

Series Title: FOR ALL PEOPLE: A Journey through the Book of Acts, Part 7- The Original Road Trip

Sermon Title: Week 1: By land or by sea

Scripture: Acts 12:24-25, 13:1-3

Date: 05-09-21

† The Holy Spirit said...

- *Have you ever heard the voice of God?*
- *Not audible- but a time when for some reason you have said “God told me this”... “The Spirit said this”*
- *Maybe you’ve heard other people say something like that- In Christian culture people tend to throw such statements around pretty easily*
 - *God told me/us to do something- or if we do THIS, then God would do THAT*
 - *God is leading us to take this step... God has revealed this to us*
- *A little more subtle- in ministry we like to take what WE are doing, and say that it is what GOD is doing- “Support us as we are doing God’s work”... OR, when things don’t work out, we often say “It must not have been what God was doing”*

- *BUT, how do we KNOW we have heard from God? That’s an incredibly profound thing to say, isn’t it? How DO we hear from God? (Lots of books that will tell you how).... What does it MEAN, LOOK LIKE to be led by the Holy Spirit? I’ve heard LOTS of people say they were being led by the Holy Spirit, I haven’t always been sure- how would you even answer that?*

- *TODAY, I am NOT going to answer those question? If anyone tells you they definitively KNOW the answer to those questions, I advise you to treat them with caution.*

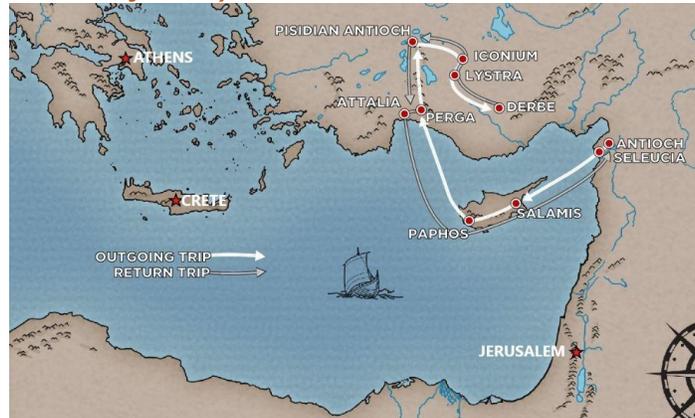
- *That said, start with TWO THOUGHTS*
 - *FIRST, to claim you have heard the voice of God, heard what the Spirit said, is a tremendously weighty thing, and should not be said lightly.*
 - *SECOND, it is absolutely clear in scripture- specifically the book of Acts, that GOD DOES SPEAK. By His word and through His Spirit, God does take initiative and leadership in the work of his Kingdom, THROUGH his church- meaning, through people like you and me. If He didn’t, then the work of the church would not be the work of God.*
 - *MOREOVER, when God is at work, His purposes WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED.*
 - *And even though we are fallible human beings, when GOD Is at work through us, his purposes will not fail!*
- *HOLD THAT THOUGHT! TODAY MOTHERS DAY, MAY 9, TO, PE, Thanks...*

† Acts, Act II

- *We are back in Acts- part 7- we’ve reached the halfway point, ACTS ACT II.*

- *As we move into chapter 13 (tiny bit at end of 12), several significant transitions are taking place*
 - *Its been about 18 years from the Resurrection of Jesus/Birth of the church*
 - *Center of activity has moved from Jerusalem/Israel to Antioch and other cities of the Mediterranean world*
 - *God’s growth of the church moves from being primarily to the Jews, to fully engaging the gentile world*
 - *Principle actors shift from being PETER and the Apostles to Paul, Barnabas, and other leaders in the (loosely) gentile church.*
- *THIS shift in Luke’s narrative begins in Antioch, as the believers there send out Paul and Barnabas on the original ROAD TRIP- Paul’s first missionary journey.*

- **OVERVIEW of Journey- go to the map!**
 - **Antioch is on southern tip of modern day Turkey, near border with Syria- all of the journey takes place in modern turkey, except for two cities on the island of Cyprus.**
 - **On map You can see relationship of this region to Israel, Jerusalem, Greece, and the northern coast of Africa on the bottom.**
 - **Timeframe: A.D. 47ish-49ish (about 1-2 years)**
 - **Distance Traveled: +/- 1,400 miles (about 800 by land)**
 - **One commentary- 15 miles a day**
 - **Cities visited: 8**
 - **Cities they had to flee or with riots: 3**
 - **Number of times Paul nearly killed: 1**



- **We pick up the story at the end of Acts 12. Persecution has resumed against the believers in Jerusalem, God has exercised judgment against Herod, and in the midst of all the drama, in verse 24 Luke tells us .**

²⁴But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

- **Growing in number, in geographic spread, and in health.**
- **Verse 25 turns our attention back to Paul and Barnabas, who had traveled to Jerusalem earlier bringing an offering from the church in Antioch in anticipation of a famine that did indeed strike Judea not long after. Luke tells us...**

²⁵When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

- **Now, back in Antioch, Luke gives us a description of the church there- a community of believers that was about to become a Spiritual Launch Pad to take the Gospel where no Christian had gone before. Who these believers were, and what they were doing, is incredibly significant, as we see here one of the few direct instances where the Spirit said what they were to do.**

† Antioch: The Spiritual Launch Pad

^{13:1}Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While 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.” ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

- **What’s happening here? Three takeaways. FIRST...**

- The Spirit is at work in the COMMUNITY of believers.

- **Some of you may think I’m obsessed over this point, as we discuss it every week! But that’s because LUKE is obsessed over this point. It is one of the greatest meta-narratives**

in ACTS... that God is at work, through the Holy Spirit, working in the context of the GATHERED COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS. This can't be overstated.

- *HERE Luke describes a fascinating attribute of the leadership of the Antioch church- it was DIVERSE- God is blessing the church to grow without ethnic and cultural barriers.*
- *There were PROPHETS and TEACHERS.*
 - *Prophets (few weeks ago)- people Spirit used in a unique way to give direct guidance and encouragement to the church (Agabus, famine)*
 - *Teachers- mature believers Spirit used to disciple and teach the core doctrines of the faith, prior to the arrival of the actual NT texts that would slowly appear over the coming generations.*
- *BARNABAS- Barnabas was a Levite- a Jew from the Island of Cyprus. Being a Levite meant he likely had a role of some influence in the religious leadership of his community.*
- *Simeon called Niger- very likely from northern Africa, and probably dark skinned- may have been gentile. Some speculation that this is Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross, but little support.*
- *Lucius of Cyrene- Cyrene is in northern Africa, also likely gentile.*
- *Manaen is described as being raised with Herod- a connection that would have given him significant social and political standing.*
- *Then of course we have Saul, a highly trained Hellenistic Jew, and also a Roman citizen.*

In this small group we have significant differences of ethnicity, culture, politics, religious backgrounds, and possibly even language. AND YET, for all their differences, we see them acting together because of the thing they all held in common, that trumped ALL their differences- their faith in Christ and devotion to God. THIS LEADS TO SECOND TAKEAWAY...

- *This community of faith was united in their DEVOTION to God.*
- *As a body, they were seeking the Lord TOGETHER... and they were doing this through WORSHIP, FASTING, and PRAYER. Let's think about that for a sec...*
 - *WORSHIP: Purposefully recognizing, reminding themselves who God is- His goodness, What he has done... that everything they are experiencing, is about HIM, not about THEM. Worship is the act of putting GOD at the center- they were doing this together.*
 - *PRAYER: This indicates they are seeking God's guidance- praying for His WILL to be done- they are in a posture of listening*
 - *FASTING: Fasting was- and is- the practice of setting aside the normal routine of eating- removing all distractions to focus on God. It indicates a higher intensity of their prayer and worship. Sense of anticipation- THEY ARE EXPECTING GOD TO WORK.*
- *This is a diverse community of individuals whose COMMON FAITH AND LIFE IN CHRIST has overcome their differences, and TOGETHER they are looking to God and expecting to be led by him.*
- *AND IN THIS CONTEXT, one of the few times we see this phrase in Acts... GOD SPEAKS.*

...the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Set Apart

- *Key verb- P&B are SET APART- - meaning the direction and purpose of their life has been given new clarity. God is doing something NEW, he reveals His work through the community of faith as they are seeking him, and he raises up the people for the work.*
- *Think of it - as the community of faith drew near to God, God shows them His plan to take the Gospel into the world. AND LUKE MAKES CLEAR- Paul and Barnabas aren't set apart*

by the church, or by their own plans- they are set apart for this calling by the SPIRIT, who reveals God's plan in the context of the gathering, worshipping, and praying community of believers.

- *NEXT WEEK, we will start the journey with Paul and Barnabas as they travel to the Island of Cyprus... but right now, leave us with one more thought...*
- *We hear this story, how P&B were set apart. Interesting, and important, history. But may not seem like it directly speaks to us... after all, God hasn't set us- you- apart for a special calling... has He?*
- *Church, HE HAS! You may not be called to be an apostle to an unreached part of the world, but God has indeed taken hold of your life, and he has done so with a purpose. He purposes that you KNOW HIM, are blessed by him, receive and enjoy the wholeness, fullness, and freedom of His life as your life.*
- *Not only that, He has taken hold of you to express and reveal his presence and goodness THRU YOU... for you to be about the work of His Kingdom in the context He has placed you.*
- *God may have set you apart to be a parent. For many of you here, God set you apart to the high calling of being a Christ centered MOTHER. God may have set you apart to be a Christian business owner, giving God glory through how your work blesses your employees and your community. You may be set apart by God as a teacher, a friend, a presence of love and compassion in the life of people who need this. God HAS set you apart, in some way, to be an active part of his church, be it behind the scenes as a servant, teaching, mentoring, or in actions of outreach into our community and world.*
- *As Paul would later write in Philippians 2, "God is at work in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!"*
- *You see, when we think about the Holy Spirit's leadership, we often default to thinking about specific decisions... should I move here, invest there, do this or that. As a church, should we or shouldn't we start a new ministry, hire staff, build a building. We pray sincerely in regards to these decisions, and this story in Acts teaches us we need to pray and seek God together, in a spirit of worship.*
- *AND YET, we don't always receive specific decision based direction from God. I am very slow to say "God did this, or God said this". But here's the thing: even though we don't always know what the Spirit is leading us to DO, we DO know how the Spirit is leading us (and enabling us) to LIVE. We have this right here, in God's word to us.*
- *WHEREVER and HOWEVER God has set you apart, the SPIRIT IS AT WORK IN YOU to...*
 - *Seek Jesus first, set your mind upon him, yielded to him as your source of life*
 - *In whatever way you are able, be part of his community of faith, the church. Desire to experience God, and your life, in the context of a church family of faith. The church in Antioch was God's spiritual Launchpad to take the gospel deep into the gentile world... I'm convinced biblically that the Local church of gathered believers is God's Launchpad to take the Gospel into our community and world today.*
 - *The spirit will lead us to worship, and to pray, together. This is why we are restarting our 'First Sunday' tradition, to gather a church family once a month....*

- ***And in all we do, the Spirit is at work in you to bear fruit- the fruit of Christ's presence in you. As we see in Galatians 5:22-23...***

Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

- ***God set apart Paul and Barnabas for a journey by land and by sea into the northern Mediterranean world.***
- ***How has God set apart you- all of us as a church family? And what will our journey of faith look like as we leave this gathering and head back into our lives, today?***