

THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH - The Issue of Sending

Introduction

1. It makes sense, if knowing Christ and making Him known is our greatest responsibility and privilege, then we will be busy about that task. If we are not working at it we either do not know, or we have forgotten, who Christ is and what He has done, and we have failed to see the hopelessness of the world without Christ. We must give ourselves to knowing Christ and making Him known!
2. As we gather together as a local church, we should be working together to build each other up so that together we will know Him better and we will be more adequately equipped to make Him increasingly known. Singularly we are a light in the darkness and we should be shining that light. Together, we are a beacon of light, pushing back the darkness, as we continue to know Him and to make Him known.
3. Marketplace evangelism is making Christ known where we work and live and go to school. The people you encounter may never have reason to attend this local church, but they know you and you are the key to making Christ known to them. (Example of Tom with a contractor and the *Ultimate Question* booklet) In the challenge of that assignment, your family in Christ stands ready to further equip you and encourage you to remain at the task. Literally in this building this morning we have access to thousands of people – a large majority who remain in darkness. The potential we have is enormous and very exciting! If even 20% of the professing believers in a 50 mile radius were committed to knowing Christ and making Him known, there would be virtually no one from Chicago to Milwaukee who would be left without a clear picture and an articulate testimony concerning Jesus! Rather than beat ourselves up and bemoan what could be, let's simply be obedient to the call and see what God will do! Again, it is about knowing Him and making Him known!
4. We are still left with a significant problem, however, in our call to know Christ and to make Him known. Unlike this area or perhaps even this country, there are many communities and villages and cities and entire countries around the world that have little or no proclamation of the Gospel. It is not a matter of urging silent Christians to speak out; there simply are no Christians to make Christ known! In the words of Paul,

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? Those are good, practical questions.

5. The early church addressed those matters by establishing a pattern that ought to be followed by us. I wish to elaborate a little before we turn to the text before us (Acts 13). The church not only has the obligation to equip its people to know Christ and to make Him known, but the church also is called to send various ones beyond the borders of their influence so that Christ may be known where He is not now known. If the church is to be a sending unit, then that church must be committed to making Christ known **everywhere** and the people of that church must be open to going **anywhere** in order to see the task accomplished!
6. What kind of church does that? Allow me to introduce you to the text before us.

I. THE KIND OF CHURCH THAT SENDS PEOPLE TO MAKE CHRIST KNOWN

A. An active, effective church

1. Acts 11:19-30 provide us with a wonderful description of how the church at Antioch got started. Persecution had moved believers further and further away from Jerusalem. Up to this time, most efforts in evangelism were toward the Jews, but in Antioch believers began to reach out to the Greeks. The results were amazing!
2. The good reports prompted the church in Jerusalem to send Barnabas to check it out. Here is what he found when he got there (11:23-24). He was so excited by what he saw, that he went looking for Saul and brought him to Antioch as well. For a whole year together they taught the church.
3. The make-up of the church is quite fascinating according to 13:1. There were a variety of backgrounds and races. One of the people had even been reared in King Herod's household. There were prophets and teachers and now joining them were Barnabas and Paul! Many were coming to faith in the Lord through that ministry (11:24). Though probably the term Christian was coined by their enemies, it was in Antioch that believers were first called Christians – "little Christs", and they wore the name as a badge of honor. If one must be called a name, it must have been encouraging the even the enemy identified these believers with Jesus! And clearly, teaching was a priority in the Church in Antioch and the church was

responding well to it. James Boice writes, *Greeks did not like Romans very much. Romans did not like Greeks. Jews did not like anybody. The rich despised the poor, and the poor hated the rich. The educated people looked down on those who were uneducated, and so on. But not in the church at Antioch! The five names of teachers tell an enormous amount about the church.* It certainly was an active, effective ministry.

B. A serious, obedient church

1. Though a young church, the assembly in Antioch was concerned about the needs of the church beyond their immediate area. A prophet named Agabus came and prophesied about a coming famine. Recognizing that prophecy as a word from God, the church determined to be a blessing and a help to their brothers in Judea. So they collected some money and sent it to the elders of the church in Judea by the hands of Paul and Barnabas. The last verse in chapter 12 records their return to Antioch.
2. That was their response toward the needs of other believers, but we also have a brief record of their devotion to the Lord. The church was a worshiping church and a fasting church. Generally fasting is a mark of deep spiritual concern. To set aside eating for a time in order to focus particular attention on the Lord and His will is a mark of serious commitment. It was during one of these times of worship that God began to make known to them His will and purpose in regard to making Him known. Though the text is brief on the details, the Holy Spirit made clear to the church that it was to set apart two men, Paul and Barnabas to make Christ known where He was not known. This church responded obediently to the call of God and immediately made the arrangements to send Paul and Barnabas on their way! (Are we that kind of a church? As individuals consider making Christ known outside our immediate area, will we be ready to set them apart and send them on their way? That was true in part with the Mosers and the Mbandis and the Lovings and the Galloways. It was not easy to say goodbye to any of them but it is appropriate for God to call the best to make Him known)!

II. THE KIND OF PEOPLE THAT GO TO MAKE CHRIST KNOWN

A. Growing, serving, serious people

1. Barnabas had the reputation of being an encourager. He also had a track record

of seeing the people that God could use for His glory, even when others might not see the same thing. It was Barnabas who saw in Paul a servant of Christ and he took the risk of introducing him to the Christian community. Acts 9:28-31 provides the fascinating account. The result was that the church throughout Judea and Samaria and Galilee was being built up!

2. Both Barnabas and Paul had been active in ministry already and had apparently just returned from a good will mission of hand carrying funds to the church in Judea. They had demonstrated their love for God and their love for the Lord's church. Those are the kinds of people who go to make Christ known!

B. Humble, faithful, fearless people

1. Going places where others have not gone and sharing truth that others have never heard, calling people to an exclusive relationship with a message about a man who claimed to be God and who had been crucified as a criminal but had been raised from the dead and had bodily ascended into heaven, required a certain type of person.
2. Such a one must be humble enough to accept the truth of the Gospel and be a selfless follower of Jesus. That person must also be faithful enough to endure making Christ known even though it was almost guaranteed that the very proclamation of the Good News would stir violent controversy. So such a person would need to be fearless before men in order to be faithful before God! Barnabas and Paul both had demonstrated in smaller ways these characteristics. Both men were humble servants who were bold in their declaration of Christ!

C. Available, obedient, passionate people

1. Barnabas sought after Paul because he believed this would be good for the church. Paul and Barnabas spent an entire year faithfully teaching the church at Antioch in order that the church might know Christ and make Him known. It was clear that they were passionate about Christ and they were passionate about His church.
2. When God chooses people for His work, He most often calls those who are already active in serving Him. He chooses people who have already demonstrated their faithful obedience in smaller responsibilities. (Kent Hughes, Acts . p. 178 – *There is a cost to sincere service for Christ. Never share your faith and you will never look like*

a fool. Never stand for righteousness on a social issue and you will never be rejected. Never walk out of a theater because a movie or play is offensive and you will never be called a prig. Never practice consistent honesty in business and you will not lose the trade of a not-so-honest associate. Never reach out to the needy and you will never be taken advantage of. Never give your heart and it will never be broken. Never go to Cyprus and you will never be subjected to a dizzy, heart-convulsing confrontation with Satan. Seriously follow Christ and you will experience a gamut of sorrows almost completely unknown to the unbeliever. But of course you will also know the joy of adventure with the Lord of the universe and of spiritual victory as you live a life of allegiance to him).

III. THE KIND OF CHURCH THAT DEVELOPS A CULTURE OF MAKING CHRIST KNOWN

A. A church that was accustomed to hearing what God said

1. Before the NT was completed, God used the ministry of the Apostles and Prophets to make known His will. The people at Antioch were blessed to have in their midst various people who were prophets. They believed, appropriately so, that these prophets spoke for God and the church was listening to what God said.
2. The era of the prophets and apostles has passed. The NT has been completed. God has made His will and purposes known, not just to select groups or individuals, but now to all of us through His written Word! We no longer need to wait for a prophet to come to our church. We have God's Word right here, right now.
3. The church that develops the culture of making Christ known is the church that is accustomed to hearing God speak and treating what He says as what it is, God's revelation to us! Blessed is the church that will respond: "This is what God says. This is what the Word means. This is what we will do."

B. A church that was obedient to do what God directed

1. It is difficult to know for sure the amount of time that passed from verse 3 to verse 4 – from being sent to actually going. Surely there must have been a little time of preparation, but it does not appear like much! God said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." And the church laid hands on them and sent them off!
2. It appears that when various ones were sent out by the church, the church accepted the responsibility to get them to where they were going. They supplied

the support necessary. (Remember in 3 John how the Apostle John commended Gaius for his ministry to the itinerate missionaries and reminded him and the church of which he was a part to “send them on their way in a manner worthy of God”). That was the response of the Antioch church!

C. A church that was serious about knowing Christ and making Him known

1. The church wonderfully enters into a partnership with the Holy Spirit in the sending of believers to make Christ known where He is not known. Verse 3 tells us that the church sent them off. Verse 4 tells us the Holy Spirit sent them. There is no contradiction. The Holy Spirit chose them and marked them out. The church obediently set them apart and sent them on their way at the direction of the Holy Spirit fully outfitted for the task. If a church does not care about making Christ known, it will not bother to send people out.
2. It costs enormous amounts of money to send others to make Christ known. It takes those people away from us when they are sent out. Their fellowship with us, and their ministry to us, is sacrificed. And to send them to places where Christ is not known is to send them into dangerous places where they might experience pain or suffering or hardship or even death. On that first journey Paul and Barnabas started out to Cyprus (130 miles by sea), working their way 90 miles throughout the island. It was not long until they encountered some serious trouble with opposition. They got back in a boat and traveled 175 miles by sea into Asia Minor to such cities as Attalia and Perga and Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and Lystra and Derbe. They endured opposition and accusation and persecution and misunderstanding and even violent attempts on their lives (Paul was even stoned and left for dead) – but they were making Christ known! Just listen to this – (Acts 14:19-23).
3. Finally they made their way back to Antioch, the sending church. This is what happened (Acts 14:26-28).

Conclusion

1. Over the past three weeks we have observed the church on mission. As believers in Christ we are called to know Christ and to make Him known. As we gather together for worship and instruction, we encourage each other to know Christ and to make Him known and we work together building each other up in Christ Jesus. But we must also be involved in the proclamation of the Gospel in places that are beyond our reach in

our normal trek of daily life. So we seek God's will for us, and either we must be among the sent or among the senders. If we are truly on mission, we will do what He commands and this is what God is calling us to do!

2. There are far too many believers who remain home and far too few who make Christ known where He is not yet known. Who will go? And when God lays His hand on these chosen vessels, will the church be ready to support them by sending them? If we name the name of Christ, we all have a part in knowing Him and making Him known. And we all have a part in building up the body. And we all have a part in seeing that the Gospel is declared around the world for the glory of Christ.
3. Not everyone can go, but all should consider it. Not everyone will be set apart to go, but all can participate in the sending process. But all of us who name the name of Christ are without excuse when it comes to knowing Christ and making Him known. And as we are faithful at the task, He just might open the door wider and move us out further. Let's just be the kind of believers we ought to be and the kind of church we ought to be and watch how God works for His glory in making Himself known!