

*This character study / commentary into Apostle Paul is based mostly on Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives in God's Word" series on Paul and FF Bruce's "Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free." Main source materials are based on contents in these books unless otherwise noted.

Sunday April 16, 2023

Lesson 5: The Marks of an Authentic Ministry

Reference: Acts 13:1-14:28

See Also: Lesson Supplemental – First Missionary Journey

When we last saw Paul, he and Barnabas were tasked with taking the collections to Jerusalem – collections gathered in response to the famine in the region. By that time, the apostle James had already been killed by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2). Herod Agrippa himself had been slain by an angel of the Lord (Acts 12:23). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch from Jerusalem, they brought with them a young man named John, also called Mark (Acts 12:25). The year was approximately AD 44-45.

Chronology of Events – Acts 13:1 – 14:28

The opening verses of Acts Chapter 13 informs us that ministry continues to flourish in Syrian Antioch. By this time – approximately AD 47 – the church has a solid leadership team (prophets and teachers) that included Barnabas (of Cyprus), Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manean (brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul (of Cilicia). Luke's account to include these individuals as leaders of this church aims to show the diversity of the congregation, as each of these leaders came from different cultural backgrounds.

Luke then records that the Holy Spirit instructed this church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the first ever Christian missionary journey (13:2-3). This first journey will include visits to Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Galatia. The following is a brief outline of this journey. Refer to lesson supplemental 'Paul's First Missionary Journey' for details.

- Acts 13:4-12 – Evangelism on the Island of Cyprus
- Acts 13:13 – Arrival in Pamphylia; John Mark abandoned the team.
 - Gal 4:13-14 – Paul became seriously ill, stayed in Southern Galatia
- Acts 13:14-50 – Evangelism in Galatia – Pisidian Antioch
- Acts 13:51-14:4 – Evangelism in Galatia – Iconium
- Acts 14:5-20 – Evangelism in Galatia – Lystra and Derbe (Lycaonian)
- Acts 14:21-23 – Return journey back to Pamphylia.
- Acts 14:24-25 – Evangelism in Pamphylia – Perga and Attalia
- Acts 14:26-28 – Return journey back to Syrian Antioch

Also relevant to note from this first journey is how Saul begin to use his Roman name of Paul from this point forth (13:9), as he ventures into Gentile territory to evangelize to the Gentiles.

Events of Acts Chapter 13 – Evangelism on the Island of Cyprus

Luke records that the ministry team of Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark proclaimed the word of God through the whole island of Cyprus from Salamis to Paphos (approx. 138 miles). The key event recorded by Luke on this island was the encounter with a false prophet named Elymas in the capital city of Paphos. This false prophet refers to himself as "Bar-Jesus" (13:7), which is an Aramaic expression meaning "son of Jesus." However, since he opposes everything that is right about Jesus, Paul calls him the "son of the devil" (13:10). The supernatural effect of Paul's words on the false prophet led the proconsul to believe (13:12).

Events of Acts Chapter 13 – Arrival in Pamphylia

Upon arrival into Perga in the province of Pamphylia, Luke records that it was at this point that John Mark abandoned the team and returned to his hometown of Jerusalem (13:13 cf 12:25). Although not recorded by Luke, biblical scholars believe that it was here during the journey that Paul contracted malaria or some serious illness (Gal 4:13). The key takeaway is that this trip has been rough, has taken a toll on the team, and may have contributed to John Mark abandoning the mission. Many other theories were proposed for the reason John Mark abandoned the team – including the notion that Paul's aggressive nature may have pushed John Mark away, or that John Mark was too young or too immature to handle this rough journey. However, these are all speculative at best. Luke's intention in this verse is to document that the mission continued without John Mark for the remainder of the trip.

Events of Acts Chapter 13 – Evangelism In Galatia – Pisidian Antioch

As the team of Paul and Barnabas arrive in Pisidian Antioch, the two continued their strategy of meeting first in the local synagogue. Luke notes that the synagogue officials invited Paul to preach (13:15). Paul then proceeded to preach – from memory – from Genesis to the ministry of Christ (see presentation slide for outline). The message was powerful enough that Paul was invited to return the following Sabbath to preach again (13:42). It also generated a lot of conversation, highlighting the effect that the Word of God can have on people's lives (13:43).

Conversely, the Word of God can also be offensive to those who stand to lose their control over other people's lives (13:45). Luke notes that the Jews opposed Paul out of jealousy rather than on the merits, leading Paul to declare that the ministry efforts will now focus on the Gentiles (13:46). As the Gentile audience welcomed and honored the word of the Lord (13:48), Paul and Barnabas followed the instructions Jesus gave to the twelve, dusting off their feet as a warning to those who rejected the Word, as they head for Iconium (13:51 cf Luke 9:1-6; Matt 10:5-15).

Events of Acts Chapter 14 – Evangelism In Galatia – Iconium

As the team of Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium, they continued their strategy of meeting first in the local synagogue. Similar to the reactions they received in Pisidian Antioch, while many Jews and Gentiles believed (14:1), the Jews who refused to believe created dissension among the brothers (14:2). Luke recorded that Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in this city trying to resolve this discord by using actions through the ministry of healing, rather than through words alone (14:3). However, when the division reached a fever point where physical harm was threatened, they departed to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe (14:5-6), preaching the gospel along the way.

Events of Acts Chapter 14 – Evangelism In Galatia – Lystra and Derbe

In Lystra, Luke skips directly to an inciting event where Paul and Barnabas continued their ministry of healing upon a man who was lame from birth (14:8). This miracle led many in the surrounding to declare Paul and Barnabas as 'gods' (14:12). Luke wanted to highlight the fact that, rather than to embrace this popularity for selfish gains – which is part of human nature, Paul and Barnabas took the extra step to correct the record and ensure that all glory is bestowed upon God (14:14-17).

Luke then recorded how the trouble-making Jews traveled from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium (over 100 miles) to win the crowd over and attack Paul, stoning him and supposing him to be dead (14:19). Luke was silent on why the attack focused on Paul while excluding Barnabas, but the reason can be inferred by the fact that Paul was the chief speaker (cf 14:12). Since the crowd supposes that Paul is dead, Paul was likely seriously injured. Also, since stoning was a distinctively Jewish form of punishment, it is likely that the Gentile crowd in the audience simply looked on and were the disciples mentioned to have provided aid.

Paul and Barnabas then headed over to Derbe, continues to preach the gospel message while winning over many souls (14:20-21). This subtle and simple entry by Luke would indicate that Paul and Barnabas took shelter in Derbe for some time without any major incidents to note.

Events of Acts Chapter 14 – Return Journey

After spending some time in Derbe, Luke quickly summarized the return trip back to Syrian Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas revisited the same cities that they journey through in Galatia (14:21). During this return journey, Paul's message of encouragement to believers included a caution to expect tribulations in their life (14:22), which reaffirms the principle that the gospel message is offensive to the world. He then appointed elders in every church they planted (14:23). Luke does not document how these elders relate to the apostles or to the early church. However, since Paul's model for leadership is learned through the synagogue structure, and having elders as leaders was already a familiar pattern for the Jewish people, appointing elders as the initial leaders for a new church plant to maintain order makes logical sense (Arnold, 323). Point being that, somebody must be in charge. These elders are not assumed to be "experts" of the Christian faith at this point (though some may be), but merely leaders.

Luke summarizes this first mission trip with another subtle reference about evangelizing in Pamphylia (14:24-25), which would indicate that Paul and Barnabas did not evangelize here on their way in; likely due to their illness and possible tension experienced with John Mark departing (13:13).

Paul Writes the Letter to the churches in Galatia

After the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas remained in the church in Syrian Antioch to continue their local ministry at the church (14:28). It was during this time that Paul received word that a group of Jewish believers who were zealous for the Law, visited the new believers in south Galatia and begin to subvert Paul's teaching. This was when Paul wrote the letter of Galatians, around AD 49 (Arnold, 354).

Swindoll's Principle for all ages

This Lesson focuses on the actions and reactions of Paul as he experiences the events of doing outreach evangelism. Unlike in Syrian Antioch where he remained largely in a church setting teaching the Word and defending the faith, this first journey gave Paul a taste for taking the gospel to the world. Taking Paul's actions and reactions as a whole, Swindoll observed four principles which he grouped together and labeled as the marks of an authentic ministry:

- **Ministry is saturated with the Word of God** – during this first missionary journey, Luke recorded words like "word of God", "word of truth", "the teaching of the LORD", "the Law and the Prophets", or "the good news" fifteen times (13:5, 13:7, 13:12, 13:15A, 13:15B, 13:32, 13:44, 13:46, 13:48, 13:49, 14:3, 14:7, 14:15, 14:21, 14:25). When Paul and Barnabas set out on this journey, their intention was not a vacation tour to visit the region, but to preach the Word in those regions.
- **Ministry emphasizes the gospel to the lost, and grace to the saved** – Paul's messages and actions were directed to both seekers and believers. To the lost, he proclaimed the hope of salvation in Christ (13:38-39). To the saved, he promoted the message of grace through encouragement (13:43) as well as through healing (14:3, 26).
- **Ministry maintains a mature God-honoring reaction regardless of outcome** – during this journey, Paul confronted a phony prophet (13:6-8), experienced being deserted by his helper (13:13), embraced an unexpected invitation to preach (13:15), be openly rejected and abused (13:45-46), persecuted (13:50-51), stoned (14:19), as well as the euphoria of mission accomplished at various locations. Through each of these outcomes, Paul and Barnabas maintained a firm mature

composure, not egotistical, not boastful, not provoking, no anger issues, and no resentment. They modeled Christ's behavior through His ministry ventures.

- **Ministry gives all glory to God** – when Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch to give a report of their journey, they gave all glory to God and made God the focus (14:27). They could have taken credit for their strategy, skills, or even perseverance, but they didn't. All the attention was focused on God.

Given these marks of an authentic ministry, Swindoll offered the following applications:

- We need to examine ourselves to see if we are being saturated with the Word of God as a result of our personal time with Him.
- We must make certain our emphasis remains on presenting the Gospel to the lost and grace to the saved.
- We should check our responses to mixed reactions, making sure they're mature responses which honor the Lord and keep the focus on His work.
- We would be wise to examine our motives for doing the work, making sure at every turn, in every achievement, with every ministry success the glory goes to Him.

Reflecting Upon the Word

Re-read Acts 13:1-5. This is the passage on the calling of Paul and Barnabas for this mission trip.

1. What can we observe about the state of this church at this juncture in the church's life cycle?
 - a. How did the church construct its leadership team?
 - b. How did the leaders react to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?
 - c. How did the church react to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?
 - d. How would you rate the spiritual life of the church as a whole?
2. What can we observe about the act of the Holy Spirit to set apart and move two key leaders in a church where ministry is thriving?
3. How can we correlate these observations into applications for our church?

Reflecting Upon our World

The church in Syrian Antioch had raised strong leaders and positioned them to lead the church. They were effectively operating on autopilot.

1. How would your church today approach the situation found in Antioch where key members of a strong leadership team are instructed to be broken up?
2. How would your church today approach the situation found in Antioch where they must break from their comfort zone and take the gospel message to a foreign land with the various unknowns?

Reflecting Upon Your Spiritual Journey

Reflect on your personal journey, focusing on how God put you in your ministry setting in your own church.

1. How would you react if the Holy Spirit moves you to join a different ministry team, or to join a new mission team? How can you know if it is the Holy Spirit, or if it may just be you?
2. If the Holy Spirit moves to you join a mission team to a location with various unknowns and uncertainties, are you adequately prepared? How can you know?
3. We do not need to be moved by the Holy Spirit to join a mission team (ex: John Mark). However, if we are to participate in a mission team, we do need to be adequately prepared (ex: John Mark). Evaluate your personal daily walk with God and journal your entry for a potential mission trip preparation.