



July 19th 2020
Reflection Three on
Acts c13 v 1 to 48
God's Mission, our
accountability and
spiritual warfare

As Baptists we rejoice in the Baptist missionary William Carey who following the model of Barnabas and Saul went as an overseas missionary for the Gospel blessing of India. But we should not reduce mission to the adventures of travelling missionaries. Over the centuries churches have developed mission as a variety of local outreach activities for varieties of people or to address particular social difficulties, such as Food Banks or TWAM [Tools With A Mission] that Nigel so faithfully supported, or local children, youth and adult outreach such as our cafe. But whether mission is about going overseas or addressing local issues there are principles in Acts 13 which still apply.

Firstly mission work and our part in it is authorised by the Holy Spirit. It's not something that we do out of our interests. And because mission is God's work it is vital that we deliberately give prayer, and worship support, space & time to seeking and sustaining what God wants us to do.

Secondly, because mission is God's work the mission leaders are to be both commissioned by the sending church, and drawn from worshipping body of the sending Church

Thirdly, mission work must operate under the oversight of the sending church. In c14 we see Paul and Barnabas, on returning to their sending church in Antioch, themselves gathering the church together to report all that God had done through them. They don't wait to be asked. They recognise their accountability and they initiate the report process.

And fourthly that the measure of any mission's success, whether far

overseas or near in local outreach, is not in the miles travelled or the activities organised but in whether or not God opens the door of faith to the Gentiles – that is to people outside the Church. Are the Gentiles being given the word of the Lord? Do those who are appointed for eternal life come to believe? Do the converts become disciples who even in the face of persecution are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit?

If Barnabas and Paul had come back to Antioch with no report of God opening the door to the Gentiles, wouldn't the Church have seriously questioned were they truly sharing the Gospel? I can't imagine either the Church or the Holy Spirit would have sent them out again. Are our expectations of what the Gospel can do as high? Do we expect God to open the door to the Gentiles? Would we be deeply disappointed if He did not? Are our accountability standards for the outreach that we authorise as high?

Interestingly the main opposition that Barnabas and Paul experienced in this mission was not from hostile Gentiles [although that would come] but from jealous fellow worshippers of the God of Israel, who took against what they were saying.

There is an important form of mission which isn't here in the positive but is in the negative. The positive is that Jesus tells us to go and make disciples. This going refers to the opportunities that come to us as we go about our lives. These may come at any time as we meeting with people in our ordinary life events. But in Acts 13 we see this in the negative when the false prophet and sorcerer Bar-Jesus [see how he uses Jesus name for his evil purposes] who, in his work is an attendant of the Proconsul, uses his position to oppose the good news!

He is defeated by the Holy Spirit acting through Paul. But this conflict and even the hostility that the good news meets from God's synagogue people remind us that mission is spiritual warfare. However as people brought up in a material world we often place the hope of what we do in sharing the good news in the activities, the programmes, the input we make. These are all vital in their own way but all of them are handmaidens to our faith in the Lord.

It may be that one, if not the main reason why many churches struggle to thrive is that they do not take seriously the idea that their life and work is opposed by spiritual forces of evil. And because this reality is not taken seriously these powers have an open door to frustrate the work of those churches, by internal and external confusions and opposition, as indeed we see in C13 and throughout Acts. We are invited, we are urged, even commanded to take up the armour of God to close the door against opposing spiritual forces - which brings us back to worship, fasting and prayer.

As I have invited you to offer ideas for future worship so I also invite you to meet in a regular zoom prayer meeting – not to talk about prayer but to pray for all that God wants us to do to share the word with the Gentiles around us so that they may come to believe. As with meeting about worship I shall be sending out an invite in our WhatsApp group, but, of course, feel free to contact me direct if you would like to join us in either of these.

C13 and indeed the whole of Acts is written in the living experience of God's mission. Luke went with Paul and Barnabas. He even writes up some of the events in the first person. We are seeing the first hand discovery of what it is to be a church acting in God's mission as He opens the door to the Gentiles. Yet Acts reveals principles and lessons about how we as a church today may play our part in God's mission for the redemption of creation.

All of which raises a very simple question: now we know these things, will we have the courage, the will and the wisdom in God to interpret and apply them to our church today? In Christ's name and for the glory of God, I pray we will.

Nick