

## What Should Be the Highest Priority of the Church?

Acts 13:1-3

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*While 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." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

- Acts 13:2-3, ESV

The church at Antioch was blessed and growing. A model church, it had been planted and led by excellent, humble, dedicated, Christ-centered, Gospel-preaching men. We don't know how big the church was by Acts 13, but five men are named as the key leaders, likely teaching elders: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. This is a very diverse leadership group, including . . .

- a Libyan (Cyrene)
- a man from sub-Saharan Africa (Simeon Niger)
- a politically connected man (Manaen)
- a devout Jew from the school of the Pharisees (Saul) and
- a man so full of encouragement that they called him not by his given name, Joseph, but by his nickname, the Son of Encouragement (Barnabas).

These men sought to lead the church faithfully, teaching the Scriptures and seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit through fasting and prayer. Suddenly, while fasting and praying, they were told by the Spirit to "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" Barnabas and Saul were the key leaders among this group. Barnabas had been the first key leader for the church, sent to Antioch by the apostles. Barnabas had sought help from Saul, better known to us as Paul.

Imagine God calling the two most prominent leaders from a large and influential church to set out on mission together. This shows us the high priority that missions should be for the church, and it shows the faithfulness of these church leaders that they immediately obeyed and sent Barnabas and Saul off on their mission.

Almost 2,000 years after Barnabas and Saul set out on their mission trip, the church has still not reached all nations and tribes with the Gospel. Some estimate that over 7,000 people groups, representing over 4 billion people, remain unreached by the Gospel, having less than 2% Christians in their population. Over 3,200 people groups, having a population of over 216 million people, are completely unengaged, having no mission engagement with the Gospel.

Why are so many people still unreached? Well, we could give the good Calvinist answer and say that God has not yet sovereignly ordained that all the nations should hear the Gospel. But that kind of answer gives Calvinism a bad name, and it is really just a cop-out. God has commanded us to take the Gospel to everyone, and we have not obeyed the call. Why not? Because we're too busy doing other things.

Too many churches prioritize almost everything above missions: church buildings, staff, programs, technology, marketing, etc. They are far more interested in growing in size and serving their own members than in reaching the nations with the Gospel. I understand very well the budgeting pressures of local churches. As the pastor of a small church that's less than five years old, we have limited resources. Caring for and seeking to grow the local church is important, but we must never neglect the priority of missions. The church exists to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our neighbors and the nations. This must always be our highest priority.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for seeking our own comfort over the advance of the Gospel to the nations. Forgive us for neglecting Your call. Your Gospel, Your mission, Your kingdom and Your glory among all peoples must be the highest priority for Your church. Ignite a fire in us for missions as the priority of Your church. In Jesus' name, Amen.*