

MISSIONARIES: OUR SUBSTITUTES

TEXT: Acts 13:1-4

INTRO.: A. I believe we sometimes romanticize the early church. But what we find there may be quite different from reality. In Jerusalem it took several years for the church to move out from Jerusalem – in spite of the Great Commission. So the Lord sent persecution to the church to get them out of their “comfort zone” and to obey His mandate. (This is the third phase of God’s program outlined in 1:8. **The Jerusalem/Judea phase** is given in chps. 1-7, **the Samaria phase** in ch. 8-12 [where Gentiles are added to the church] and **the “Uttermost” phase** of God’s program moves into high gear to reach the **“uttermost part of the earth”.**)

B. Some churches are “missions minded” and others are not. The church at Antioch was missions minded. They did not hold back sending their very best men to the mission field. No doubt sending Barnabas and Saul was a great loss to their church, but they took their responsibility very seriously.

NOTE: In my ministries God often led the “cream of the crop” of our membership into full time ministry. However he always blessed our church with others to fill their place. The **“Lord of the harvest”** knows what He is doing and when a church is in tune with Him, it will always prosper and be blessed.

I. THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH:

A. Its Personnel: v.1

1. This church had several specially gifted men **“prophets & teachers”** including the great Apostle Paul.
2. They are five in number:
 - a. Barnabas: the courageous, Spirit-led representative of the church at Antioch.
 - b. Simeon...called Niger (“black”) possibly the man who carried Jesus’ cross.
 - c. Lucius of Cyrene from North Africa.

NOTE: Europeans, Asiatics and Africans can work together harmoniously in the church if they have a common Savior. AMEN!

- d. Manaen a foster brother of Herod Antipas (who tried Jesus and executed John the Baptist).

NOTE: It is interesting that two men who are so different, nursed by the same mother, turn out so differently. One murders the greatest man born of woman, the other winds up teaching the Bible at the heart of Biblical Christianity.

- e. Saul...not called an Apostle here

NOTE: *First*, God’s guidance came to those who were actively engaged in ministry.

Second, God’s guidance was revealed, in part, through the ministry in which they were already engaged. **“prophets and teachers”**

Third, God’s guidance extended the ministry of those who were doing their present ministry.

Fourth, God’s guidance was not merely individual, but it came about through the church.

Fifth, God’s guidance was only for the next step, not for the entire future.

3. It seems that God always reaches into the ranks of the faithful, not the slothful, to carry out His commission and do His work.

B. Its Prominence: cf. Acts 11:-19-22

1. v. 21 says that God’s hand was upon this church.
2. That speaks of preference, provision and power.
3. That also meant that there would be a guaranteed harvest.
4. The end result was that the Jerusalem church and the Apostles had to take special note of what God was doing in Antioch.

II. THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT:

A. The Church’s Service: v.2a

1. The call to service is never from man but from God.

NOTE: Missionaries sometimes confuse the NEED of a field to God's CALL to that field! Our evaluation of the "need" may not be the same as His. The need never constitutes the call...unless that need is recognized by the Lord and He makes the call!

2. These church leaders were fasting and praying when God, through His HOLY Spirit speaks to them.
3. The Lord always works within the context of the local assembly.

B. The Clear Summons: v.2b, (v.4)

1. The Holy Spirit spoke through Spirit-filled men of God.
2. They were in tune with Him, but there was no audible voice given.
3. Neither the church, mission board, nor school have the authority to call a missionary, preacher or teacher.
4. First the leadership fasted and prayed, then God spoke, then the church acted.

III. THE COMMISSION OBEYED:

A. The Seriousness of the Called: vv.2,3

1. The matter of sending men to the field is serious business which requires sensitivity to the Lord's leading.
2. This was obtained in the early church through fasting and prayer; a practice often neglected today.

NOTE: Paul and Barnabas' first journey lasted just under two years and they travelled 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea. During this first trip Paul wrote the book of Galatians and saw a great harvest of souls and started several churches.

B. The Substitutes Respond to the Call: v.4

1. Since all cannot go, all should not go, but God uses these "substitutes" to go for those who cannot and should not go.

ILLUS.: Some wit declared "*The band for whom the grandstand roots, is not the band of substitutes!*" But God believes in substitutes and He is rooting for them – and so should we!

2. When they laid hands on them they were not imparting some special gifts or abilities upon them, they were simply recognizing what God had already done.
3. They were doing what O.T. saints did when they laid hands on the substitute sacrifices – identifying with them.
4. They were saying we love you, believe God is calling you and we are sending you out as our substitutes and representatives.

NOTE: A missionary is to be a substitute for those who have not been called. But when he goes he needs to know the church will pray for him and support him financially. The missionary must sever all connections with his home, friends, job, etc. and DEPEND on those for whom he is substituting.

CONCL.: If missionaries are indeed our substitutes then we must take our responsibility to them and their families very seriously. They are working on our behalf and in our place. Our rewards at the Judgment Seat will be impacted (positively or negatively) based upon our response regarding those who go in our place! How will YOU fare?