

**Acts 12: 20 – 13: 5; “The Word Grew & Multiplied”, Sermon #53 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 14th, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The wonderful truth that is being taught to us here in these verses is that God’s word grew and multiplied in those days of the early Church, even though there was so much opposition from Herod the king and the unbelieving Jewish leaders. It has been the purpose of God, in His own time and in His own way, to have His word grow and multiply throughout the Church Age. And it is His purpose to do the same for us, His Church, in this generation as well. I want you to see that this growth in the knowledge of God’s word, and this multiplication of its good spiritual effects upon the hearts and minds of many people, came through the faithfulness of His called men, in and through the preaching of His word. Those prophets and teachers in the church of that day were instruments in God’s hand for doing much good. The success which these men in the early Church experienced, in the spreading of the truth of the gospel, came by God’s calling them to the work, and then giving them grace and wisdom, according to His will and purpose, to begin the fulfillment of the Great Commission. They knew that they needed to be faithful to God in this matter. God’s Holy Spirit would need to lead them into the truth of how they should go about to do the work of evangelism and missions.

If we believe this great truth, that success in the word of God’s growing and multiplying is from God, then I believe that it will be a great encouragement to your faith and our labors here in this place if we can conduct ourselves in the way that these faithful men conducted themselves. It will motivate us to continue to preach and share His word with people around us who need Christ, no matter what kind of opposition that we will face. Let me give to you 3 observations about how the word of God can grow and multiply in its effects through, and in relation to, our preaching and teaching, and sharing of the word of God. 1st of all – The word of God will grow and multiply if God is given the glory, for all the good results. 2nd – The word of God will grow and multiply if men are sensitive to the Spirit’s voice in regard their work. And 3rd – The word of God will grow and multiply, if those who minister and evangelize, have helpers.

1st of all – The word of God will grow and multiply if God is given the glory, for all the good results. (verses 20-24)

“Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country.” “So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.” “And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” “Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.” “And he was eaten by worms and died.” “But the word of God grew and multiplied.” You will remember that at the beginning of chapter 12, we saw that Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword, and he would have killed Peter as well, because he was a man who thrived on popularity with the people. In chapter 12, verse 3, it says – “Because Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.” And in verse 4 it says – “So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.”

So Herod’s intent, to bring Peter before the people for their judgment was motivated by his seeking the favor of the people to further his own interests. He wanted to be seen as someone great in other people’s eyes. And he thrived on that kind of popularity where glory (that is praise) was being brought to his person. This, we should see and understand, was a very dangerous thing for him to do in the sight of God. And indeed, the way that all of this fell out,

shows us what God is looking for, from all men, in regard to any gifts or abilities that they might have. He is looking for humility in the use of those gifts. He is looking for a humble assessment of the fact that all of what we have been given, has been given to us by God. And He expects that men will not take credit in terms of the glory, to themselves. God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. This principle is especially needs to be remembered, in relation to public speaking. God wants all men everywhere, even unbelievers, to give him the glory for anything that they are able to say or do, but especially in terms of how they are then seen by the people that they are ruling over; or in the case of a Christian, whether glory is being given to God, by them, for what they are able to accomplish by means of preaching His word.

Now Herod was certainly not speaking God's word, but rather he was giving an oration to the people. He was giving to them a skillfully delivered address where he would make himself out to be a very gracious ruler. But really, he was speaking to them from very selfish motives. He had been angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon because they had provoked him somehow. We are not told what it was in particular. But they were afraid of what he might do to them. And so, having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they were asking for peace, it says, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day, Herod showed up, arrayed in his royal apparel, and he sat on his throne and he gave these people an oration. And the people, it says, kept on shouting – "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Now, we need to understand that our God is a God who is jealous for His own glory. It says in Isaiah 42, verse 8 – "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another."

Albert Barnes in his commentary says this about that fateful day for Herod – "An appointed, public day." "This was the second day of the sports and games which Herod celebrated in Caesarea in honor of Claudius Caesar. Josephus has given an account of this occurrence, which coincides remarkably with the narrative here." "The account is contained in his "Antiquities of the Jews," book 19, chapter 8, section 2, and is as follows: "Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety." "At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity throughout his province." "On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture, and early in the morning came into the theater place of the shows and games, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently on him."

"And the people gave a shout" – A loud applause." "It is the voice of a god ..." Barnes says – "And presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful unto us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a king, yet shall we henceforth own thee as a superior to mortal nature.'" "It is true that Josephus says that this was done when they saw his splendid apparel, and that he gives no account of his addressing the people, while Luke describes it as the effect of his speech." "But the discrepancy is of no consequence." "Luke is as credible an historian as Josephus, and his account is more consistent than that of the Jewish historian." "It is far more probable that this applause and adoration would be excited by a speech than simply by beholding his apparel." And I agree with Albert Barnes.

It was a great sin against God for these people to acclaim Herod Agrippa a god. It was just as bad that they asked him to be merciful to them, reverencing him as one who was superior to mortal nature. In this whole affair, the sin was greater yet in Herod himself, than it was, even in the people. He received their adoration as though he really was a god. He did not rebuke it. He evidently was quite pleased with it. But his greatest sin was – "that he did not give glory to

God". He did not say – No, it is not me who is great; it is God who is great. He is the One who has given me the ability to speak graciously and act graciously. And so, God was not pleased with Herod. And God's response in this case was instantaneous. He was not going to let this pass, but He was going to make Herod an example to all generations to come. "An angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God." "And he was eaten by worms and died." Now, we can apply this to all Christians who want to do good for God through preaching and teaching, and sharing the gospel with people around them. Do you see that God is the One who has given you all of the natural abilities that you have? Do you see that as a Christian, it is God who has also given you a spiritual gift to go along with those natural abilities, and that it is also He who has placed the good desire in you to want to do evangelism? Then see also how important it is, that in all that you do and say for Him, that your greatest desire would be that He would receive the glory for all that you do and accomplish, on behalf of Christ's kingdom.

How important it is, that when good results and fruit come from your labors that you do not seek for praise and honor to come to yourself, but that you deflect it away from yourself, and point people to God. What should you say, then, when any success comes to you? You should say – It is the Lord. The Lord has mercifully granted me or us, help and aid, and that is why, you who are looking on, see these things. Give the glory to God the Father and Christ your King, for so ordering providence and so interceding on your behalf, that all of your sins of omission and commission in regard to doing God's good work have not come to light, but because of the blood of Christ, these good works are really seen as good works. And then you should rejoice that God knows how to hide pride from men, so that they will truly learn to glorify God in and by their works. Children, young people, and all Christians who desire to do something or say something to the glory of God – Do you see how important it is that you will learn to deal with pride, even from your youth? And how do you deal with it? You deal with it by coming to Christ at a young age, and asking Him to save you. And then you ask Him to help you not to see yourself as someone who is great.

Yes, those who do not know God yet, here in this place – Come to Christ, and ask that He would open your ears and seal your instruction, in order to turn you away from the sin of pride. Ask Him to conceal pride from you, as it says in Job 33: 18, that "He would keep back your soul from the Pit, and your life from perishing by the sword; that you would understand that "there is a messenger for you, a mediator, one among a thousand, who can show you God's uprightness. Then ask Him to be gracious to you, and deliver you from going down to the Pit." And you will come to say – "I have found a ransom." (Job 33: 24) And if you are older or have been distressed greatly by your sins, listen to the encouragement which is given to you – "Your flesh shall be young like a child's and you shall return to the days of your youth, and you shall pray to God, and God will delight in you, and you will see His face with joy, for He will restore to you through Christ and to His righteousness. His righteousness is so much better than your own, because His righteousness is perfect, and yours is not. Hear me, for this is the gospel – To believe in Christ and not yourself, and your own proud efforts, to make yourself appear to be someone great, or someone who has it all under control and can deal with all the situations in your life. God knows better than that.

2nd – The word of God will grow and multiply if men are sensitive to the Spirit's voice in regard their work.

(Chapter 13, verses 1-4)

Chapter 13, verse 1 says – "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" "And having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” Now, I want you to see that this church at Antioch already had prophets and teachers who were using their gifts in the context of that local church, even before this decision of sending them was made; that is, of the Holy Spirit’s speaking to them about the work to which he had called them. They were already functioning members of that local church. They were men who were using their gifts to build up the body of Christ there in Antioch. It was out of such faithfulness in ministry, using their gifts within that church context, that these men together knew that it would be good to fast and to pray to determine what they could further do to evangelize the provinces and cities around them, along with the island of Cyprus. Yes, they had a personal vision for what they wanted to do. But they knew that it was God’s will to act in concert with each other. This praying together and working together would glorify God more than their each going about the work on their own. They wanted to be under God the Holy Spirit’s leadership and guidance. They knew that they needed to hear a word from God concerning who should specifically be sent out.

This leads to a simple and straightforward consideration that each of us should consider – Am I a Christian who is willing to attempt to work together with others in this local church; to pray about what God the Spirit would lead us to do together for the furtherance of the kingdom of Christ? Am I willing to even fast, if it appears to be necessary, in order to see and know what God would want me to do in concert with others in this local church? Often times, in our day, there are Christians who do not seem to understand the importance of this vital principle of truth which I am attempting to bring to your attention here. They may think that they can live out their Christian life in their own way; not really joining together with the labors of the local church. Or, if they are in the church, they seem to have a hard time working together with other Christians for the common cause of evangelism. May this not be the case among us. May each of us see our local church here as the base of operations for our spiritual labors and endeavors in evangelism and missions. This glorifies God, and God will build upon it. He will cause the good work to grow, and the good effects will be multiplied, because the work is being done in God’s way.

Well, I hope that you can see that the church at Antioch was strong in this way that I am talking about. They were strong because they were ministering to the Lord, and praying and fasting together, about what they could do, and how they should proceed. And God blessed what they were doing, and the Holy Spirit actually spoke to them while they were seeking wisdom on this important matter. Verse 2 of chapter 13 says – “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” Let me spend a few minutes giving you my thoughts about God’s speaking to men in our day. Certainly I believe that those men in that day heard the voice of God the Holy Spirit. There is no explanation of whether it was a voice which they all heard together in their minds simultaneously, or an audible voice as though the Holy Spirit was standing right in the room there with them. I tend to favor the latter explanation. But this verse shows us that the Holy Spirit is the 3rd Person of the Godhead. He spoke and commanded in an authoritative way. His calling them to this work was initiated by Him as God. He said – Separate these men unto Me, God the Spirit.

But I bring this up to say to you that God the Holy Spirit has a very extensive ministry to the Church of Jesus Christ. I believe that He speaks to the hearts and minds of Christians today, not in this more dramatic revelatory way, but through His impressing upon our minds His sovereign and holy will in regard to the work of the Lord. Certainly He does this by means of using the word of God’s commands and principles, and the example of those who labored in that apostolic time; using them as examples to us. We no longer have the more direct revelation of the Spirit,

as to how we should proceed. We who are seeking for guidance should therefore continue to see prayer to be of the highest importance, and even at times we might consider whether fasting together would be appropriate, in order to obtain the wisdom that we need to understand how we might be most effective in the work of the Lord. We will continue to seek His guidance, and in this holy way of waiting upon the Lord, and ministering to Him; we will very hopeful, making every attempt to be faithful in building up our local church's spiritual strength. We will humbly ask the Lord, the Spirit, for wisdom on who it is who may be called to be sent out to do more wide-ranging labors of evangelism. And if they are to be sent away from us, we will publically recognize them, if it is the work of missions to foreign lands, that they are being called to. I hope that you can see that the good work of evangelism begins with this simple desire; the desire to see others hear the gospel of Christ and be saved. It continues with the word of God growing in us, the believers who want to glorify God and promote Christ's kingdom of righteousness and truth. And it reaches full fruition in the church formally recognizing and sending out a missionary or missionaries, as the Lord raises them up.

By our love for people's souls we as a church will see the good effects of our receiving the preached word, multiplying in our midst, and eventually these good effects will begin to have an impact on the communities which we live in. When you pay attention to the preaching of the gospel and the word of God, and then you do your best to promote what you have learned, it is then that word grows and multiplies. When the work and labors for Christ grow more extensive and the Spirit's blessing attends them, then the gospel itself and the effects of our labors in promoting the word will spread to more and more people. This is the dynamic and high calling of the Church of Jesus Christ; those who are called to preach the word preach it, praying that it will be heard with spiritual ears. Those who hear the word receive it, and they act upon it, and then they also spread the word near and far. And so, by as many as love the Lord, and by those who have the gifts which will enable them to persevere in such work, Christ is proclaimed and the Lord blesses and brings the results that fulfill His purposes.

In our particular church there are already those among us who are interested in doing street preaching and other forms of outreach. Let us continue to pray together about what the Lord would have each of us specifically to do. And even though we should not expect the Spirit to speak to us in an audible voice, we should expect that He will speak to our minds and hearts concerning those among us who are gifted, and who may be called to a more extensive outreach and mission. But I want you to notice that the Holy Spirit told this group of gifted men in the church to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. These were men who had already been involved in the work of evangelism and missions. They were both single men, by the way, which freed them up to devote themselves fully to this work in a way that married men never could. Let us not think that single men cannot become elders, for these men show us that they can, and that they can be mightily used to preach and teach, counsel and encourage the church in her great mission of proclaiming Christ and making disciples.

Notice also, that the church formally recognized the ministry to which God was calling these men. Having fasted and prayed further about the matter, they laid their hands on them, and they sent them away to their work. This was not an ordination service, but it was a ceremony which publically recognized before the church that God had appointed these men to this specific work; their desiring that God would bless and prosper them in their labors. What is also wonderful to notice is the fact that they were also being sent out by the Holy Spirit as well as church. They were not simply being sent by men, they were being sent by God. This gave everyone in the church much encouragement; realizing that this work having been begun by God Himself would have good success and results. And it should cause us to rejoice as well, remembering all that the Lord has done for us as a congregation; that over the past years, He has been helping me, your pastor to deliver the word of God to you, relating many portions and

applications which come from those portions to you, so that you have grown strong spiritually and that we are now in a better position than ever before, to bear fruit to God if we persevere in this good work.

And then 3rd – The word of God will grow and multiply if those who minister and evangelize have helpers.

Verse 6 says – “And when they arrived Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” “They also had John as their assistant, or as their minister. The word used to describe Mark John in the Greek is υπηρετησ and means “an under-oarsman”, a subordinate, an assistant, or a servant. John Mark has been mentioned before back in verse 25 of chapter 12 – “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.” John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas. He was not a called minister of the gospel, at least yet, but he was an apostolic helper. He was someone who brought them information and food and looked out for places for them to stay while they were away on their labors. He may have assisted them in the baptism of converts.

He may also have been a kind of intern or apprentice to them in their work; observing them in their preaching, and may have had desires to preach himself, and perhaps did actually preach. John Calvin believes that he did help the apostles in their preaching. And this may have been so, as Paul later refused to take John Mark to the work with them in a later missionary journey because he had left them in the work in Pamphylia. And I think that Paul’s refusal to Mark come with them, can hardly be construed to have come, because of John Mark’s unfaithfulness in simply leaving off a ministry of helps to them in earthly things alone. It was probably because Paul had had expectations that John Mark would develop as a faithful minister of the word. Eventually, we see that he did develop into that faithful minister. John Mark is the Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark and took down the very words that the apostle Peter gave to him, in that regard. What could be a more important ministry than that?

Let me conclude this message by saying that it is very important that those who are pastors, and missionary preachers and those who are doing the work of evangelism in spreading the gospel of Christ and the word of God, have faithful helpers in their work. How can God be glorified and lasting fruit be born in church, or on the mission field, if those who preach do not have helpers who will faithfully assist them and support them and help them in their work? No doubt it is essential. For later on, the apostle Paul says in 2nd Timothy 4: 11 to Timothy – “Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.” “Only Luke is with me.” “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” The word for ministry there is διακονιαν, the word which is used in reference to one who serves, or a deacon. How very important it is for all who would serve God to learn to be faithful to help and assist the pastor or missionary or evangelist in their labor. It is how the word comes to grow and be multiplied.