



Acts: The Church Unleashed- Session 8

10/28/18

Introduction

What is an adventure that you have experienced? What is a risk that you were willing to take? Is it something that lasted only a moment or was it life-changing? When you think about people taking adventures and risks, what intrigues about their stories?

When we consider what it is to follow Jesus, we have to remember that it is a call to rest in the Lord, but it is also a call to go and take risks for the sake of sharing the gospel. So often we believe that the adventure of following Jesus is relegated to a few select people within Christianity called missionaries, but today we are going to see how true adventure exists and is called for everyone that bears the name of Jesus.

How would you define *missionary*?

Have you ever had confusion about who a missionary is and does?

Who are some missionaries that you know? How have they demonstrated a life of being sent for Christ?

You may have heard it said before that every Christ-follower is a missionary. That idea might help us remember our shared calling to make disciples of those around us as a normal rhythm of our lives. God intends for all of us to live on mission for Him wherever we are, but we know that some Christians are called by God and sent elsewhere to live and make disciples as missionaries in the truest sense of the word.

While it may feel like defining *missionary* is an exercise in semantics, it matters. It matters because God's revealed method of advancing the gospel to the ends of the earth—across all ethnic, language, and national boundaries—is missionaries sent by Him through the church. If we are going to join with God in this plan, then we have to understand it first, and that means we have to understand what a missionary is.

We see God's method of sending missionaries all throughout the Book of Acts, and actually, if we have been paying attention to the big story of Scripture—the meta-narrative of God—we see it all throughout the Bible. God is a sending God. Page after page of Scripture shows how God sent His people out to make Him known, but we can see this most clearly in the incarnation: Jesus was sent.

TRANSITION: In this session we see how God sent out some of the first missionaries through His church. These missionaries were committed to following Jesus wherever He led them, even if that meant facing opposition to and suffering for the gospel message they proclaimed. God

used these missionaries not only to bring others into His family but also to strengthen and encourage the church itself as they saw God at work.

1. God sends out missionaries through His church. Acts 13:1-3

Have a volunteer to read Acts 13:1-3.

¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² As they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

What is the context of these verses?

After his conversion recorded in Acts 9, Saul is not mentioned for a few chapters as Peter once again takes center stage in the book. We see Saul again at the end of Acts 12 when he returns to Jerusalem along with Barnabas and Mark. The men had been on a relief mission because of the famine that had spread across the Empire (Acts 11:27-30).

Somehow Saul (later Paul) and Barnabas end up in close fellowship with the church at Antioch. There these two men were called and set apart for the righteous purposes of God—the first recorded missionary journey in Scripture. This missionary journey would span eight cities in several regions of the eastern portion of the Roman Empire, laying the foundation for two other missionary journeys to follow and eventually Paul delivering the gospel to Rome.

What actions do you see the people doing in these verses? (worshipping and fasting)

As the leaders were worshipping and fasting, they heard from the Holy Spirit. This was a natural expression of their worship as seen before in Acts 12. It might be easy to read past this important connection between practicing these spiritual disciplines and being tuned in to the Holy Spirit, but it deserves our attention. These leaders and the church with them were in the right posture to hear from God and then respond accordingly when the time came.

The Holy Spirit instructed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God had called them. God was separating these two men from the normal rhythms of being part of the church at Antioch for something else. Barnabas and Saul would leave their church and their lives as they knew it in Antioch to advance the gospel to unreached regions as missionaries.

What was the response from their prayer and fasting? (They sent Saul and Barnabas to the mission field)

After the leaders fasted, prayed, and laid hands on the pair in recognition and affirmation of God’s calling, they sent them off. The word used here is a strong, uneasy word that carries the idea of far more than a casual goodbye. This sending was a stronger separation. The word can also be translated “divorce.” It was a tearing apart of a Christ-formed family, but in the context of the mission of God, it was a Christ-approved severing.

How do you support missionaries sent by your local church? (We support when we pray, support, and send).

Here are a couple of ways that we support in the prayer, support, and sending of missions at New Vision.

Our focus in missions at New Vision is called Across the Street and Around the World.

We want people to see the span of where we are called to be missionaries as we share the vision to share Christ across the street for our neighbors and to those that are around the world.

Our desire is for our groups to find a way to serve across this span. From local projects (Our after-school program, TN Baptist Children's Home, Arrowhead Ranch, etc) that are offered year-round to short term mission trips to even embracing the call to plant churches across the US (Boston, Minneapolis) and around the world (La Represa, Haiti, etc), the important thing to remember is that we are called to live sent! These are the opportunities that we provide here but God may be calling you to have a broader vision beyond what we provide and He simply wants you to take the next step in the adventure!

Extra info:

This is a great time to discuss the history and importance of the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program. Here are a few quick details of what the Cooperative Program is:

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries.

Every year our church prayerfully decides how much of its giving will be committed to reaching people in your state and around the world through The Cooperative Program. This amount is then forwarded to our State Baptist Convention.

These gifts are used by SBC entities to send and support missionaries, train pastors, and other ministry leaders; provide relief for retired ministers and widows; and address social, moral, and ethical concerns relating to our faith and families.

The impact when you give to the church goes to reach far beyond what we can ever do on our own.

While we wish everyone would embrace their calling to live sent, however, sadly, the church often believes that missions are reserved for only a few instead of the entire body of believers. And yet we see the call to be sent is an adventure for everyone!

What are some common reasons people might offer as their justification for not going as missionaries themselves? Why is being sent to our community just as valuable as being sent across the world? How can your group begin to live out the call to be sent?

How should our identity as a church of being "sent" affect how we live every day?

TRANSITION: Separating from a church, leaving family behind, and going to a new land makes being a sent missionary hard enough, but it is even more difficult when the gospel starts to affect the status quo and the culturally-accepted norms where you are sent. This is what happened to Paul and Barnabas in Lystra.

2. God sustains missionaries through opposition and suffering. Acts 14:8-20.

Have a volunteer to read Acts 14:8-20.

8 In Lystra a man was sitting who was without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth. 9 He listened as Paul spoke. After looking directly at him and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 Paul said in a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet!" And he jumped up and began to walk around.

11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!

"12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought bulls and wreaths to the gates because he intended, with the crowds, to offer sacrifice.

14 The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting: 15 "People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own way, 17 although he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy." 18 Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.

19 Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. 20 After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

What happened in verses 8-10?

As Paul preached the gospel in Lystra, a man who was lame and who had never walked sat listening. Paul took notice of him and saw that he had faith to be healed. The language indicates a sort of supernatural understanding by Paul. Paul called for him to stand, and the man jumped up and began walking around! However, this created quite a problem for Paul and Barnabas.

How did the people respond to the healing of the lame man?

When the crowds saw what had happened, the people began to praise Paul and Barnabas in their own language, declaring they were gods who had come down in human form. Lystra was located in a region of the world in which, according to legend, Zeus and Hermes had visited the earth and were greeted only by a pauper and his house was blessed. So they saw Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes and they didn't want to miss an opportunity to be blessed. This distinction was made because Paul was the vocal messenger of the two in the same way Hermes was the messenger god. The local priest to Zeus intended to offer sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul.

How was Saul's gospel message the same from previous sermons and how was it different?

Consider the content of the gospel message as well from Saul and Barnabas in verses 15-17. In previous encounters where the crowd listening were mainly Jewish, the message reflected how Christ came to be the Messiah. In this message, Saul and Barnabas go back to creation and demonstrate how Jesus Christ as the Son of God came to provide the ultimate sacrifice. We have to remember to share the gospel where people are and not where we think they are. Some may have a basic understanding of the Bible but no knowledge of salvation, while others have never heard the name of Jesus and we are introducing Him completely.

What opposition arose for Paul and Barnabas?

They attempted to show the crowd that they were ordinary men while highlighting the extraordinary God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. Then some Jews with harmful intent came from Paul and Barnabas' previous stop on their journey. They won over the crowd and turned them against Paul and Barnabas, going so far as to stone Paul, leaving him for dead. Paul was stubbornly courageous though. After the disciples gathered around him, no doubt to take him and bury him, he got back up and went right back into town.

How did Paul embrace the suffering that came from sharing the gospel?

In verse 20, Paul went back into the city and prepared to leave the next day. Paul could have easily asked to go to another city, but he went right back to the place where he was opposed. Paul demonstrated that he embraced the suffering that was to come from sharing the gospel. Then after going to Derbe, Paul came back to encourage the believers again in Lystra. What a powerful testimony of standing in the face of opposition!

Why do we run away from suffering instead of embracing it in our lives?

Through the innovations of our culture, we live in the age of convenience that rejects inconvenience. Though there are innovations that do increase our quality of life, we end up rejecting anything in our lives that brings about pain and suffering. Suffering is equated with inconvenience and therefore we end up rejecting it in our lives. When we are called to live for Christ, we must be willing to embrace the suffering that comes from living sent. To reject suffering is to not embrace the identity that Christ demonstrated and calls for us!

How does our experiencing hardship and suffering advance the gospel? What is a way that your group can embrace hardship to advance the gospel?

TRANSITION: Paul and Barnabas went from Lystra to make disciples of Jesus in Derbe. Then, as they traveled on their way back to Antioch, the two missionaries made the rounds back through the cities where they had previously been.

3. God strengthens His church through missionary efforts. Acts 14:21-28.

Have a volunteer to read Acts 14:21-28.

21 After they had preached the gospel in that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 They passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 After they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed back to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 After they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported everything God had done with them and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28And they spent a considerable time with the disciples.

What purposes do you see in these verses for the purpose of their trip?

First, Paul and Barnabas wanted to strengthen the new believers in each city with the encouragement to endure, for living by faith would not be easy in an Empire that would grow increasingly antagonistic toward the Christian faith.

Second, Paul and Barnabas wanted to assure the churches that they could count on troubles—the primary reason why the churches needed to be encouraged. Jesus had predicted that His followers would be hated and persecuted for His sake (John 15:18-25). Now Paul and Barnabas were echoing that promise, having experienced it firsthand on their journey.

In verse 22, the word that is translated as “encouraging” comes from the same root as one of the terms used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26). One of the Holy Spirit’s ministries to believers is empowering us for faithful service to God. We see this in the Book of Acts through the Spirit’s empowering believers to perform miracles (2:4; 6:5,8) and to preach the gospel with boldness (4:8,31; 6:10). We also see this more broadly through the Spirit’s giving of gifts to the church so that the church can carry out its mission to advance the gospel.

Likewise, the purpose of our encouragement to other believers should have increasingly faithful living for Christ in mind. We step into other believers’ lives to come alongside them and call them and push them to continue in the faith—faith that manifests itself tangibly in everyday life.

What are some ways you have been encouraged by someone else and you were able to act in faith?

What are some ways that your group can encourage a current missionary and help them to keep sharing the gospel? How can you teach the next generation what it means to embrace a life of being sent? What would it look like in your life to encourage others?

APPLICATION

Christ followers are called to live as sent no matter the when, where, and what situation we find ourselves placed within and this is a call that moves beyond our comfy lives here, dies to self, and goes to share the gospel!

What does this look like in our lives?

1. Embrace the adventure.

Sadly, too many Christians (especially men) live as bored believers. They go through life doing the checklist of Christianity instead of going for the challenge of taking the next step in spiritual growth! We have a measure where we ask; is my yes on the table? This story teaches us that the gospel reframes not only our beliefs but our adventures are to be found in living for Jesus every day!

Consider what may be a next step of adventure that you need to take in your walk with Christ that is beyond what you think or imagine.

2. Embrace the uncomfortable.

To live as someone that is adventurous for Christ and with your yes on the table means there are going to be some uncomfortable situations to arise as you will live differently in the world. Your thoughts will change, your motivations will change, your family will change, but it is all for the glory of God. It may even require us to talk to our neighbors and not just go in the house and close the doors.

Consider what may be some difficult situations you may encounter living for Jesus this week. Talk about how living for Christ far outweighs any momentary inconveniences you may encounter.

3. Expect opposition and difficulties.

Saul and Barnabas knew as they went that there was going to be opposition. They knew that there would be people to not listen to everything they say or embrace the gospel, yet they remained true and encouraged others as they went.

Share how you could celebrate as a group when opposition arises from sharing the gospel that gives glory to God.

Quotes and Commentary:

Acts 13:1-3

“The congregation continued fasting. Here Luke introduces praying (though surely they had been doing this all along). They commissioned the chosen two with the laying on of hands and ‘sent them off,’ an interesting word (*apelysan*) which means ‘to release them from their duties’ at Antioch. What a joyous passage. Willing workers released by a worshiping congregation through a wise procedure. No apostles were present—the sending of the first missionaries was a people project.”³

–Kenneth O. Gangel

“God isn’t looking for people of great faith, but for individuals ready to follow Him.”⁵

–J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)

Acts 14:8-20

“The response of Paul and Barnabas to the attempt to worship them provides a window into their character and their motivations. They are exemplary missionaries who reject all praise and give glory to God alone. They keep Jesus as the point of their message even when they had an opportunity to gain fame and renown. Their rejection of praise ultimately leads to their being rejected and nearly killed (v. 19). Persecution for faithfulness is a common result of ministry, and the willingness of Paul and Barnabas to endure such suffering is evidence for their truthful witness.”⁶

–Darrell Bock

“ ‘But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city’ ...Here the saying is fulfilled, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ This is greater than the raising of the lame man!...‘He entered the city.’ Do you see his zeal? Do you see

how fervent he is, how set on fire? He entered the city itself again, to show that if he should ever withdraw, it is because he had sown the word and did not wish to inflame their anger.”^z

–John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

Acts 14:21-28

“One way of strengthening the churches was making provision for leadership in them. In each of them there were some members who had already attained a sufficient degree of spiritual maturity to serve their fellow-believers as guides and give them the further instruction and encouragement they required in face of the hardship and persecution which they must expect as they maintained their Christian witness. It is held by many readers of Acts that the formal appointment of elders reflects the later situation of the Pastoral Epistles rather than this early stage in apostolic history. The language may be Luke’s, but it is plain from Paul’s letters that he made provision for spiritual guidance in the churches which he founded and encouraged the members to recognize and respect their leaders. What Barnabas’s policy in this matter was we have no independent means of knowing. It has more than once been pointed out that more recent missionary policy would have thought it dangerously idealistic to recognize converts of only a few weeks’ standing as leaders in their churches; perhaps Paul and Barnabas were more conscious of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the believing communities.”⁹

–F. F. Bruce

“God does rescue the holy from affliction, but he does so not by rendering them untested but by blessing them with endurance. For if ‘affliction brings about endurance, then endurance brings about an approved character.’ Whoever rejects affliction deprives himself of approval. Just as none is crowned who has no rival, so none can be pronounced worthy except through tribulations. Therefore, ‘he snatched me from all my tribulations,’ not by allowing me not to be afflicted but by granting with the test a way out, in order to be able to endure.”¹¹

–Basil the Great (circa 329-379)