

**Acts 13:1-12**  
**Faith Manhattan June 11, 2023**

1. Introduction

- a. Good morning. It is so good to be back with you all of you here today. I preached about a year ago right after we had returned to the US from Thailand, and at that time we were planning to be more regularly involved here at Faith... well, we're back! Our year has been quite different than we had planned, but now that we are transitioning back here indefinitely, we hope to make those regular connections still happen.
  
- b. This morning I'm excited to have the chance to come together with you to God's word in Acts 13. As we look at the call and commissioning of Barnabas and Saul, it was so encouraging to see us, as a church, commission the team to Bali. We've had two teams from Faith come to serve at our conferences over the years, and we can tell you first-hand how important this ministry is. You will be everyone's favorite people as you serve and love them and their kids. Thank you for going. And thank you, church, for sending them. As we're going to see this morning, there is a vital connection between those who go and those who send and God's call to both.
  
- c. Chapter 13 is really the pivot point in the book of Acts.
  - i. The first twelve chapters are mainly focused on the Jewish church in Jerusalem and Peter as the primary leader. We do see in chapters 10 and 11 the beginning of the Gospel moving outside of the Jews and into the Gentiles, but the focus is still on the early church that spread from Jerusalem.
  
  - ii. Beginning in chapter 13 the focus moves from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch; from a monocultural Jewish background church to a very diverse church among the gentiles; from Peter as the head of the church in Jerusalem to Saul who we know as Paul as the apostle to the gentiles.
  
  - iii. And this structure in the book of Acts follows Jesus' original commission in Acts 1: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."
  
  - iv. If you've been listening at all over the past weeks of this series, it is pretty obvious that these disciples have received the power of the Holy Spirit and that God is on the move. We've seen the church grow in Jerusalem and then we saw in chapter 8 through persecution the church was

scattered and the Gospel spread throughout Judea and Samaria. As we now move into chapter 13, Luke, the author of the book of Acts, wants to take us on the journey that brings the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

## 2. The church in Antioch

- a. Luke then begins chapter 13 with a description of the leadership of the church in Antioch. He does this to highlight the diversity within this church. It is not a monocultural Jewish church like the church in Jerusalem. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire – it was a “New York” of its day. And we see that diversity reflected in its leadership:

### b. Read 13:1

- i. Barnabas – Jew from Cyprus, a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith
- ii. Simeon called Niger (which means black) – a Jewish name, but often believed to be from somewhere in Africa
- iii. Lucius of Cyrene – a gentile name came from north Africa
- iv. Manaen – friend of Herod who we just was eaten by worms in chapter 12
- v. Saul
- vi. So we have Jews and Gentiles; different cultures; different races; different economic and social backgrounds all represented

### c. Read 13:2a

- i. We don’t know if there was a particular issue they were seeking the Lord on or if this was just part of their regular practice
- ii. But they set themselves to earnestly seek the Lord and to put themselves in a posture to receive from the Lord and to hear what He might want to say... And God spoke

## 3. The Spirit Speaks - 13:2

- a. But you can’t read the book of Acts and not come away believing that God is a God who speaks to His people. Here we see the Spirit speaking to this group of leaders in the church. We don’t know how the Spirit spoke – whether through one of the prophets; perhaps through a vision like he did with Peter and Cornelius; perhaps an audible voice like he did with Saul at his conversion; or perhaps simply a sense of conviction shared by the leadership community... We don’t know, but that shouldn’t lessen the incredible fact that the God who created the universe spoke to them and continues to speak to us today. So what did God say?

## 4. God’s Message Reveals His heart

- a. **“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”**
  - i. From the rest of the passage we know that the “work” God called them to was to go out from the church at Antioch to spread the Gospel in places that had yet to hear about Jesus. We don’t know exactly how they knew

that. Perhaps there were more instructions given by the Spirit than was written. Perhaps they were praying about how to fulfill Jesus' command to be His witnesses unto the ends of the earth when the Spirit spoke. It really doesn't matter how they knew this – what does matter is to realize that as they were worshipping and fasting, earnestly seeking God, God's response was to reveal his heart for the lost.

- ii. What I want you to remember from this is that God loves the lost. And isn't that good news? Because we all were lost at some point in our journey and needed to be found. Jesus' life – spent time with disciples yes, but also a lot of time with sinners, those who were broken and rejected by the rest of society as "unsavable" – the lepers, the prostitutes, the tax collectors... They loved being around Him. We know he didn't condone their sin – repent... But even so, they knew they were loved and welcome in His kingdom
  - iii. Matthew 9:35-38 says this: *"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*
  - iv. Jesus when we saw the crowds had compassion on them. He was concerned, he longed to see them know God and be brought into God's kingdom. And I have to examine myself and ask how I see the crowds around us today? Those people in your lives that you walk past or work with... Do I even see them? And when I do, do I have compassion? Do I long for them to find God and His love and great care? And do I believe Jesus that the problem isn't with the harvest – its plentiful... But he says the issue is that the workers are few. And so he tells his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest, which is really himself, to send out laborers into the harvest fields. Mystery of prayer – maybe it has more to do with us – getting our hearts in line with His.
- b. "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- i. Because God loves the lost... and He wants our hearts to reflect His... to have compassion and to be moved to enter into the harvest fields He has placed us in...

5. The church Responds – God’s heart moves us to obey
  - a. Acts 13:3 Barnabas and Saul say “yes” to God; the church says “yes” to God and they pray some more and fast some more and then lay hands on them and send them off to the particular work that God has called them to.
  - b. And if this morning you’re thinking that this does not directly apply to you because you have not been called overseas, are you sure? Maybe we need to fast and pray as a church and see who God might call! We’d love to have you join us! Seriously, we would love to have some of you join us in seeing the Gospel go forward into South Asia – let us know if you’re interested, and we’ll fast and pray and see what God says.
  - c. But regardless of where we serve, God has set aside each of us for a particular work to which He is calling us. How do I know this? Because he has told us in Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority in heaven and earth have been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”
  - d. Command – GO... As you are going... Where you are... The idea is that as you go about your lives... as you go to work, to school, go shopping or out for lunch you are to be about making disciples. God has given you specific people to share Him with. And only you are able to do that.
  - e. *“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Frederick Buechner*
  - f. Think about where God has called you to. Your job, school, family, friends, neighbors... Maybe you wouldn’t necessarily say that these things are where you find deep gladness... but we can so easily see the world’s deep hunger in these places – for love and acceptance, forgiveness and justice...
  - g. If we understand that God has put us in these places to in some way meet that hunger – then all of a sudden we have a different way of understanding what our lives are all about – no longer a paycheck or good grades or changing diapers... We are on God’s mission – representing Christ; bringing comfort into pain and light into darkness... and when we understand this, then suddenly these places that seemed commonplace and even difficult and mundane are places we find joy and deep gladness... That have meaning. *“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”*
  - h. God’s call is never an either/or – reaching people here or reaching people overseas. It is always a both/and. Wherever we are and however God calls us we are to spread the good news of God’s love and kingdom in Jesus Christ. Steve Ratliff often says that God is calling you, our sending church, to do the same things here that we do over there. And He is calling us to do it together.

## 6. Our Story

- a. I'd like to share a bit of our own story. You'll see from the pictures that it began quite a while ago. (if anyone tells you haven't changed a bit they're either lying or have a really bad memory)
- b. Ellen and I were married in college, lived in Jardine (before they looked so nice) and were involved here at Faith. And through some summer short-term mission trips, we felt God's call to go overseas and brought that call to the church. At the time, we had gone to Brazil on those trips and had been invited back by the missionaries who worked there to join them long term – so that is what we had assumed God's particular work was for us.
- c. Before going to Brazil, however, we were asked to come to our organization's US office and serve for three years helping to mobilize others and send out people on short-term trips and it was during that time that God began to speak more clearly – well, actually he clearly told us that Brazil was not where He wanted to send us – but it was incredibly unclear as to where that was. Being in the US office we'd hear about all kinds of different opportunities, and I'd have a different idea about every week. But nothing was coming into focus. So, based on Acts 13, we contacted the elders here at Faith and asked them to fast and pray and help us discern where God was calling us.
- d. Now I say that we had no clarity, but we definitely felt a pull towards serving among Muslims and we didn't want to go to Africa or South Asia. Anywhere else Lord is fine. And so the elders prayed and fasted and we came up for a visit and we all went for lunch at the Chinese Buffett on Ft Riley Blvd. For some reason it's so clear in my mind. And during that lunch they told us they wanted us to go to River City (as we call it) in South Asia. There were a number of reasons for this including the fact that another family from the church, Lowell & Robynn Bliss, were serving there as well and that our organization was trying to start a new team there. I think we must have hesitated because one of the elders – whose name I won't mention, but might have been Mark Duff, looked straight at us and asked, "Why wouldn't you go there?" We didn't have a good reason. Really the only thing I could think of at the time was that we struggled with the food. But you can't tell the elders of your church that after they fasted and prayed for you, you won't go because you don't like the food. So we gave the spiritual answer – we'll pray about it.
- e. And we did. We prayed, we sought counsel from some of our mentors in our organization, we went on a short-term trip to visit the Blisses and see River City firsthand, and all along the way God confirmed His calling on our lives to serve Him in South Asia – He even changed our tastes. The food is awesome – I'm pretty sure it will served at the wedding feast in heaven!

- f. But the way God used the leadership here at Faith in our lives did something even more. It connected us to you in significant ways. There was a sense of ownership by the church – a sense that overseas missions was a part of what we do and who we are. And from that through the years it has overflowed in care for us and continued involvement as we have made decisions about moves and changes in ministry. And during the hard times, when we were tempted to give up – to think that maybe we hadn't heard God rightly, that maybe we should just go home... Having the church fast and pray and speak out God's call kept us there. It was not just us, but this whole body who heard and affirmed our call – as can be seen in this photo of our commissioning 28 years ago.
- g. We never would have lasted this long without you behind us. And now we head into a new season with new challenges and again, we look to you, and ask you to join us, to send us, to walk with us – and to do so with the others whom you have sent out. Even as we commit to walking with you, encouraging each of you in your own particular work the Lord has called you to.

## 7. The Lost are Saved – God's power confirms His word

- a. What is the result of God's call and a willing response? Acts 13:4-12 we see that the Lost indeed are Saved. Barnabas and Saul – who is now going by the name Paul when he's among the gentiles; they go to the island of Cyprus and proclaim the word of Gods right across the island ending up in Paphos which was the Roman capital and where the proconsul – basically the governor of the entire island – summoned them so he could hear what they were teaching. One of this proconsul's advisors was a Jewish false prophet, a magician who tried to oppose their message.
- b. Acts 13:9-12
- c. It's interesting to see how closely Paul's own conversion story mirrors what happens here with Elymas the magician. Both were opposing the truth of the Gospel, seeking to turn people away from the truth. "making crooked the straight paths of the Lord" – both were blinded for a time, and both had to seek out someone to lead them by the hand. I wonder if there was not only judgment in this miracle, but also hope that he too might turn and repent.
- d. We don't know what happened with Elymas, but we do know the proconsul believed. And we see here that he had been astonished by the teaching of the Lord – and then when God's power was displayed believed.
- e. I think it is encouraging to remember that God redeems our own stories in similar ways. Maybe they're not as dramatic as temporary blindness and Jesus

speaking to us audibly. But every one of them has elements of God's love and God's power:

- i. Power to forgive sin
- ii. To heal relationships
- iii. To overcome addictions
- iv. To be content in all circumstances
- v. To love our enemies

- f. And it's as we share both the truth of who Jesus is and who He is to us, to our lives and how He has broken through in power to change us – it is this witness that we are called to be.
- g. I can't wait to one day meet in heaven and introduce you to those who have been saved because you partnered with God to send us to South Asia. Kalpana, an older woman, so poor, who worked for us in River City – she wanted to follow Jesus but her husband wouldn't let her. It wasn't too long after she told us this that he had a stroke and was paralyzed and couldn't talk or work. Kalpana was suddenly the head of the home – and not only will get to introduce her to you, but her granddaughter, her daughter-in-law, and we're pretty sure her husband will be there to welcome us.
- h. Harish will be there – a quirky man who found a sense of peace in the Catholic church in town – and like Cornelius was brought to our door where we explained the Gospel.
- i. And Sanatan, the gentle hard working husband of another of the women who worked for us who saw God's love displayed through helping to care for his injuries.
- j. And we trust so many more – both there and here in Manhattan through your witness. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few... Let's not let that be said about us. Let us follow His call and join with His heart to see those who are lost be found.