

Text: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-4 (NIV)

Series: Missions Sermons

Title: Jesus is building a sending church

Date: March 30, 2008 (Commissioning of Mexico Mission team)

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

### **The Church of Antioch is our home church.**

Jesus told his disciples: **“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)**

The church in Jerusalem took care of Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria – missions from Jerusalem covered the home ground

BUT it was the mission begun in the church in Antioch that took the Gospel “to the ends of the earth.”

And that’s where First Baptist, Olds, comes into the picture.

From Acts 13 to the end of the book the story shifts from the home ground of the Gospel, from Jerusalem & Palestine, to the ends of the earth, from Antioch, to Athens, to Rome & points in between and beyond!

The remaining chapters of the Book of Acts tells the story of Paul’s mission to the non-Jewish peoples of the world – three missionary journeys that circle the Mediterranean world, sharing the Gospel of Jesus in Jewish synagogues, Roman amphitheatres, Greek marketplaces, homes, businesses, riversides, prisons – wherever he can get a hearing for the message about Jesus!

And every one of his three journeys began at the church in Antioch.

Antioch was a great place from which to launch a mission to the world.

Located in modern day Turkey just in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, it was the third largest city in the Roman world, after Rome & Alexandria in Egypt. It was the Roman HQ in the east, the launching pad for Roman expeditions and trade with the East. The road system & mail system – the shipping routes – all developed by Imperial Rome for commerce & conquest, made Antioch a key, strategic centre for communication.

Antioch was also a city with a diverse population. In its population of over 300,000 Greeks, Macedonians, Syrians, Jews & Romans all mixed in her streets. Contacts could be made with virtually every part of the Roman Empire in the streets of that city. It was the perfect place to begin a church that could carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It was a perfect place to begin a church that could break down the ethnic barriers, the “dividing wall of hostility” that existed

between Jews & the rest of the world. As long as someone was brave enough to make the first step! The church could have stayed within the Jewish population. It's estimated that there were between 25,000 and 40,000 Jews in the city.

But it was also a desperate place, spiritually. Antioch was well-known in the Roman world for the worship of the goddess Daphne, a worship that involved mass public immorality and drunkenness. Even pagan Roman writers complained of the corrupting influence of Antioch on Rome.

And it was in this strategic, bustling, immoral city that God raised up a church to fulfill the mission of taking the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth. The church in Antioch could have stayed home – there was lots of work to do in Antioch, but instead, it reached out to the world!

We need to take lessons from this church. What happened here is not simply interesting information – it's a model for us! The commission to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth is still in force – it's not completed yet!

How do I know that? Because we're still here!

Jesus said: **“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14)**

Once the Gospel has been taken to the ends of the earth, to every nation, to the whole world – then history is over! Jesus will return, the final judgment will occur and we'll be in heaven worshipping the Lamb!

But we're still here this morning because the job is still unfinished!

From the very first contact I had with this church, the Lord has laid on my heart the conviction that we are to be a sending church. What do I mean? That we are to be a church that sends people out to finish the task that Jesus gave us to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

I am very honoured to be associated with the group of people who make up the FBC missions family! Excuse me for a moment while I brag on them!

- For many years we've been partners with Alan & Caulene Bussard & Integra Mission in Eastern Europe as they bring a salt & light ministry among the people of post-communist societies.
- For a number years we've been involved with Rod & Beth Johnson and also with [another couple] in the work of Wycliffe Bible Translators, translating God's Word into the heart language of people around the world.
- Ron & Sharon Harris are our CBM Partners In Mission and although their only quarter time now, their pastoral support ministry in India is still bearing fruit.

- Roman & Tatiana Panachenko, and now Vladimir & Anna Kalinin are our church-planters in Millerevo, Russia, and together they are doing a fabulous work!
- Troy & Naomi Johnstone & John Krajec are our partners serving with Good Seed in the production of evangelistic & disciple-making material that is being used to bring people to know Christ around the world.
- Troy & Kirstin Taylor in Lethbridge and now Katie Housek here in Olds, are working to share Christ with university & college students and to equip them in turn to share Christ.
- Bob McKenzie and the staff at Shalom Counselling in Red Deer are also part of our missions family in their work of bringing God's healing into the lives of broken people.
- And we have a new member of our FBC missions family who will be introduced to you in the next few weeks. Peter & Areni Ritchie work in Angola with SIM, doing literacy work so that people will be able to read the Bible as it is being translated into their heart language.

But this isn't all that God is doing through us! I haven't even mentioned the short-term missions with which we're involved.

This morning we've prayed God's blessing upon this great Mexico Mission team as they prepare to leave next Sunday morning for a week of ministry in Tijuana. But there is so much more!

We've supported Pastor Norm & Renate in their educational work with the church in Russia. Our Knitters for Romania are sending blankets & quilts that literally touch the lives of orphans in that country. Last Sunday, Katie Housek shared her burden with us for the people of Mongolia and her plans to spend several weeks doing evangelism there. Next Sunday two of our people are going to share with us their burden for an orphanage in Brazil and their plan to spend some time there this summer caring for those kids. In two weeks, on April 13, Sima Mpofu is organizing an African dinner to tell us about her concern for AIDS orphans in her home country of Zimbabwe.

People, it is a privilege to be involved with a church that is asking God, "what do you want us to do?" and then does it!

What kind of church is "a sending church"? Let's look at Antioch. Let's use them as a model of what a sending church should look like and let's compare ourselves against it. I think when we do that we'll see why God is using us as a base from which He is sending people out into mission. And I believe that the more intentional we become about being a sending church, the more He is going to use us.

**First, a sending church is a church of ordinary people with an extraordinary vision.**

**“Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 11:20)**

This is one of the central events in the history of Christianity, and it gets only a passing mention. This was the beginning of the mission to the ends of the earth – right here in Antioch.

Up to now in the story of Acts, the followers of Jesus were only slowly beginning to catch the vision that Jesus left with them in chapter 1. Chapters 2 to 7 tell us that they were effectively reaching Jerusalem & Judea with the Gospel – thousands had been saved. In chapter 8, as a result of the scattering caused by the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, Philip had taken the Gospel to Samaria. And finally in Acts 10 & 11, Peter’s ministry to Cornelius in Caesarea cracked open the door to the Gentiles, but very reluctantly.

- Philip’s ministry to the Samaritans was to a nation that was half-Jewish.
- Peter’s ministry to Cornelius had come because of Cornelius’ invitation.
- But here in Antioch, for the very first time, Jewish believers in Jesus intentionally shared the Gospel with non-Jews on their own initiative. They finally got what Jesus meant when He commissioned them to be His witnesses to the “ends of the earth.”

And we don’t even know their names! We only know that they were Jews from the island of Cyprus and from Cyrene in North Africa.

They were ordinary followers of Jesus who simply took seriously what Jesus had said and did it!

Jesus had told them:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus had told them:

“The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:46-48)

Jesus had told them:

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

They heard it and did it! They caught Jesus' vision for the world!

You and I are ordinary people. History probably won't record our names, or even where we're from – but God will! You can be sure that the names of each and every one of these people in Antioch are recorded in God's books! The things that you and I do for Jesus and the spread of the Gospel will never be forgotten.

All we need to do is obey. Jesus calls us to the task of telling the world. What are you doing to fulfill that commission?

**You can give** – financially assisting those involved in the task.

**You can pray** – supporting the people doing the task by lifting them up to God.

**You can go** – being the person on the frontline, carrying the message of Jesus.

Which will it be?

**Second, a sending church has a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.**

**“When [Barnabas] arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.” (Acts 11:23)**

The Jerusalem church wisely sent Barnabas, a man we're told in Acts 4:36 who was known for his big heart and desire to encourage others, to check on what was happening in Antioch. And he was delighted with what he saw! When he walked into the Church of Antioch, he could tell that God was with them. I want you to notice some important words with me.

It tells us in verse 21 that **“a great number of people believed [the good news about Jesus] and turned to the Lord.”**

At the end of his missionary career, the apostle Paul summarized his the message he preached with these words: “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26:20)

When people “turn to the Lord” it means that their lives are changed – Barnabas could see the “evidence of the grace of God” in the forgiven and changed lives of the people of the church of Antioch.

And he wasn't the only one – the citizens of Antioch could see the change. In fact, the connection of the believers with Jesus was so much a part of their lives that the citizens of Antioch gave them a nickname: **“Christiani.”** (11:26)  
 “Belonging to Christ,” “Christ followers,” “of the household of Christ.”

When they spoke about Jesus, the community knew that their lives matched their message – their walk and their talk were together.

To be a church that makes an impact for Jesus, whether it's in Olds or around the world, we need to have a dynamic life-changing relationship with Jesus.

It's our walk that gives power to our talk.

Cf. Survivors winner "Vecepia"

- Proclaiming her Christian faith constantly
- BUT what her fellow-competitors pointed to was her constant breaking of her promises
- "I just needed to ask for forgiveness"
- Her words about Jesus lost power – because her life wasn't in line with her message.

What nickname would the people of Olds attach to us? I pray that they see us as dedicated, committed followers of Christ.

**Third, a sending church is grounded in the truth of God's Word.**

**"So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people." (Acts 11:26)**

When Barnabas saw the evidence of the grace of God in the changed lives of the people in Antioch, he challenged them to "remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." (v.23)

He knew that the only way they were going to maintain the integrity of their lives was if held on to Jesus with all their might! And the only way they were going to do that was if they got the Word of God deep into their minds and hearts.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 that we are "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind." The writer of the Psalms speaks about the transforming power of God's Word in our lives: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)

Some years ago I was talking with one of the prisoners at Bowden who was struggling with the renewal of his mind – there are many attitudes that need to change if he is going to live without re-offending once he's released. Whenever the staff challenged his ability to cope with life on the outside, he always responded, "But I've been saved by the blood of Jesus!" It struck me after I talked with this man – as far as I know, Scripture doesn't say that the blood of Christ renews our minds. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin, it washes away our guilt and sin. But there's a reconstruction work that's needed to make us live like new people, and that's the work of the Spirit & the Word.

That's why we emphasize the teaching of God's Word here. That's why we put such a strong emphasis on Bible study in our small groups and our Bible school program. God's Word combined with the action of God's Spirit in our lives is what keeps us "true to the Lord."

Is God's Word your spiritual lifeline, keeping you connected to Jesus?

Not only does knowledge of the Word shape our lives as Christians, but it's knowledge of the Word that shapes our mission in the world. How can we know what Jesus wants us to do unless we know His Word?

In Chapter 13, the Spirit spoke to the Church in Antioch and gave a specific word directing them to set Barnabas & Paul out on mission. Without knowledge of the Word of God, how can we discern when we're hearing the Spirit's voice from other voices – our own ideas, or even the voice of the Enemy? We need to know the sound of God's voice and we learn to discern it by spending time in His Word.

How frequently do we turn to God's Word for direction for the church?

How frequently do you turn to God's Word for direction in your life?

Do we know enough of God's Word to discern His voice from all the others?

**Fourth, a sending church recognizes the diversity of spiritual gifts and the value of team ministry.**

**"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch." (Acts 11:25-26)**

Seeing the church's need to be grounded in the Word, Barnabas went looking for a teacher. And he knew just the man – Saul. This is the first pastoral search we find in the Bible.

They had first met almost 10 years before in Jerusalem. Barnabas had introduced Saul to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem when they were very wary of him (Acts 9:27). He knew that God had called Saul to preach the Gospel to Gentiles and Antioch needed a man with his skill and calling. He knew that Saul was well versed in the Jewish traditions but had been raised in a Gentile environment in Tarsus, 200 miles north of Antioch. He knew that Saul was a man of great courage and Antioch was no easy place. He knew that Saul was a skilled teacher, able to respond to both Jewish and pagan counter-claims to the Gospel message.

Saul was the man!

Barnabas the encourager & Saul the teacher – what a combination! What a team!

In addition to Barnabas & Saul, we're told about some of the other leaders in chapter 13 (v.1):

- "Simeon called Niger" – a man with a Roman name who moved in Roman circles
- "Lucius of Cyrene" – from North Africa
- "Manaeen" – a man brought up in the aristocratic world

What a diverse group! But all united by the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When you look at the people in mission connected with our church, you're going to see the same diversity. I won't mention any names, but as I reflected on the people in our missions family, it struck me how God uses such diverse people to accomplish the work of the Kingdom of God!

It takes all kinds of people with all kinds of gifts to accomplish God's mission.

When Jesus sent out his disciples for mission, how did He send them? In two's, as a team! (cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1)

There is strength in numbers, but there is much more!

- there's a greater diversity of gifts
- there's a sharing of the load of work
- there's the balance of another's perspective
- there's mutual encouragement and support
- there's the challenge of mutual submission & correction as "iron sharpens iron"
- there's a humility in the recognition that we need one another – we can't serve the Lord or live for him alone!

A church that builds that "one another" team mentality into the very fabric of its life is a training ground for mission.

When we look to develop ministries here, we look to develop teams of people with varying gifts & perspectives. We do it in our pastoral staff and we do it among throughout the whole church body.

Why? Because that's the way to prepare people to do mission for Jesus, whether its here in Olds or around the world!

**Fifth, a sending church gives sacrificially to meet needs outside it's own walls.**

**"The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea." (Acts 11:29)**

Mission costs!

It costs time and energy, and it costs money!

One thing I know that this church does well is give. Our Mexico Mission needed to raise \$44,000 in a short period of time and it has come in ... AND MORE! And you've done it again and again, whenever the call has gone out. God has provided the need through you. Thank you for giving to the Lord!

As God calls us to send, he will call us to give in order to touch lives beyond the walls of this church.

I love the story the church treasurer in Toronto told us when he was making a special offering appeal.

An elder came to his pastor and said, "Pastor, I need advice. I'm giving the Lord too much of my money and I'm miserable, will you pray for me."

The pastor asked how he could help and the man said, "When I was a teenager and a young Christian I earned \$10 a week and gave \$1 to the Lord as my tithe. Then later as a young man I earned \$40 a week and gave \$4 to the Lord. As I prospered I earned \$150 a week and gave \$15 to the Lord. Now, I earn \$1500 a week and I'm giving too much to the Lord. I'm so unhappy, I can't afford this tithe, please pray for me."

The pastor said, "Let's pray right now." So they knelt together and the pastor prayed, "Lord, bring this dear man back to earning \$40 a week so that he will be happy again in giving his tithe to You."

**Sixth & finally, a sending church prays, listens and obeys, even when it's costly.**

**"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:2-3)**

God had already spoken to Paul ten years before telling him that he was take the Gospel to the non-Jewish people of the world. After 10 years of preparation and waiting, God finally said, "Now."

Cf. Jim Cymbala re "Beyond Volunteerism"

- God is calling people, not asking for volunteers.

**"Barnabas & Saul did not `volunteer.' Neither were they voted in by some council in Antioch. Rather, they were summoned by a message from heaven. The Spirit himself appointed them."**

And he did it through the church. There's beautiful balance here of the personal internal call of God on Paul's life being matched and confirmed by the corporate and public affirmation through the church.

A sending church recognizes the importance of both of those factors:

- 1) the personal call of God to individual believers and
- 2) the confirmation of that call by the church

And anyone truly sent by God will also respect both of those factors.

They must have had a great thing going in Antioch – all that teaching, people being saved, great pastoral leadership in Barnabas & Saul, a church of diverse people.

But when God stepped in and told them to take the two key leaders and send them out on mission, they didn't hesitate!

It might have been tempting to hoard all those great resources to themselves – Antioch was a pretty desperate place, there were thousands who still needed the Gospel.

But God had spoken.

It doesn't tell us how God made His will known to them. It simply says that while they were worshipping the Lord & fasting (usually a practice that accompanied intense prayer), the Holy Spirit spoke:

- there were prophets there and perhaps one of them received a message from the Lord that he shared with the congregation
- perhaps the Lord spoke to several people while they were praying

However it came to them, they confirmed the word before they acted on it – they “fasted and prayed” and then sent them off.

Are we listening for the Lord's direction for mission?

Do we understand our role as a church in confirming what God is saying to His servants?

Do you understand the role of the church in helping you to determine whether God is calling you into ministry?

Are we willing to send our best into the work of mission anywhere in the world?

I like the words of David Livingstone, the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to Africa: “**God had only one son and He was a missionary.**”

And God calls us to follow Him.

**Has God called us to be missionaries?**

- **Across the hall?**
- **Across the street?**
- **Across the country?**

- **Across the ocean?**  
**Which is it for you?**

Closing Song: From the Sun's Rising