Paul's rabbinic background and Barnabas' connection to Cyprus paved the way for them being invited to share some teaching from God's Word. That makes sense because they used the Word of God in Jewish worship obviously but they hadn't made the connection that Jesus is the Messiah. We also read that John Mark was also with them. Why Mark? Col. 4:10 may give us a clue:

*My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of **Barnabas**. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)*

Mark joins them for awhile but we read in v.13,

¹³ *From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.*

Before we talk about Mark we may have missed something in v.13. Back in v.4 we read

⁴ *The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus*

But after their Cyprus tour we read “Paul and his companions”, implying they gained some disciples along the way. Here’s something we need to remember. An effective ministry

Will attract attention of Christians wanting to help, some of whom are not mature enough (v.5, 13)

When God is working one of the ways He affirms His hand is in it by raising up more workers; increasing the team. Mark joins, others join. Ministry can be exciting especially if you’re travelling to different places. But Mark maybe wasn’t mature enough yet. Doesn’t mean he misread the Spirit or his heart wasn’t right. Probably was encouraged by Barnabas too come along. There was a desire to be part of God’s work but according to v. 13 Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem, his home. Mark’s presence would have been very helpful because Mark was an eyewitness to events surrounding the crucifixion and probably other eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life. His mother, Mary is the one we read about last week in Ch. 12 whose house the early church was meeting in and most likely is the upper room house. Perhaps, Barnabas was overly enthusiastic about Mark who he thought having an eyewitness to Jesus’ life would have been helpful but perhaps Mark was not quite mature enough to be involved yet. Perhaps this incident with Bar-Jesus the magician threw him. We don’t know. The word in Acts 15:38 for “deserted” has a negative connotation to it, like quit or can even be used to describe the extreme, to apostate. That’s probably not the case here but Mark left Paul and Barnabas short staffed when he departed. And when people quit on you in ministry it hurts, and Paul was hurt. Thankfully, they reconcile later on and Mark returns to help Paul out later in life.

Others obviously stuck with Paul and Barnabas. Their ‘companions’ team grew larger as the need for more help grew. Effective ministry will also draw the attraction

Of enemies to the message of Christ as Lord (vv.6-11)

While ministering on the island they encounter a Jewish sorcerer known as Bar-Jesus but named Elymas. Bar means ‘son of’. Jesus was a popular name in that day but it does seem rather ironic that this demonic influenced advisor to the Roman procurator (same position as Pontius Pilate) is called ‘son of Jesus.’ Paul calls him out for what he is and deals boldly with him charging him with ‘perverting the ways of the Lord’ (v.10). The word means cause to doubt or not believe. So he was deliberately trying to prevent the proconsul from believing the gospel that the real Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and Lord..

We need to expect opposition to gospel ministry especially when we’re making an impact. We need to see past the angry faces and realize they are being deceived by the enemy and that he doesn’t want people saved or to grow in the Lord. Paul discerned exactly what Elymas was doing. Paul struck Elymas’ temporarily blind and that paves the way for Sergius Paulus, who accepts the Lord.

Thankfully through the power of the Holy Spirit, an effective ministry also attracts the attention

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Of unbelievers ready to hear the gospel (vv.7, 12)

Sergius wanted to hear the gospel message and so called for Paul and Barnabas. Once Paul removes the demonic obstruction to the message of God's Word we read in v.12

"12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

The miracle affirmed the truth of Paul's message, much like Jesus' miracles affirmed His message. Sergius came to know the Lord through the message of the Word of God. That's how people are saved.

In v.13 Barnabas, Paul and the others sail from the western side of Cyprus northeast back inland to Perga, southwestern Turkey and we'll continue to see how effective ministry happens next week when we cover vv.14-52.

So if we've learned more about how effective ministry happens, we need to ask ourselves are we making ourselves available to help serve God in the diverse group of believers we belong to? Primarily, our church. Every church is made up of a variety of believers whose common goal is to spiritually grow to become more like Jesus. Our focus needs to be on Jesus. He is who unites us. It is He whose message we want to get out through the great variety of people and gifts God has given to us through you.

Another good question to ask ourselves is, how Spirit-minded are we? To be Spirit-minded would be to be Word-minded intent on glorifying God by making Jesus known. Again the Word of God was not written to inform us but to transform us (2 Tim. 3:15-17). I read or listen to God's Word so I can know how to live for God. How intentional am I/are you on living for God's purpose today? Do we begin our day praying to God asking Him help us desire to be effectively used for God – encouraging each other and working together to be His light to the lost?

We should be praying for each other also to have the mind of the Spirit, fueled by the Word of God, open to the leading of the Spirit to serve others and share the message of Jesus. We should be praying that God's Spirit would show us where and how He would have us serve God right here in our community and around the world. And that's one of the reasons why we're having a ministry brainstorming night on Saturday to see how God is leading us and praying for direction on when and how to serve Him.

Whether you're a Barnabas or Paul type who is willing to go and talk to others boldly about Jesus, or whether your more of a companion or helper whose willing to do what they can to support and encourage the Barnabases and Pauls or maybe you're kind of a Mark whose sitting on the sidelines for now and not involved in God's work at the moment; we need all of us to do God's Spirit-leading work. That's why God saved us in the first place and brought us together. To build His church because we know the gates of hell won't prevail against it. And then we can look back and see the great things God has done. For from Him and through him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever and ever, amen.'

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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