

## The Sent Church: Sent with Committed Prayer, Acts 13:1-4, 2/20/22

We worship a missionary God. Did you know that? Praise God that he doesn't sit back smugly, indifferent to humanity and our needs. That's the god of the deists, not the Bible, not of history. We worship a missionary God. A God, not sitting on his hands but a God on the move...He is a God who pursues humanity in love. John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, he sent.* Jesus is the Father's missionary to our broken, sin-sick world. That same Jesus, after he paid for our sin on the cross, opening the way to be restored, he now sends us, the church on mission to our broken, sin-sick world to declare and demonstrate the good news. In Acts 11 and 13 we meet a church that caught that mission. A church in a city called Antioch which is modern day Turkey.

Let me give us a brief summary of Acts 11 to get a glimpse of the origin story of Antioch Church. Several Christians and entire families start moving out from Jerusalem because of persecution and relocating to surrounding cities and living on mission-sharing and serving, declaring and demonstration the gospel of Jesus. Some Christians migrate the 300 hundred miles up the Mediterranean coast to the city of Antioch. As they settle there, they begin inviting their neighbors over, those gathering in places of worship, workplace all about Jesus. They were on the move in their neighborhood and city. And there is a great response, many come to faith. the gospel just starts going around like a wave in their community. And the church is being built up as more and more people believe. This church isn't just sitting and soaking, they aren't forming the Christian Country Club of Antioch. They were a mission outpost for the Kingdom of Jesus. But they were also on the move beyond their own city. Through a prophetic word, they learn of a coming famine to Jerusalem. And they sense that the Spirit is calling them to the mission of financial relief. And so the members of Antioch Church say, "You know what, we can fast a day a week and with the money we save, we will give to Jerusalem." "We don't really need that extra field we own, let's sell that and give it away." "Thaddeus said to his wife, you really don't need all those shoes do you? I mean how many types of wedges does one woman need?" And Mrs. Thaddeus replies, "I'll sell my shoes but can you just remind me of how much money you've put into that mountain bike?" And it's like...a bicycle. OK now I'm meddling, you get the idea. And they send out a small convoy of generosity from their church on the 300-mile journey South to Jerusalem. This is a church that got it, they were blessed to be a blessing. They were a sent church.

In Acts 13, we get a behind the scenes glimpse of the DNA of this sent church. This is where we want to focus our time, because what we learn here is essential if we long to be a sent church.

*<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> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.* Here begins the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul (who is renamed Paul-Gentile version) for their first missionary journey. The rest of the book of Acts is dedicated to telling of Paul's missionary endeavors. But it was out of this one sent church, and this one moment, that the Gospel spread like wildfire throughout the known world, that churches grew at an incredible rate and within a couple centuries turned the world upside down.

And there is a powerful key that unlocks this incredible wave of gospel impact in and through this church in Antioch and out to the world. Often we speed right by it and go on to the action of Acts 13. Luke tells us in v.2, *“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said ‘Set apart’”* Did you see it? Notice it didn’t say, *“While they were coming up with their strategic plan to reach the world.”* Notice it didn’t say, *“While they were meeting with the megachurch consultant about trending tactics to attract new guests.”* Notice it didn’t say, *“While they were recruiting their heavy hitters.”* What were these church leaders doing? What was the church doing? They were worshipping and fasting, when these words are together in the New Testament they represent a special, dedicated time of intense seeking of the presence of the Lord. They dedicated themselves to unhurried waiting on the Lord for their marching orders. They were going without food for periods of time to intensify their hunger and attune their ear to hearing from the Holy Spirit. Here's our principle as a sent church: **the Plans and Power for Mobilization come as we earnestly seek the Presence of God.** Now God’s not against well laid plans and strategies. Proverbs. We aren’t resistant to keeping up on trends and best practices. These are good, helpful, wise leadership practices. We do these things. But you can’t take a Dupont 5-year strategic planning process and overlay it onto the church in Acts. The Holy Spirit isn’t Lean Six Sigma Certified. That’s not primarily how the Holy Spirit works. He’s not primarily concerned about us being clever and strategic. The power of the Holy Spirit for ministry and the plans for ministry come from the overflow of His Presence in the life of the individual Christian and the local church.

About 4 weeks ago I was on a pray walk with my dog. I wasn’t praying with my dog...I don’t think he’s saved. But just praying and listening... And the Spirit whispered *“Consecration and Expectation.”* Now those of you that have been here for the last 6 years, you will know that’s not a phrase that I throw around. I’m very careful to not say, *“God told me...”* because it can be used to justify terrible ideas, rash decisions and spiritual abuse of power. But God told me **“Consecration and Expectation.”** And these words have been in my heart and prayers. I was reading a book over the last week called *Longing for Revival* that Pastor Terry gave me and as I finished chapter 3 and turned the page, guess what the title of chapter 4 is? Consecration. That’s more than a coincidence. That’s not a modern, trendy word. I read a lot of Christian books, books aren’t talking about consecration, Hillsong United isn’t writing songs with the word consecration. I don’t think I’ve heard it in church circles for 20 years. OK Spirit, what are you telling me? And then this week, I started studying this passage from Acts 13 and it hit me. This is exactly what was happening in Antioch. They were consecrating themselves with the expectation of being sent on mission and then the Spirit consecrated them for the mission. What does it mean? Consecration is an idea that runs throughout the Old and New Testament. **Intentional seeking, silence and sacrifice in expectation of being set apart for God’s special purposes.** It is something we do voluntarily and something the Spirit does. Starts with our intentionality- going a level beyond, shifting into another gear in pursuit of holiness. Consecration starts seeking the Lord earnestly. Consecration may look like waking up an hour earlier for a month to dedicating additional time for prayer walking and listening to worship music, it may look like sacrificing entertainment and using that time for solitude and silence before God. It may take the form of fasting as it did for the Antioch Church. But it’s also something that the Spirit does in and through us. As I was reading in that chapter of the book

Terry gave me talking about consecration- *"In this way we are like sailors, raising the sail, presenting ourselves to be caught by the wind. The sails don't make the wind come, but they do prepare us to catch it when the moments arrive."*

*God is moved when he sees people preparing themselves for his wonders out of faith, hope, and expectancy. Consecration reminds us that work of God is dependent on the Spirit of God. It connects us with his presence and his power."*

And that's when the conviction of the Spirit came upon me and I realized this sermon today, was for me more than for you. I'm preaching to me today. The Spirit was impressing upon me **Blank Slide** "Nate, you long to see the gospel change people's lives? You long to know how to be a sent church and where I'm on the move? Consecrate yourself." Now the fasting won't be difficult for me, waking up extra early? I got that...but I believe the Spirit is calling me to do something particularly difficult for me- seeking Him in silence. Unplugging from the noise.

C.S. Lewis in the Screwtape letters has the demons railing against silence as a danger to their cause. Senior demon Screwtape calls the devil's realm a kingdom of noise and claims "We will make the whole universe a noise in the end." That was more prophetic than he could have imagined when he wrote that in the 1940s. I'm just old enough to remember this thing that died in the late 90s that we called silence. If you were born after 1990, you are like, "Is that when you have a bad Wi-Fi connection and your ear buds lag in the middle of a song?" Not exactly... A survey from Microsoft found that 77% of young adults answered yes when I asked when nothing is occupying my attention the first thing I do is reach for my phone. The second we feel even a hint of boredom or silence coming on we reach for the appendages that are our smartphones, we check our newsfeeds, answer an email, we search for a new pair of shoes, scroll our social media feeds and play candy crush. I don't like silence. John Mark Comer, "The noise of the modern world makes us deaf to the voice of God, drowning out the one input we need most. All those little moments of silence were potential portals to prayer. Little moments throughout our days to wake up to the reality of God all around us. To wake up to our own souls. To draw our minds attention and heart's devotion back to God."<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever seen the show **Hoarders**? We look at that those people and say, wow how can they live with all that clutter? But this is what my mind looks like sometimes. And I'm guessing I'm not alone.

**Blank Slide** So the Spirit is calling me to consecrate myself from now until Easter. I'm going to fast 1 day a week. I'm waking up an hour earlier to pursue silence and solitude. Monday through Thursday I'm unplugging from entertainment- from music, news, sports, from games on my phone. I'm telling you this, primarily for accountability and speed of the leader, speed of the team. I'm calling our church leadership to consecrate themselves, whatever that may look like for them from the Lenten season, March 3 to the 40 days through to Easter. If you wish to join us, we welcome you to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> John Mark Comer, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, p.121

Time of Prayer:

Pray for the Spirit to break our hearts for the lost

Pray for our Partner Ministries in Wilmington

Pray for the Spirit to do a new work through us