

ACTS | Called and Sent | Story 19

Acts 13: 1-52

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Introduction

Today, In Acts 13 and 14 during Paul's first missionary journey, there is a shift that happens where we see the church in Antioch becoming the base of operations for mission work and ministry, and Saul is now seen as the prominent leader in the early church. [MAP]

Acts 13:1-4

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² 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." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

- While on the island of Cyprus, they meet a Roman Proconsul who had an attendant with him named Bar-Jesus (Son of Jesus) who was a false prophet. Paul looks at him, and says, "you're not a son of Jesus, you're a son of the devil." The guy goes blind, and the Proconsul was so shocked by the series of events that he believed and was saved!

Acts 13:13-15

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it."

- Then Paul stands up and preaches his first recorded sermon. He walks the Jewish people, and the Gentile converts to Judaism through the entire Old Testament, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus — and appeals to them to receive forgiveness of sin, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ...
- It was so compelling that the people begged them to stay until the next Sabbath and speak in the synagogue again. (Act 13:42)

Acts 13:42-52

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

**CALLED IN
SET APART
SENT OUT**

Called in

One of the things we don't see directly in this passage is what God did with Saul before this moment. We talked about Saul's conversion several weeks ago but one of the things we need to understand is that Saul thought he was on the inside of what God was doing in the world.

He was moral; he obeyed the law; he referred to himself as a pharisee of pharisee's; he did all the right things and behaved in all the right ways according to the letter of the religious law...

But as hard as he was trying and as driven as he was, he was on the outside of what God was doing in the world. In all his religious zeal—he was still an outcast. In fact, he wasn't an outcast in spite of his religious zeal—he was an outcast BECAUSE of his religious zeal.

Earlier in Acts, God intervened in his story— sort of picked him up, slapped him around a little bit, and set him on a new path. Maybe God hasn't picked you up and slapped you around, but how many of you have had God intervene in your story and set you on a new path?

Here's what we see with Saul even before we get to this passage. *Unless God calls you in, unless God opens the door, unless God gets involved, **we are without hope.***

One of the mistakes we make in the southern church is to think that because I attend a church, or because I serve, or because I give, that means I'm in. And it doesn't.

Personal: One of the things that I appreciated about pastoring in the PNW is that there was no cultural advantage to calling yourself a Christian. So, if you're claiming the name of Christ—there's a level of commitment and resolve around your faith that isn't necessarily present in the south.

But often we have an attitude that is similar to Saul's...

“That because I do the right things and behave in the right ways, then that means I'm in with God.” And what Saul's story tells us is that's not how God operates.

We can't achieve our way into God's acceptance. Scripture tells us that our righteousness is as filthy rags before a holy and perfect God. *Because any morality born out of self-effort results in self-righteousness, arrogance, and pride.*

To say, “oh I'm going to prove my worth, my value, my goodness, through my own effort” is dead religion. It's empty! And it's exhausting! And it's the life that Saul was living before God called him in.

- And once he realized that the forgiveness of sin, and the gift of salvation comes through the absolute unmerited gracious call of God on his life, it changed everything about him.

Because the CALLING IN is an invitation to come home. It's an invitation to rest from your weary wandering and scrambling for some semblance of meaning or significance in life. It's an unmerited invitation to something so much better, so much more fulfilling.

What I love about Saul's story is that, in his own eyes — he was in with God, but really, Saul was God's enemy. **God invited him in anyway.**

See, unless you have the call of God come into your life and unless you respond to His invitation — you're at a dead end.

The first aspect of the call is a calling to come home. A calling into the fold of God's family. To no longer look from the outside, but to walk through the open door and into the home. But there's another aspect of being called by God...

Set Apart

God had very specific work for Saul and Barnabas. As the early church is worshiping and fasting, they're positioning themselves in total dependency on Christ. The Holy Spirit spoke setting them apart for a specific purpose.

So, it's not just a calling in... it's not just an invitation to be saved for salvation's sake.

It's an invitation in, to be raised up.

Often, we make the mistake of thinking that because I'm not an extrovert, or I'm not really a people person, or I'll never stand up on a stage and speak into a microphone means that God can't use me.

- Some of the most effective disciple-makers are some of the most introverted, and socially awkward people I've ever met. And praise God for them!
- There's a guy out of Boca Raton, FL, who is responsible for planting 300+ churches around the world, mentoring hundreds and hundreds of pastors and if I told you his name — you'd have no idea who he is. He's behind the scenes, simply willing to be used by God.

We are called to make disciples of men.

If you are called to Christ, then you are called to make disciples.

Problem: If we're not careful we can fall into the trap of thinking that "of course God chose Saul! He was educated better than anyone else about religious issues. The story of his conversion alone probably brought a bunch of people to faith in Christ and that'll never be my story"

1. Be thankful that your story does not include murdering and imprisoning Christians for their faith.
2. Paul refers to himself as the chief of sinners. The worst of the worst and yet God still chose him.
3. One of the things that should give us all great hope about God's calling on our lives is that at one time, God literally spoke through a donkey!

If God can use a donkey... he can use you and me!

What does that mean about God's calling on our lives? It's been said many times before, but it simply means this.

**“God does not call those who are qualified;
He qualifies those who are called.”**

If I need someone to do electrical work on my house, you know who I'm not going to call? A chiropractor.

I'm going to call an electrician, because I want someone who I know has the knowledge, training, and experience necessary to do the work that needs to be done.

My call to a chiropractor cannot make that person an electrician but when God calls you — when He calls someone in who is simply willing to be used by God, He does this crazy thing where He will gift you with what you need to accomplish what He's set in front of you. He will qualify you and grow you and stretch you and supernaturally equips you to do things that in your natural state, you could never do on your own.

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Sent out

This might be my favorite phrase in the entire book of Acts...

Acts 13:3-4

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

This idea is so central to what it means to be a Christian.

Genesis 12:1-4

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

The first aspect of the call to Abram is to go! God says, “leave your country.” He's telling him — “Abram leave your comfort, leave the status quo, leave everything that is familiar to you... get up and get out!”

What's so terrible about the calling on Abram's life is that God doesn't say, “Get out, and here is the exact location of where you're going. This is what it's like there. I can't wait for you to see it!” He just says, “Get out! I'm not going to tell you where you're going or what it will be like.”

Personal: Before I was a Christian, I would ask questions of my friends who were Christians. “So, what can I get away with? Can I smoke? Can I drink? Can I party?” In other words, the Lord may have been calling me, but my response was, “I’ll only go if I agree with all the conditions. I’ll only go if I know what you’ll ask of me, and what you won’t ask of me, and only if I agree to those terms.”

We do this all the time. God, I’ll only go IF... God, I’ll follow you IF... and every time we do that, what we’re saying is, “God, I don’t trust you and I need to be in control, and I’m staying in the driver’s seat.”

Look at Abram’s life.

- God says, “Get out” Abram says, “Where?” God says, “I’ll tell you later; trust me.”
- God says, “Abram, “I’ll give you a son” Abram and his wife are very old... Abram says, “How?” God says, “I’ll tell you later; Trust me”
- Later God says, “Go to the top of that mountain and put your son to death.” And Abram says, “Why?” and God says, “I’ll show you later; trust me.”

That is Christianity! If you’re exploring faith and that sounds terrible. Well, sometimes it is. But on the other side of the difficulty of the unknown, the struggle to trust, is the most beautiful, rewarding, exhilarating, adventurous life you can imagine. It’s filled with ups and downs and trials and victories, and you come out on the other side of all of it a person very different than the one who began the journey. One who is very much closer to God than you ever would have been had you never taken the journey in the first place.

We see this with all of Jesus disciples. He brings them in and sends them out —the same thing with Paul.

This is what happens in this passage. The people begged them to stay until the next sabbath, and this is what happens...

Acts 13:44

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Nothing has changed. Even in the Church today, there is this mentality that unless your church is big, then you’re not successful. Nothing could be further from the truth. If the goal is to get big then what the church will do is view people as tools to be used rather than people to be loved.

In the life of Jesus, never did He treat someone like they were a means to an end. For Jesus, people were the end in and of themselves.

What this tells us is that the western church needs a new measurement for success.

Acts 13:48

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

The measure of success for the church must never be how many people show up, but how far the word goes out. What we see in the early church is both attractional and missional. It’s bringing people in, raising people up, and sending people out and it happens over and over again.

The question for you is... have you been called in? Are you being raised up? And where is God sending you today? Tomorrow? This week? Who is God sending you to?

Church, 39 out of the 40 miracles performed in the book of Acts happened outside of the church.

**The crowds will not change communities;
the mobilized force of Spirit-empowered believers will.**

Conclusion

Acts 13:50-52

But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

They weren't distracted by the naysayers, deterred by the doubters or those that sought to undermine the work of God in their midst.

They stayed focused on the mission.

And what happened next?

Acts 13:52

⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

**You are called in.
You beloved of God, are set apart.
And right now, in this very moment,
Jesus is sending you out on the mission field.**

Discussion Questions

1. What areas or times in your walk have you fallen into a false sense of security or righteousness because you do all the right things?
2. How are you responding to God's calling on you?
3. What are you doing to be raised up and equipped?
4. Where are you being sent today, tomorrow, and next month?
5. Who around you need love and grace?

NOTES