

Four Things that Make You a Missionary

(Acts 13:1-52)

This morning as we continue on our journey through the *Acts of the Apostles* which is the New Testament's history of the early church, I want to talk to you about four things that make you a missionary. Now I know what you're thinking. "But I'm not a missionary. I've never been a missionary and I have no plans on becoming a missionary. That's really not on my bucket list." In fact, this morning I feel like a judge must feel during jury selection; facing a room full of people who all have a great reason why they deserve to be excused from jury duty. However, the New Testament teaches that every Christian is a missionary; the only issue is whether we're an effective missionary or not. The word "missionary" originally came from the Latin word for apostle and meant "one who is sent on a mission" and Christ said that He has sent every believer into the world to tell people about the good news of what He has accomplished for them. In John 17:18, Jesus says to His Father, "*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*" And in John 15:16, Jesus says, "*You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*" Every Christian is a missionary. We're all sent to be salt and light and witnesses for Jesus both by our behavior and by our words, serving His purpose wherever we find ourselves in this world. And I've noticed that Christians who embrace Christ's call to be missionaries seem far happier than Christians who ignore His call and live only for themselves. I hope this morning will help you to embrace Christ's call to be His missionary in the particular place He has placed you. Chapter 13 of Acts begins a new section in the history of the early church as Paul and his missionary journeys become the focus of the rest of the book. As we look at Paul's first missionary journey, I want to highlight four themes we will see over and over throughout Paul's adventures; four characteristics of a true missionary; calling (1-4) custom (5) conflict (6-13) and communication (14-52).

Now since a missionary by definition is one who is sent, the first thing that makes you a missionary is a calling from God. Christ has called every Christian to be a missionary but there's also a more personal calling He gives to the specific place or people or opportunity He has for us; and the clearer we are about that calling, the more effective we'll be. Missionary work is hard and unless we're confident that we are doing what God has called us to do, it's too easy to turn in our missionary badge and resign when the going gets tough. One of the biggest differences I've seen in those missionaries who quit and those missionaries who won't is a clear sense of calling; and that's what we see in the first four verses of chapter 13. This chapter begins in the church in Antioch; the capital of the Roman province of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman Empire and the site of the first Gentile church. Until the church of Antioch, all churches were made up of Christians from Jewish backgrounds, but in Antioch, the gospel spreads to Gentiles and for the first time, Gentiles and Jewish Christians are worshiping Christ together. Let's read Acts 13:1-4 "*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, (who was a Jewish Christian from the island of Cyprus whom the apostles sent from Jerusalem to investigate when they heard of what God was doing among the Gentiles in Antioch and who stayed to teach the Christians there) and Simeon who was called Niger (which means "black" and so Simeon was probably an African Christian), and Lucius of Cyrene (a major city of Northern Africa; so both Simeon and Lucius are Jewish Christians from Cyrene), and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, (Manean was a foster child who was raised in King Herod's family and so he's a nobleman) and Saul (whom we now know as Paul the apostle.)* Prophets were Christians through whom God spoke to His people directly and teachers taught the Scriptures to the church. Since none of these prophets and teachers is originally from Antioch, they were probably among the first missionaries who brought the gospel to Antioch since we learned back in Acts 11 that those believers were from the city of Cyrene and the island of Cyprus.) *While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia (the seaport which served Antioch) and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*" Notice three things here. First, God is the one who sends us. The mission is His idea, not ours. The Spirit of God speaks to this group and instructs

them to send Barnabas and Saul away to the work which He has called them to do. Second, God calls us to mission when we are seeking Him. Notice when God speaks to the prophets and teachers; not when they are strategizing or planning but when they are praying and fasting and ministering to the Lord; because calling is a result of communion with God. He is the Lord of the mission and we get our marching orders from Him. Jesus said, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." The closer I get to Jesus and to His heart, the more active I will be in fishing because that's what He cares about. And this is the pattern we'll see in Acts; as the Christians seek God for God's sake, God shows them the next step in the mission. It is only as we spend time in God's presence, seeking to know Him better that we begin to understand what God has called us personally to do. Third, God calls us to mission when we are seeking Him together. "*Set apart for Me, Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" It looks like God had already spoken to Barnabas and Saul about the mission He was sending them on and they were waiting until He spoke to the church about it. There are lots of people who feel called to preach but until other Christians say, "I think God has called you to preach," they probably should wait. There is nobody easier for us to fool than ourselves and the older I get, the more I rely on our leadership here at Creekside to test my ideas about what I think God is calling us to do. When we began our search for a family pastor over a year ago, I thought Greg Arthur was the perfect candidate, but when I talked to him, he didn't think he was qualified and wasn't really interested, even though of all of us, he was the most insistent that we hire somebody as soon as we could. Well, we interviewed a lot of people but no one was the right fit for Creekside. Then one Sunday evening, Greg told me how God had just run over him with a train and he knew God was calling him out of civil engineering and into ministry. I was really excited – but I've been wrong before. So we ran this by the elders and the Council and the staff who all interviewed Greg just like we had interviewed all the other candidates. Everybody came away convinced that God has called Greg to be our family pastor. And since we announced Greg's candidacy for this position, I have had so many people tell me, "Wow, I am so excited about Greg. He is the perfect person for this job." We make far better decisions together than we do alone because God speaks to the church and through the church.

The first thing that makes you a missionary is a calling from God. God calls people in different ways in the Bible and He calls people in different ways today because each of us is different and each of us has our own unique relationship with Him. But we get that calling by spending time doing what the prophets and teachers in Antioch were doing: fasting (which is not very popular today but is the biblical way to really get our attention focused God and to screen out distractions) praying, worshiping and seeking God. Calling is a result of communion with God. I can't know what God has called me to do if I never ask Him. In the Spring of my senior year of college, I was desperate to know what God wanted me to do with my life. I had always planned to become a high school music teacher which is a noble profession – but after I came to know Christ, my desire to do that vanished. So here I was, coming up to graduation, without a clear plan for moving forward. I remember one afternoon, praying and reading 2 Timothy 2 when all at once, it was like the words jumped off the page and I knew the Spirit of God was speaking to me. From that passage, I not only saw a bunch of reasons why I needed to go into full-time ministry but also what that ministry would look like and what God was calling me to do. That calling has remained unchanged for the past 45 years. When was the last time you set aside time to spend with God; to focus on Him and on your relationship with Him; to worship and pray and enjoy His presence? And then, to ask, "What do You want me to do? I'll go anywhere, say anything, and do anything. I just need to know that You are leading me." The first thing that makes you a missionary is a clear sense of calling. You know you are on a mission from God.

The second step thing that makes you a missionary is custom. A custom is the habitual way we do things; and becoming an effective missionary involves an intentional strategy of serving God. I used to think that if God was leading me, I didn't need a plan. I would just spontaneously respond to whatever opportunities He gave me. My plan was to not have a plan and that plan got a whole lot of nothing accomplished. After all, why did God give us a mind? Proverbs 16:9 says "*The mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps.*" My job is to plan what I will do. God's job is to direct my steps. I find that God directs me far more as I plan than when I don't bother to think things through. So what was Barnabas and Paul's plan for taking the gospel to new places? What exactly did they do? Let's read Acts 13:4-5, "*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia (the seaport which served Antioch) and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*" *When they reached Salamis, (the largest city in the eastern half of the island of Cyprus) they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.*" (map) Barnabas and Paul and Barnabas' cousin John who was also known as

Mark and eventually will write the Gospel According to Mark sail to the island of Cyprus and start in Salamis, the biggest city on the eastern side of the island, and begin visiting the Jewish synagogues of that city.. This will become the pattern throughout Paul's missionary journeys. He always goes to the major cities of a region and he always begins in the Jewish synagogues of that city. In fact, Luke calls this pattern Paul's custom in Acts 17:2; his habitual way of doing missionary work. Go to a major city. Preach the gospel in the synagogues. See what develops. Paul always went to the major cities because the gospel spreads through relationships and the cities were where the most people were. Influence the cities and you influence the entire nation. The cities were the centers of influence, commerce and culture and that's why Christianity began in the cities. In fact, the word "pagan" originally referred to people who lived in the country because they were less likely to be Christians than people who lived in cities. Paul is planting churches in every nation of the Roman Empire; and since he can't talk to everyone, he focuses his efforts on the cities. But why does he always go to the synagogues first? Two reasons; first, the Jews are still God's chosen people and Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Just as Jesus came to save the world but went to Israel first so Paul took the good news of what Christ has accomplished first to the Jews of the region before proclaiming it to the non-Jews. So there was a theological reason for beginning in the synagogues and there was also a strategic reason. There was far less cultural distance between Paul and Barnabas and the Jews of a particular region. Even though it was a foreign land, the apostles shared a common culture, a common language and a common experience with the Jews of that land. Paul and Barnabas always began with the people most like them. Now many of the Jews rejected the gospel and Paul said that his ministry was primarily to the Gentiles or non-Jews. But the synagogue was the best place to connect with Gentiles as well. Not only Jews attended the synagogue but also Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel and in the Old Testament Scriptures. They were called "God-fearers." They weren't ready to fully convert to Judaism yet but they were interested. So even though they are Gentiles and foreigners, Paul and Barnabas still have a lot in common with them. They believe in the same God and in the same Scriptures and share the same basic worldview. It was actually the Gentile God-fearers who were Paul's target audience. If they became Christians, they could then reach their Gentile friends and relatives far easier than Paul and Barnabas could. That's why Paul's custom was to go to the major cities where there were synagogues, preach the gospel in those synagogues and then begin a church with those Jews and Gentiles who responded to the good news about Jesus. So what can we learn from Paul about being a missionary? We need to develop our own customs, our own habitual ways for connecting with people in order to share Christ's love and the gospel. At our small group this week, Steve Holman shared one custom he's developed. Steve flies a lot on business and whenever he sits down beside someone on a plane, he always asks the same question. "Are you leaving home or going home?" Steve says that he can tell by the way the person responds to that question whether they are open to talking further or would prefer to be left alone. And because this is a habit for Steve, he talks to far more people about Jesus on planes than most of us. He doesn't waste time worrying about whether he should try to share the gospel or keep quiet and work on his computer. He knows exactly what he's going to do. It's up to God how He wants to use it. His mind has planned his way. Now it's up to the Lord to direct his steps. I was talking to a friend of mine recently who is also in full-time ministry and I asked him how he finds his missionary opportunities and he said in his neighborhood. When they moved in a few years back, he and his wife were intentional about meeting everybody and learning everybody's names. Every day they and their children pray for opportunities to get to know their neighbors better. And whenever they are invited to anything, they go – whether they're interested in the activity or not; just to get to know their neighbors. If his neighbor invites him over to sit in the garage, drink beer and play cards, he goes. Pretty soon, they started hosting their own get-togethers for the neighborhood. Every 4th of July, he sets up a BBQ in front of his house and cooks hot dogs all day – and most of the neighbors and kids come by sooner or later. That's his custom. What's yours? What can you do on a regular basis that will enable you to connect with and serve people? Here's why simply connecting with those who don't know Christ is so important for us to do regularly. The more secular our culture becomes, the more stereotyped people of faith will be by those who don't know any Christians. Because of the way we are portrayed in the media, people can't imagine themselves ever believing what we believe. We just seem to be too different, too far out there – until people get to know us personally and discover that we're just like them in most ways. We eat the same food, we root for the same teams, we struggle with the same problems; we have a lot more in common than the things which divide us. And the better they know us, the easier it becomes for them to question their own spiritual beliefs and to recognize that believing what we believe is actually possible; that what they once considered strange and unfeasible before getting to know people who follow Jesus, begins to sound more and more likely once they get to know us. Our

mission is simply to get to know people who need to know Jesus, love them and serve them and then see what God will do. But we won't do that without a clear strategy which we employ as a habit of life. That's why custom makes you a missionary.

The third thing that makes you a missionary is conflict which is another recurring theme throughout Paul's ministry. Everywhere Paul goes, he seems to create conflict. Let's read vs. 6-12. *"When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, (which was the capital of Cyprus on the western side of the island) they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, (which means "Son of Jesus" which doesn't mean he claimed to be a Christian since Jesus was a common name then) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God."* The Roman proconsul was the highest ranking Roman official in a Roman province and the governor of that province, appointed for a year by the Roman Senate. Sergius Paulus was, according to Luke, an exceptionally intelligent man and he had a court magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus in his court and probably exercising a good deal of influence over him. The governor summons the apostles to his court so that he can hear what they have been preaching. *"But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) (Elymas is Greek for magician) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith."* As Barnabas and Saul explain the gospel, Elymas keeps interrupting, mocking, arguing and doing everything he can to prevent Sergius Paulus from believing. He recognizes that if the governor believes the gospel, his position of influence over him is threatened. *"But Saul, who was also {known as} Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord."* It looks like Paul goes Old Testament on Elymas, confronting him as a liar and a son of the devil and striking him blind temporarily. What happened to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you and bless those who curse you? Even more confusing, Luke tells us that Paul did all this in the power of the Holy Spirit! This was God speaking through Paul. To understand what's happening here, let's work backwards. What was the result of this conflict? Sergius Paulus comes to faith in Christ, being amazed not that his court magician was struck blind but at the teaching of the Lord. Elymas was trying to prevent the Roman governor from believing and that's why Paul has such a strong response to him. This is really a battle for Sergius Paulus' soul between Christ and the devil. That's why Paul acts so forcefully. There will be plenty of other conflicts in the book of Acts where Paul calmly accepts imprisonment, beatings and persecution, but in this situation, a man's soul hangs in the balance. It's the difference between you being attacked and turning the other cheek; and someone else being attacked and you defending them. Love compels you to act differently in each situation. There's a time to confront error and deception and that's exactly what Paul does. It's interesting that this is when Saul becomes Paul and Paul becomes an apostle, since the apostles were able to perform unique signs and wonders which authenticated their apostleship. From this point on in Acts, Paul will be the main character and Barnabas will be in the background. That's why vs. 13 says, *"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem."* Mission causes conflict with those outside the church and often with those inside the church. Once Paul and Barnabas leave Cyprus to push forward into even more unreached regions, John Mark gets cold feet and returns home to Jerusalem; and everybody who has been involved in Christ's mission knows what it's like to be deserted by people you trusted. It's just part of the journey of becoming like Jesus.

Being a missionary is always going to involve conflict and that's why I can't be an effective missionary without courage. The gospel always causes conflict because Jesus is in the life-changing business and some people don't want their lives changed. Jesus was a threat to Elymas' position. In other cities, Jesus will be a threat to the authority and prestige of the local religious leaders or to the economic interests of the local tradesman or to the political interests of the local politicians. But everywhere Paul goes, he causes trouble. And if you are by nature, a conflict avoider like me, this is the toughest part of being a missionary. I was raised to believe that keeping the peace was always the right thing to do, the prudent thing, the wise course of action; that my responsibility was to keep everyone happy and if someone was unhappy with me, I must have done something wrong. Then Christ came into my life and I discovered that made a lot of people automatically unhappy with me. But as Paul says in

Galatians 1:10, "If I was still trying to please people, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ." We shouldn't look for conflict but we should expect it and not avoid it but instead see it as a way to proclaim the truth; not in an angry, combative way, but in a persuasive and wise way. Paul says that everyone who wishes to live a godly life will be persecuted and if I never experience any conflict simply because I follow Jesus; then I'm probably not following Him. I'm just not dangerous enough for anyone to care. When the gospel spreads, people get upset – because people are always upset by change. And again, because of the way I'm wired, this has been the most difficult thing for me to accept as Christ's servant. But Jesus said, "If they love Me, they'll love you. If they hate Me, they'll hate you." The first Christians accepted conflict as evidence they must be doing something right.

The fourth thing that makes a missionary is communication because the essence of the mission is communicating what Jesus has taught us. That's why throughout *Acts*, Luke emphasizes the spread of the word of God. Faith only comes by hearing the word and being able to communicate that word is essential for every missionary. In verses 14-52, Luke records Paul's first and longest sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. We're going to look at this sermon in greater detail on Easter Sunday because it is a great sermon on the resurrection, but right now I want to point out two things that are common in all of Paul's sermons: why the gospel is true and why the gospel is relevant to us. Faith is not a blind leap into the dark; it is confidence in God based upon evidence of and so in every sermon in *Acts*, Paul presents the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. In this sermon, he explains how everything that happened in the Old Testament prepared the way for Jesus; that he is the promised Messiah, fulfilling all of the prophecies, especially the promise that the Messiah would be raised from the dead. Notice vs. 29-30 *"And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead:"* Paul shows that Jesus is the hero of the story of the Bible; that the whole Bible points the way to Him. The more you know about the Bible, the greater your faith in Jesus grows because even though this book was written over 1600 years by 40 different authors from different cultures and times, it tells a consistent story. People won't put their faith in Jesus until they are convinced the story is true. That's why Paul doesn't preach moralism or personal experience or sweet but empty devotional ditties. He gave people a reason to believe. Can you do that? Can you explain why the gospel is intellectually satisfying; why it makes more sense than any other philosophy or worldview? Can you explain the gospel in light of the whole story of the Bible? Paul writes in 2 Tim 2:15 *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."* The word of truth is the primary tool of the missionary and the more skillfully we can use it, the more effective we become, because it is the word which inspires true faith. Now something can be true but that doesn't mean it's relevant to us. This Spring, the Oakland As have a brand new infield with new players at first, second, third and short stop. That's true, but unless you are an As fan, probably not particularly relevant to you. Paul not only communicated why the gospel is true but why the gospel is relevant, why it is good news today. Look at vs. 38-39. *"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses."* Jesus is God promised Messiah but what does that mean for me, personally? Jesus frees us from the things we cannot free ourselves by keeping God's laws; forgiveness of all our sins and freedom from our slavery to the evil that exists in all of us; freedom from selfishness and narcissism and lust and fear. Can you explain to your unbelieving friend why the gospel is relevant to them; why the gospel is good news? The more the gospel is good news for you personally, the more you will be able to communicate why it is good news for others. That's why continually applying the truth of the gospel to our own lives and what Christ has accomplished and is accomplishing for us is so important; not just for our own spiritual health but to be His representatives to those who don't know Him yet.

