

**SPEAK TO US LORD JESUS:
SET US APART AND SEND US OUT
Acts 13: 1-3**

**I. GOD MOVES WHEN HIS PEOPLE DISCERN HIS GRACE
AND HIS GREATNESS**

They were: WORSHIPPING and FASTING

This presumes that they had been a part of that group in Antioch that come to know Jesus; they had been taught for a year solid about how the Old Testament pointed to the Lord Jesus and the effects of the Cross on and in their lives. As they learned more about Jesus and His grace, they were more and more thankful of what He had done in their lives. And that resulted in more desire to praise Him, i.e. worship Him, declare His worth to Him, to themselves and to others. Worship also points to a life of daily surrender to Jesus, talking with Him, listening to the promptings of His Holy Spirit, and seeking His direction as a way of life.

They were also “fasting.” This means there was an intent resolve in their minds and hearts about seeking the Lord and ordering their life under His control. It was an acknowledgement of the need of their lives to have Jesus as daily Lord—living life daily while “knowing” Jesus and His fullness. It was a no holding back. They were there together and they were ordering their private life in a way that it was

clear to themselves, others, and to the Lord that they were unashamed to acknowledge their need for Him. Fasting means doing without food in order to FOCUS on the needful things from the Person of Jesus; a pruning of fleshly desires in order to have more of Jesus permeating all of one's life.

God's people, His church will get direction from Him as they yield to Him AND as they have daily fellowship with Him. This comes out of a sincere heart of love and appreciation for Jesus and the Cross. It is a discerning of His grace; and that grace overwhelms you.

NOTE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT GAVE DIRECTION TO THE WHOLE BODY

There is so much sin present in the average church that the Holy Spirit is hindered in His freedom to work. Sin is like pulling the plug on the connection with God. Although we do not lose our salvation, consistent sin is like pulling the power cord and having to do everything in your house without electric power. It is hard, slow, and tiring. Church can be like this if the majority of the people come with known, unconfessed sin in their lives. God wants to work through His Spirit to guide and give counsel to His local churches. He wants each local church to be a vibrant body, an organism that is functioning in a HEALTHY way. All six tasks or purposes of the church (Worship, Evangelism, Discipleship, Ministry or Service, Fellowship, and Prayer) working smoothly to make disciples and to send them out on mission for Christ. When the body is a true body (not just a collection of individuals who

are mostly doing their own thing), it is then that God can speak clearly to His people and guide them.

The problem I see in America is that we do church more as individuals AND many people have no clue as to the purpose of the church. They just come to church for THEIR ENJOYMENT and not for the mission to which God has called them. When any church begins to incorporate the Mission of Jesus into their PERSONAL LIVES, when people begin to get sin out of their lives, and when they grow in their daily walk with Jesus . . . well you had better watch out; the Lord God through His Holy Spirit will begin to work in the lives of the people CORPORATELY, in the WHOLE CHURCH to LEAD THEM AND GUIDE THEM AND WORK IN AND THROUGH THEM FOR HIS GLORY. People will begin to sense that the Lord is pulling people together for His purposes. You cannot force this thing, but you can begin to OBEY His call toward OTHERS. If any church and any people do this He WILL WORK IN AND THROUGH THEM.

THE CHURCH HAD GROWN TO THE POINT THAT THERE WERE ELDERS/TEACHERS/PASTORS NOW DOING THE WORK THAT BARNABAS AND SAUL (PAUL) HAD BEEN DOING

This is one of the things missed; a church is to be DEVELOPING new leadership through the continual instruction and equipping of God's Word, mentoring, personal encouragement, and all other means. The whole point is that the pastor/leader is not to be an island unto himself. He is to develop other servant/leaders. And that is what Barnabas and Saul did at Antioch. This is the model for every local church.

The qualifications of this leadership were set by the Word of God and administered by Barnabas and Saul (especially at the beginning). The fact that the Holy Spirit spoke in the way He did was in part because the church had been obedient to Him before and they were ready for the next chapter in gospel service.

G. Campbell Morgan said that "this is not a picture of a Church choosing men to be sent forth on missionary enterprise. There is a sense that the church had no voice in the selection of these men!" The conditions were right for Him to work. The healthy condition of the church cleared the way for more Holy Spirit freedom and missional or gospel-centered mindset. When churches get healthy, then the Lord works IN and THROUGH the local church. Of course it is a process; we never arrive. But I am talking about a place to where there is significant life change, and it is obvious that the Holy Spirit has been working in and on people. In this setting there is a common burden in that local church to see people come to Jesus, have definite transformation in their lives, and begin to follow Jesus as a genuine disciple. There is a multiplication of this through the body and not just a "preacher thing" going on.

When I speak of a "healthy" church, that has several ideas associated with that. But I must say that most churches I have seen have NOT been healthy churches. Many are organized wrongly. They are put together sometimes with more structure than the federal government! Rather than being flexible and nimble ready to hear from God, they are stuck in many different ways. And if a person attended that

church twenty years ago and then visited again today, there would be very little that looks different (no new people, same style, lack of joy, no sense of mission or "being sent"). When any church begins to desire a more healthy and EFFECTIVE church (more gospel centered, more of God's power present in their lives), that church will be in a much better position to hear from God. That CAN BE DONE TODAY! I want you to know that this IS happening all across America! The Holy Spirit is still speaking today to take us out to this lost world and our lost communities.

II. WHEN GOD WORKS HE ALWAYS CALLS PEOPLE TO A NEW LEVEL OF SURRENDER AND OBEDIENCE

Note the word here says "set apart for me"! Folks, the Lord God is calling each of us in some way to a deeper level. The word "set apart" comes from the Greek word "aphorizo". You can see part of the word "horizon" in there.

This word means to separate by some boundary. To set apart for some purpose. It is a permanent act in the sense it is definite act done (the setting apart is done), but the verb is an ACTIVE verb which means the state of being set apart is ongoing. It is an ongoing work. This "setting apart" is a huge deal.

This is in essence God putting His mark on you! It is God's stamp saying at this time "I am setting a NEW HORIZON, a new goal, a new work which is the same work but to people that have not heard."

It is easy to stay in the same place! I know. I can only imagine what Barnabas and Saul must have felt at this time: . . . "man we have been here for over a year and we have the best of friends here. We have invested our very lives in the lives of the people here and we have seen true miracles in the lives of these our brothers and sisters in Christ. We LOVE THESE PEOPLE." If they had been like most pastors in America they would have stayed put doing the things familiar to them with the people familiar to them. If that had happened at this time it would have meant a sure slow death for this fledgling movement. But the Holy Spirit is all about calling people . . . SETTING PEOPLE APART for something more. And it ALWAYS involves the Gospel getting to people who do not know. Did you get that: the Holy Spirit carries and calls us outward and forward. There is constant movement with the Holy Spirit! And that movement always . . . always goes to the depth of our hearts to bring us to new levels of surrender in our lives.

Every Christian has been "set apart" in their lives to be an ambassador for Christ. We may not go to places far away, but the world has come to us! We are now cross cultural missionaries! We are God's people "set apart" for Him. We are to be a living demonstration of His life and power (through our increasing holiness and victory over sin). And we are to live as His "sent people."

III. GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE AS THEY WORSHIP TO LEAD THEM TO DO GOSPEL CENTERED LABOR FOR HIM

G. Campbell Morgan said this: "Worship and work are always intimately associated. If we try to work without worship we shall disastrously fail. If we worship without work we shall become ritualists." In other words, if we are worshipping in Spirit and in truth the Lord will draw us out to service. We cannot be content to sit on the pew or on the chair in the classroom. We will want to get in on the action of taking the gospel to others and witnessing changed lives for God's glory. The great indictment on us in the American church is that we have reduced our work to the act of worship itself. We have substituted worship attendance for our work and therefore the church is floundering.

What I am talking about here? Unless the message of Jesus and the sufficiency of His Cross gets in the hearts and minds of people who do not know Him, . . . nothing will happen. But if the Word about Jesus DOES enter into the mind and heart of someone clearly, then we are assured that "God's Word does not return void"! So the issue for us becomes: how can we be used of God to get the Word of the Gospel into the hearts and minds of the people around us? That is the work to which He has called us. Then after they repent and trust Jesus, it is our "work" to invest in them heavily in order to help them develop a walk with Christ such that they will be continually transformed by their close walk with Jesus. And then they too will be able to do the same thing in their own life! That way it is possible to multiply spiritually. So back to our point; if we are indeed worshipping then we will all be pulled to fulfill that to which we are all (as Christians) set apart for . . . namely making disciples and displaying Jesus to the lost around us. If

we worship, we will all come to the conclusion that we are a "sent people." The Church at Antioch had already "gotten it" that that they were sent to their city at Antioch. Everyone there knew about this new group. That city in essence called them "little Christs" or Christians! So their worship led them to WORK HARD FOR JESUS. They got what I call a case of the "can't help its." Their increasing understanding of God's Grace motivated them to tell others and go to others, etc. They were walking with Jesus daily and His presence continually prompted them OUTWARD.

IV. GOD ALWAYS CALLS US TO GIVE OF OUR BEST TO HIS GOSPEL MISSION

Now this part of the message is deeply personal to me (I may share my personal experience here). I want you to imagine how the church at Antioch felt. They had had the absolute best in the way of teachers anyone could have. They had Barnabas and Saul . . . it does not get any better than that. I just want us to put ourselves in their place. First of all the church: they must have thought "man these guys are fantastic. I have learned so much from them. Their teaching and the Holy Spirit have changed my whole life. I love them so much for their gospel heart and their love for all of us here in Antioch. I do not want to lose them to any new mission endeavor. Can't we send someone else?" Now I do not think this happened, but I say this to point out how we think today. We would want what WE want and not think what is best for the Gospel Mission. These guys were the best at what they do. They had trained many good people there in Antioch to do the same thing. So the Holy Spirit knew and the church knew

that in reality they did not need these guys to keep the teaching, worshipping, ministering, witnessing machine going. So when it comes to a lost world, the church (and us as individual Christians) should give our best. Our hearts are naturally stingy. We must battle that.

I am sure also that Barnabas and Saul were tempted to stay; they had it good there. A system was in place. They were enjoying the people whom they had taught and they LOVED these people very much. And yet the Holy Spirit said: "set apart for me" Barnabas and Saul, etc. I will tell you that this is very difficult when it involves people you love. And yet when yield to the Lord God, He draws out the best we are and have to His mission. It is sometimes hard to see, but He is in this business and He knows best. In fact, even from our point of view this giving of one's best makes sense if His Gospel mission is to survive and THRIVE. If we do less we cheapen the cross and make it something we can control or "use." God always calls us to give His best in His Gospel work. Barnabas and Saul understood this early on in their walk with Christ. In fact, thinking otherwise was not an option for them. May I say to you that Americanized comfort goes against this spirit of sacrifice. We have turned (what was supposed to be) a sacrificial fellowship into the fellowship of the half-hearted and the "good ole boy network" and thereby diminished the work of the Cross.

Here is the good news in all of this. God is still God, Jesus is still Lord, and the Holy Spirit is still in the process of calling His people to take the Gospel outward.

1. If we draw close to Jesus in our daily walk (TAWG) and come here to worship Him personally and with a genuine desire to love Him, lift Him up, and listen to Him, THEN HE WILL SPEAK TO US INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A BODY.
2. We will be a "sent church" and as we sense this more and more there will be more of His power present in our lives and in the body of Christ.
3. There WILL be some people drawn by the Lord to THIS body of believers and we will have opportunity to invest our hearts and the Word of God into their lives.
4. We will see changed lives.
5. We will have increased joy.
6. We will have a sense of purpose.

I could go on but I want to stop here because there is something very important I want to share with you. If your desire for these things is low or you just can't seem to sense what this is all about, it is possible you may have never yielded your heart to Jesus! If that is the case He is calling you to Himself today. He has died to take the penalty for YOUR sins. He rose to give you real life! But you must be broken for your sins and give your life over to Jesus. You must admit you are a sinner and do NOT deserve to be in His presence. You deserve judgement because you have not been perfect. God does not grade on the curve. That is why He sent Jesus for you. You failed the test! You will never measure up. Jesus passed for you with flying colors. He also bore the punishment meant for you. But you must admit your need to Him. I am asking you to tell Jesus that today. Let Him know you are ready to give your heart and life to Him. He

will take your sins off of you and leave you clean! You can do that through prayer today. If you would like to understand better what to do in relation to receiving Christ, then please come and tell the pastor (or other staff member) during the invitational hymn. Or if you would like, please come to us after the last hymn at the close of the service and we will be glad to help you.

For those of you who already know Jesus as Savior and Lord, we welcome you to become a part of the Riverdale Family. Just come and indicate that to the pastor during the invitational hymn.

We thank all of you for your presence here today. Pastor Michael Palmer