

10.30.11 / Acts 13:2-3

Passage Guide

In Acts 13:2-3 we find the early church sending out Paul and Barnabas in accordance to the Spirit's leading. They prayed, fasted and sent out these ordinary men to serve God and the church by bringing extraordinary joy to the towns and people they encountered. It is a beautiful window into the early church's devotion to following Jesus no matter the cost. This narrative allows us a good opportunity to examine the early church and evaluate where we (the church) are today. It is our belief that by examining the early church as seen in Scripture, we can get a glimpse of what, in many ways, the modern church can look like as well. It is important to ask ourselves if we are living a life like the early followers of Jesus did?

We want to avoid the idea of thinking of the early church as "super-Christians" who had it all together. Read the New Testament and you will quickly determine that there was no such thing as a super-Christian. In fact, Paul and Barnabas themselves were rather unknown men at the time they were sent out, and we've already discussed Paul magnificently ANTI-Christian past. The early believers were not heroes but rather messed up men and women who stepped out believing God was great and trusted in Him to come and do great things. They found their strength and purpose in Jesus alone. They believed they were indwelled by the Holy Spirit and relied on His power to bring about redemption in those they encountered. Through the Spirit they boasted in Christ and accepted death when it came their way knowing God would use it to bring others to Himself. The manner in which the early church lived continually pointed towards Jesus. Is this our church today?

Risk is a word associated with the early church. Their risk was responding to Jesus with everything they were. Their finances, their time and literally their lives were given to Jesus. They came to understand the worthiness of Christ and risked all they had knowing nothing could compare. They were normal people like you and I who were being used in extraordinary ways through God's power. Their persecutors could take nothing from them because all they had was already given to Jesus and His church. Their resources were spent more on Jesus than themselves. Is this our church today?

Often times when we are confronted with shortcomings in our own life we will experience feelings of guilt and shame. Making comparisons between the early church and our church today may have the tendency to build up guilt in our lives. However, as Christians, we should feel no guilt because we understand there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). Indeed, there is "no guilt in life, nor fear in death," as songwriters Stuart Townend and Keith Getty have penned. Rather, we rejoice that God was gracious in revealing these things to us. The Spirit is helping us to see our weakness so that in Him we may be strong in these areas. Our goal is "not to challenge ourselves emotionally, but to change spiritually." Jesus is the only one who can change us. God is calling us to something far greater than entertainment and momentary pleasure. He is calling us to Himself and to be on mission with Him as He builds His kingdom.

Therefore, let us not respond in guilt but rather with gratitude knowing the Spirit that indwells us brought these things to our attention. Thank Him for being merciful in helping us refocus on Jesus where we receive His love, mercy and the life that we were created to live. Let us sacrifice everything for Jesus and His church. Let our words match our actions. Let our lives be lived with great risk as we give everything we are to making much of Jesus. Let us trust in the indwelling Spirit as we are sent out like Paul and Barnabas to bring great joy to our city by honoring Jesus and knowing He will show up and make Himself known!

Application Questions

- If someone were to examine your day-to-day activities what would they say your life points towards? How are our lives pointing towards Jesus?
- How does knowing we are indwelled by the Holy Spirit change the way we live our lives?
- What risks can we take to honor Jesus in our city?

Prayer

- That we would be bold and rely on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to bring ultimate joy to our city.
- That God would help us sacrifice everything for Him and the Kingdom.
- Thank God that we are not condemned for our shortcomings and rejoice that He is constantly gracious and merciful toward us.