



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

Jesus Calls Us to Fish for People January 24th, 2021

Acts 13:1-12

Acts 13:1–12 (NIV) 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 worshipping 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. ⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

1. There’s an old phrase in sports circles: “Players not plays.” What does the saying mean? Can you think of examples that might serve to prove or disprove the saying? How might it apply to your job or career? **The saying suggests that no matter how good of a play the coach may have designed, it’s really up to the players’ skills to make it work. It’s hard to disprove the saying. So much in the NFL, for example, depends on highly skilled individuals playing at the top of their game. Aaron Rodgers, an MVP candidate shows how important skill is every week. This may be true a most jobs. A company may have a great marketing plan, but unless those making and selling the product are doing a great**

job, chances are the product won’t sell. In most professions, it’s about people – their motivation, ambition and skills.

2. According to the sermon, what is “public ministry”? How does it differ from every Christian’s call to “give the reason for the hope that we have” (1 Peter 3:15)? How do the church’s public ministry and the Christian’s private ministry complement each other? **Public ministry, as the sermon explains, is “representative ministry.” For the sake of good order, the church calls a few of its members to carry out ministry on behalf of the entire congregation. A few are called to preach and teach and administer the sacraments. Some are called to go great distances and proclaim the gospel in foreign lands. They derive their authority to serve in this way from the call that God issues them through the congregation. This ministry is different in that requires a call. All who serve in the public ministry are ministering to and on behalf of those who have called them to serve. Not all are called to public ministry. Every one of us Christians is directed by God to give the reason for the hope that we have. In other words, all of us having as our Christian calling, the honored task of sharing the good news about Jesus with the people we know and meet. These two “ministries” are extremely complementary. They complete each other. As Christians share the gospel with family, friends, and neighbors, these “new” Christians are brought to church to be spiritually fed with the Word and Sacraments” by our “public ministers of the gospel.” As the public ministers feed and nourish Christians, they are empowered and motivated by the gospel to carry out their own ministry of sharing Christ with family, friends, and neighbors.**
3. Agree or disagree and why? Our sin makes us unworthy to share Jesus with others. Read 1 Timothy 1:16. Citing his own example, what important reminder does Paul give us? Use his words to explain how you and I are living proof of God’s grace. **Agree! Our sin makes us unworthy of anything and everything that has to do with Holy God. Our sin separates us from him, making us incapable of serving him. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul cites his own inadequacies and unworthiness as the “worst of sinners.” It is God who, in his great love and patience, changes the sinner’s status from unworthy to worthy. He does this by crediting Jesus’ holiness to us and by accepting Christ’ innocent suffering and death and payment for all our sin. With our sin paid for, with the risen Savior’s holiness counting as ours, we are now worthy and motivated (thankful) to serve. God sees us this way. The world probably doesn’t. They still see our sins and shortcomings. But God**

uses this to demonstrate his mercy. As we sinner/saints share Jesus with friends and neighbors, they can be encouraged that Jesus forgives them, even as he forgives us. We are living proof of the grace that God shows to sinners!

4. In what sense are all of us Christians called to be a “Barnabas”? (Hint: Look up the meaning of this nickname.) Who is your “Barnabas”? For whom can you be a “Barnabas”? Barnabas means “son of encouragement” or “Encourager.” You can imagine that Barnabas had the gift of encouraging people with the Savior’s gospel promises. We are all called upon to encourage one another in the face of life’s challenges in this sinful world. For me, my wife is Barnabas. My pastors and dear friends in Christ are all Barnabas to me. I am further “encouraged” by the truth that through the power of Scripture, I can grow in my own ability to be Barnabas to my spouse, my children, my friends and fellow members at Mount Olive. I’m being rather general in my answer. I think it is good for Christians to know their Barnabas, seek encouragement from him and her when needed, and at the same time indemnify a particular individual or individuals for whom we can serve as a Barnabas. Be deliberate in this.
5. Read Acts 13:6-7,12. Agree or disagree and why? It is especially intimidating to share the gospel with “intelligent” and “influential” people. I find myself agreeing with this. During the course of my ministry, I have felt this intimidation. It is the product of my own foolishness and forgetfulness. Many times I have forgotten that such people are in need of the same gospel that has rescued me. On one occasion, I recall having the opportunity to share the gospel with a post-graduate student who was majoring in religious studies. I spent the afternoon before my visit fretting over the fact that this fellow might ask me something for which I didn’t have an answer. As it turns out, I soon discovered that for this man, religion was nothing more than a subject to study – a matter of curiosity. He knew a great deal, but didn’t value the truth. That realization made me sad, but at the same time it filled me with compassion and a desire to take the facts that he could recite and let them speak to him as the saving promises of the living God who loved him and wanted him in heaven forever.
6. Name some modern-day counterparts of Elymas the sorcerer. What does the existence (and success) of such individuals tell you about the people of our world? How does this impact the way you think and feel about “fishing for people”? Every modern day false prophet is a Bar-

Jesus. I think of cults like The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah Witnesses. I also think of the palm readers and the psychics who make their money telling people about the future. All of this reminds me that people are born with a natural knowledge of God that makes them naturally inquisitive about the origins of this world, who or what is in control of their future, life after death, and what God is like. All of this impacts my thoughts in sharing Jesus in a “positive” way. I have answers to the questions people are asking or should be asking. The fact that such things are on their mind makes it easier to strike up conversations. God opens the door to witnessing opportunities.

7. Agree or disagree and why? Fishing for people involves nothing more than proclaiming God’s truth. I agree. In the sermon I stressed the point that we don’t need to argue or persuade people to believe. This is not our task. We speak the truth. The Word of God does the rest. I do think someone could disagree with the statement in this sense: part of speaking the Word does involve reading the situation. Does the person need to hear what God says in his law about sin and its punishment? Does the law need to “humble” a person before I can speak the good news of God’s forgiveness in Christ? This is all part of being ready to give the reason for the hope that I have (1 Peter 3:15). The Word does the work. I’m a student of the Word – we all are. We are also students of human nature. As we listen to people, as we get to know them and their circumstances, it helps us to properly communicate God’s law and his gospel. I don’t need to be a trained theologian to do this. I know how the Word works on my own heart. I can use that knowledge to share the Word with others.
8. In the sports world it’s “players not plays.” In discipleship it’s “Word not workers.” Explain. Fishing for people is so different from everything else we do in this world. For almost everything else I need to develop a certain skillset. The more skilled I am, the better doctor, therapist, etc., I will be. When it comes to testifying about Jesus, the focus is not on my skills. It’s on the Word I’m speaking. I’ve seen/heard young children witness for Jesus in beautiful and powerful ways. By this little phrase I’m not suggesting that workers are unnecessary. God chooses to communicate his Word through people. I’m simply trying to point out that it’s not about us. It’s about the Word of Christ bring people to faith. My work as a witness is getting out of the way of the Word.

9. Share with the group, if you will, the name of someone you'd like to invite to worship. Seek advice as to how you may do this. Pray together that God grants and blesses the opportunity. **Witnessing needs to be something "intentional."** Often I can't and don't plan for witnessing opportunities. God gives me many unexpected "fishing" moments during the course of the week. But at other times, I can and want to identify people in my life that need to hear about Jesus. I'm in this for the long haul. I cultivate relationships and speak to circumstances, sharing the gospel's promises in many and different ways. I can plan what to say and when to say it. That's why it is important to think of someone to invite. Share the name with the group. Plan ways to extend the invitation: will I write it in a card, call the person, send an email, etc? Pray for the opportunity and pray that God blesses the invitation and, eventually, the hearing of the word. When I share this all with others, I enlist their help and their prayers in my efforts. I also have some accountability that helps me overcome my natural inclination to sidestep and avoid opportunities to witness.

Paul's First Mission Tour: Asia Minor

The Commissioning

Acts 13:1

13 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.

Since Luke does not indicate which of these men were prophets and which were teachers, we may assume that all five of them performed both functions. They preached and they taught. They served throughout the city, wherever there were groupings of Christians. All five were Jews by birth.

Barnabas and Saul we have met. Niger means "black," and Simeon was probably a dark-complexioned man, perhaps of African ancestry.

Manaen had been brought up with Herod Antipas, the tyrant who murdered John the Baptist. When Judea had been divided into four governmental units, Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and

Perea. That was why Pontius Pilate turned Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean, over to him for trial.

We learned in 11:20 that men from Cyrene were part of the group who came to Antioch after Stephen's death and spoke to the Greeks about Jesus. Lucius was most likely one of those men. He is not to be confused with Luke, the author of Acts.

Acts 13:2–3

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.

From here to the end of his history, Luke's major focus will be on Saul (Paul) and his ministry. The account begins about A.D. 47.

It is not clear who was worshiping and fasting, the congregation or the five men just mentioned. We do not know just how the Holy Spirit made his will known. It is clear that it was God's will that Barnabas and Saul be released from their ministry in Antioch to preach among the Gentiles.

Again, it is not clear who placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul after fasting and praying. It may have been the other three prophets and teachers. They may have included other leaders of the Antioch church. We can see how the entire congregation might fast and pray before this commissioning, but not how they could all lay hands on the two men whom the Holy Spirit had chosen.

The service was not an ordination but a commissioning. These two men were already active in the public ministry of the church. Now God had called them to a specific assignment, and the laying on of hands in blessing signified that.

"Sent them off" could be translated more literally as "released them." The church released Barnabas and Saul from their ministry in Antioch so that they could undertake another ministry.

This commissioning was not what made Saul an apostle. The risen Lord made him an apostle by revealing himself to Saul on the road to Damascus. The risen Lord announced that Saul would

be his apostle when he sent Ananias to baptize him: “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (9:15).

On Cyprus

Acts 13:4–5

⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

The missionaries were sent forth by the Holy Spirit. The church had been his agent for commissioning them, but *he* had called them for this work.

Seleucia was Antioch’s port city. From there the two men sailed to Barnabas’ homeland, Cyprus, the island in the angle between Asia Minor and Syria. Our word *copper* comes from Kupros, Cyprus; the island was an important source of copper in the Middle East. Cyprus was a province of the Roman Empire, controlled by the Senate of Rome, administered by a proconsul.

Saul and Barnabas landed on the east coast of the island at Salamis. Salamis was the principal city of Cyprus and the seat of government for the eastern half of the island. It was near the site of the modern city of Famagusta.

We are not sure what John’s work as “helper” was. The term had been used for a synagogue attendant who took care of the less important affairs of the congregation. Some scholars think John was along to teach children the good news about Jesus. This was the man who was also called Mark, Mary’s son (12:12) and Barnabas’ cousin (Colossians 4:10).

At Salamis Saul began his pattern of proclaiming God’s Word in the synagogue first. He had a responsibility to Israel, and there were gentile proselytes of the gate, “God-fearers,” there as well. What the results of the preaching in Salamis were Luke does not tell us. When results were immediate and dramatic, Luke usually

recorded them. We are sure that God’s Word had its effect there, accomplishing what God wanted it to accomplish. The outcome of mission preaching is not always immediately evident and may not be evident for many years. The seed of the Word is planted, and God gives the increase in his time and according to his will.

Acts 13:6–7

⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

Paphos was about 94 miles from Salamis, across the island on the west coast. It is not likely that Barnabas and Saul went directly across the island through the mountains. More likely, they followed the coast to the south and around to Paphos. Here was the proconsul’s residence, the seat of Roman government for this province.

Evidently the missionaries met the proconsul’s attendant before they met the proconsul. Bar-Jesus means “son of Joshua,” and it was not an unusual name. He had or pretended to have supernatural abilities, but he definitely did not speak for God; he was a false prophet.

Sergius Paulus was not a man like Cornelius the centurion, “devout and God-fearing,” generous in giving and regular in prayer (10:2), but he was an intelligent man who had the good sense to send for Barnabas and Saul for the purpose of hearing God’s Word.

Acts 13:8–11

⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds

of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.”

“Elymas” was Bar-Jesus’ nickname, meaning “sorcerer.” His position with Sergius Paulus was threatened by the proconsul’s willingness to hear the Word. If his master heard and believed the gospel, he would no longer want a sorcerer and false prophet as an attendant. Elymas did his worst to deprive Sergius Paulus of the saving truth.

Saul’s words of rebuke came from a man filled with the Holy Spirit. His cutting and biting condemnation was intended to show the sorcerer his sinful condition. They were like Jesus’ words to the Pharisees: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire” (John 8:44). The expression means, “You are the opposite of a child of God; you have the qualities of the devil.”

God’s right way is to save people by the preaching of the gospel. Elymas was perverting God’s way by trying to turn the proconsul from salvation. Saul would not have been doing Elymas a favor by softening his rebuke.

Elymas was not the first man who had to be led by the hand when God put an end to his wickedness by blinding him for a time. Remember the persecutor on the road to Damascus? Here was a warning and an opportunity for the sorcerer to repent. Unless he did repent, eternal punishment was in store for him.

For the first time Luke informs us that Saul the Jew had a Roman name as well: Paul. It was the custom of Greek-speaking Jews in the empire to give a child two names, one Hebrew and the other Greek or Latin. From here to the end of the book, the author will use the name of Paul, the Roman citizen. Some say

that Luke does this because Paul’s work among the Gentiles really began with preaching to Sergius Paulus.

Acts 13:12

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

The groping blindness of Elymas was a sign that pointed to the truth of the Word of God, which Paul had spoken. Sergius Paulus believed *when* he saw what happened; he believed *because of* the teaching about the Lord.

Luke does not report on further work or successes in Paphos. It would be speculation to say more than Scripture tells us. ¹

¹ Balge, R. D. (1988). [Acts](#) (pp. 135–140). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.