Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 13

Introduction
Illus: “Sit down young man. If God wants to save the heathen, He’ll do it without your help.” This was the response William Carey received when he first suggested foreign missions at a meeting of Southern Baptists. Today, Southern Baptists have over 5,200 missionaries and William Carey is known as the father of missions among Southern Baptists.

Illus: I have heard church members at other churches say, “We just need to concentrate on the home front.” God commanded us to go into the world. We need to reach everyone we can with the gospel and God will honor that obedience.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 NIV

As we read Acts chapter 13, we see God plowing forward with His divine plan by calling Paul and others to leave their places of comfort and go into other lands to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

William Carey is quoted as saying, “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.” As you study Acts 13, consider what great things you are expecting from God and what great things you are attempting for God.

Content
1. The signature of a calling (vs. 1-3).

What are some ways you know when God is calling you to serve?

Inner Calling – When God calls us to serve Him, the Holy Spirit sets us apart for that calling. It tugs upon our hearts in a way that is virtually irresistible. There must be an inner calling within our heart and soul; a yearning to do that which we are being called to do. A genuine calling is never someone else’s idea or outer pushing but rather an inner moving by the Holy Spirit. (Example: Pastors get into trouble by trying to please people by doing things God has not actually called them to do.)

Outer Confirmation – While a genuine calling comes from within, God usually provides an outward confirmation from others. When we sense God calling us in a direction, we can turn to trusted friends who have an authentic relationship with God and who sincerely pray for us. If the calling is of the Holy Spirit, such supporters will provide earnest confirmation. They often become our greatest supporters. (Example: Is my spouse completely supportive of my calling?)

Past Preparation – One could look at Paul and conclude that he is ill suited to be a missionary. He has a violent past and might never gain the trust and respect of others. On the other hand one can conclude Paul is a perfect candidate for being a missionary. He has experienced an extreme conversion; he is a completely changed person. He is a well-educated Jew and a respected Roman citizen who speaks multiple languages. He is a pragmatic leader who gets things done. If God is calling you to serve in a capacity, He has been preparing you for that service for years in ways you did not even recognize. Whatever is in your past, God can use it for His service.

Supplied Resources – While we are to be dependent upon God for the resources, we must also look around and determine if God is opening the necessary doors and providing the required resources. When God calls, God equips. If we are ill equipped, we must ask ourselves if the timing is right, if others should be involved to help us, or if God is actually calling us at all. Sometimes we need to take
the necessary steps to become more equipped perhaps by learning a foreign language or waiting until we have fulfilled our existing obligations (example: Arthur & Paula Bosarge).

To be in Christ is to be on mission. The ministry is for all of God’s people whether we are called to go on the mission field overseas or to stay home and support those called out. Either way, we need to be obedient to the calling of God in our life. To fail to do so is to miss out on the adventure of a complete walk with Christ; the most meaningful thing we can experience in life.

2. The boldness of a calling (vs. 4-12).

What obstacle did Paul encounter when preaching in Cyprus?
He encountered a sorcerer by the name of Bar-Jesus who was jealous of the gospel and the proconsul believing in the gospel.

Why do you suppose Bar-Jesus did not want his friend to hear the truth of the gospel?
More important than the truth to the sorcerer was his practice of fooling people. His agenda was more important than discovering the truth. Such distorted priorities still exit today. We have people whose livelihood is more important than the truth of the gospel. This is shortsightedness at its worst.

What gave Paul the power to rebuke the sorcerer and punish him?
Paul had the complete confidence of the Holy Spirit and God’s calling. He had complete confidence in God’s call on his life and knew he was doing the will of God. He knew God had his back. Perhaps the ultimate validation of a calling is the confidence and power to meet with opposition and remain steadfast.

Too many Christians jump ship when they meet with the least bit of opposition in serving God. But when we have complete confidence in our calling, we are able to stay the course and be bold in the work to which we are called.

3. The essence of an effective sermon (vs. 38-39).

What would you say is the most important purpose of any message?
This is our first account of a full sermon preached by Paul. Luke gives us what appears to be a word for word account of his message. Paul speaks of prophesy and how it pointed to the Messiah. He speaks of the Messiah being born of the house of David and how John the Baptist spoke of the coming Messiah. His entire sermon leads up to the most important point of his message found in verses 38 and 39; in Christ’s death and resurrection, God has established His acceptance of us. What the Law of Moses could not do, God had done in Christ.

The most powerful thing we can tell others is that through Christ, we have justification by faith. Paul would later explain this in detail in Romans, Galatians and Colossians. But now he is declaring the gospel of freedom in Christ; freedom from the guilt and burden of sin.

This freedom in Christ means that we no longer fear our past or future. Though we desire to walk in Christ and live for Him, we need not live in fear that we are never good enough. We do not live to earn our salvation; we live in light of our salvation.

We are liberated in knowing God is not against us. His grace is not conditioned upon our performance; we are accepted by God permanently. Paul later writes in Galatians 5:1, “Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.”
The thrust of the gospel is that we can be saved by faith in Christ and not by works. Through Christ, a person is justified, acquitted, forgiven and set free. Every Christian should be able to declare this truth whenever the spirit leads us.

4. The ability to leave the results to God (vs. 44-52).

Notice that twice in his message, Paul addresses “those among you who fear God.” There will always be those who will receive the message and there will be those who reject the message. There are those who are great respecters of God and those who have little respect for God. Therefore, the results are always up to God.

Out of envy and jealousy of power, the Jewish leaders again rejected the gospel and thus rose up against Paul and Barnabas. The Jews were enthusiastic about their religion but they did not fear God in their hearts. They were too busy being religious to receive the object of their religion; Jesus Christ.

What does the Bible say Paul and Barnabas did in response?

They dusted off their feet and moved on to what God would have them do. What a testimony to the importance of keeping your eyes on whom you serve. We must remain focused on being obedient to God and leave the results to Him.

Paul and Barnabas moved on to the Gentiles with the gospel where the message was received with great joy. Was this part of the will of God? You bet it was. Once again, we see God using men and women to further His gospel.

Conclusion

Paul had plenty of things to happen on his first missionary trip to discourage him. Paul became ill, John Mark left and returned to Jerusalem and just when things were going good, the Jewish leaders raised up against them. In spite of several things to discourage his work, Paul remained faithful to God’s calling on his life.

As Paul Harvey used to say, “And then there is the rest of the story.” We know the rest of the story. We know Paul had many more challenges including times in prison, beating, false teachers, backslidden congregations, etc. But we also know Paul remains the most effective missionary to ever be called. But what if Paul had responded to adversity the way we often respond to adversity? What if Paul would have thrown in the towel and said, “I don’t have to put up with this kind of abuse?”

Praise God Paul did not quite. Praise God Paul remained committed to that which God called him to do. May we learn from Paul’s example and remain faithful to our calling regardless of the circumstances. May we remain steadfast in our calling; enough so as to see the rest of the story of what God does through us.