



A Sermon Outline for National Sports Sunday, with committed Christians in mind

'Ministry beyond the Church': Acts 13 verses 1 to 5

Introduction:

Read Acts 13 verses 1-5.

In the 'Acts of the Apostles', the second volume of Doctor Luke's two books about Jesus and the early church, we read of the followers of Jesus sharing their faith with others. That began in Jerusalem, but was spread much further due to the persecution of the early believers who were scattered far and wide. (See end of Chapter 7 and the start of Chapter 8) However, the incident recorded in chapter 13 is hugely significant in the history of the early church. Here is the start of St Paul's three missionary journeys, and it began not as a response to religious opposition, but as an obedient response to God's clear directions to leaders of the church in Antioch.

So we look at Acts 13 verses 1 to 5.

Praying: Verses 1-2

Five very different people – ethnically, educationally, socially and in terms of religious background – were seeking God together. This united group were worshipping, fasting and praying. The beginnings of the three great missionary journeys of St Paul, which transformed the Roman world, began in a prayer gathering.

Let us never underestimate the church's need for seeking after their Lord. It was in the context of seeking God that the group heard God's guidance.

Hearing and Obeying: Verses 2-3

The Holy Spirit spoke into that gathering, 'set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work *to which I have called them.*' This seems to imply that there has already been a sense of God's call on these two, and here God's message is more one of 'now is the time to send them out'. The group fast and pray



again, presumably to ensure they are hearing correctly what God is calling them to do. Then they commission the two to go. Here is hearing and obeying! God had made His will clear, and the Antioch church obeyed.

The principle of doing what God wants us to do is vital for both individuals and for churches. No church can engage in everything that might be good and helpful. Yet each church can be faithful in doing what God has particularly called it to do. Hearing and obeying are key principles for churches in the 21st century, too

Sacrificing: Verse 3

Arguably Barnabas and Saul were the most important of the Antioch church leaders. When the Christian community began there (Acts 11 v 19) the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11 vs. 22-24) to encourage and pastor the embryonic church. And later, Barnabas brought Saul to the church (11 vs. 25-26) to help nurture this young Christian community. These two were key to the establishing of the Christian community in Antioch. Despite their importance there, the church willingly sent them off to fulfil God's purposes. They gave their most valued, most important leaders away to enable them to fulfil God's plans.

Our call is to see God's kingdom grow, not just *'our church'* grow. Antioch here sacrificed their best people to facilitate God's plans. 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done' is a challenging prayer to pray!

Initiating: Verse 3

This is God at work. They are not copying what worked well in another Christian community, nor implementing an idea they'd heard about in a church leaders' conference!! God initiated this. God called them (13 v 2) and sent them on their way (13 v. 4) This was a work of God, a new work of God! The church today must move forward with God. This may mean we are guided to new forms of mission and ministry which meet God's plans for today's situations. And maybe some of those from earlier generations need prayerful re-evaluation.

God was taking the church beyond the community of the church!



The Holy Spirit was clearly directing these new believers in Christ to work beyond their normal environments and their comfort zones.

And today it is important that Christian Churches grasp the significance of working for God in the wider world, and know how and where this might be to further God's plans and purposes.

Invading: Verses 4-5

In Acts 13 the church begins to invade the world beyond the church, not because of being pressured into the wider world due to persecution, but because of God's clear call to serve Him in mission beyond the church walls.

In Acts 1, verses 6-9, at the Ascension, Jesus tells the disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The rest of Acts traces that journey, and Acts 13 is a significant step on the way. God wants His people serving Him both in the structures of His Church and in the wider world. We are to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in the world. See Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 vs. 13 – 16. God's people are to be as salt and light in a tasteless and dark world.

Applying: Acts 13 vs. 1-5

Christian leaders in Antioch were willing to serve God in the church and to witness to God in the world. The world in which we equally should serve God is to be more than a geographical concept. As well as locations there are other worlds – such as the worlds of education, medicine, street-people, science, music, the broken and needy, the media and more – all of these need the touch of God's love in Christ. Especially today, as we highlight the world of sports, we should think of the needs and opportunities of those who belong to the community of sport.

The sports worlds, both amateur and professional, interest huge numbers of people in our country. The kids' teams, the gym, the sports club, and professional clubs that fans follow all claim the time and interest of so many in our culture.



Do our churches see the significance of sports ministry in our current society? Just as the Antioch church did something new and different under God's hand, maybe the church today needs to hear God's direction about opportunities through sports.

Some churches run coaching groups for kids; or lads' and dads' sports nights; or ladies' keep fit classes; or walking football groups for over-50s; or teens' and ladies' netball; or fell walking groups. Some churches send staff and leaders to do chaplaincy training so that sports chaplaincy in local amateur clubs or even at higher levels, becomes part of the church's servant ministry. What is vital is that churches do what God leads them to do, and it is led by wise and sound Christian people. Mission is more than an activity, it is an attitude. We need to look outwards as well as inwards.

Through sports, a church can build bridges with various local communities, so extending its 'fringe'; through sports, community care and service can be developed and fostered; through sports, the essential Christian message can be explained; and through sport an open door can be established for contact with people who from time to time may value genuine Christian friendship, help and support. I know of at least a couple of churches who have written above their exit doors, something like 'this way out to serve the Lord in the world outside'.

Is there a Barnabas or a Saul in our congregation today whom God is calling to a new expression of ministry in or through sports? Would you be salt and light in the world of sport? The community of sports needs caring, helpful, sensitive Christian involvements. Is God calling you?

There are leaflets and magazines available for you to take and pray over if you are interested. If God has spoken to you, do follow up the possibilities!

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