

# Mission of the Spirit

by Stephen Olford

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*The mission of the Spirit is worldwide evangelism, fulfilled in the calling, sending, and blessing of missionaries.*

**Duration:** 34:50

**Scripture:** Acts 13:1-5, Acts 13:7, Acts 13:52

**Topics:** "Spirit Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the fourfold blessing that comes from being a missionary for Christ. The first blessing is the opportunity to witness for Christ, as seen in the apostles preaching the word of God and performing miracles. The second blessing is the ability to battle for Christ, as the apostles faced persecution and opposition from the Jews. The third blessing is the joy of harvesting for Christ, as they saw many conversions and the spread of the gospel. Lastly, the speaker emphasizes the blessing of suffering for Christ, as the apostles were expelled and faced persecution. The sermon encourages all believers to see themselves as missionaries in their daily lives and to embrace these blessings.

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## Transcript

The reading of the scriptures this morning, Acts 13, 1 to 5, and verse 52. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Mannion, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

And when they had fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia, and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John to their minister.

Verse 52, And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. May the Lord bless to us this morning this reading from His own holy word. We bow together in prayer.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

This morning we return to our theme, The Power of Pentecost, and in that series we look at the mission of the Spirit. So I am going to ask you to turn back to Acts chapter 13, concentrating especially on this chapter this morning, with particular observation on those first four verses, and then a little exposition in the chapter at large. Acts 13, verses 1 to 4. The mission of the Holy Spirit is worldwide evangelism.

It was Dr. A.T. Pearson who said many years ago, the whole work of the whole church for the whole age is that of witnessing. And no one can read through the Acts of the Apostles without being aware of this theme, and this emphasis again and again, that the mission of the Holy Spirit is worldwide evangelism. This is clearly illustrated by the unfolding events of the Acts of the Apostles.

The whole book is divided into the establishment of the church, the expansion of the church, and the extension of the church, even to the uttermost part of the earth. This progression of worldwide evangelism was clearly implicit in the words of our Savior when he said, the power of the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and Judea, Sinaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Here in the thirteenth chapter we reach the watershed of the book.

Up until now, the movement has been from Jerusalem through to Antioch. From this point onwards, we find the movement from Antioch through to Rome. And in this progression of the movement of the Holy Spirit, we have a picture of the expansive work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism.

In order to fulfill his mission, the Holy Spirit works through local churches. And in this chapter we have such a picture of a local church in action under the sovereignty and movement of the Holy Spirit. It's interesting to note, if you'll glance down at verses one and two especially, that the leadership of this particular church at Antioch had not one single one of the original apostles, those who walked and talked with the Lord Jesus during his earthly pathway.

At the same time, it's interesting to notice that those who are here named teachers and prophets represent a universal appeal of the gospel. Look at them just for a moment. There was Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus.

Lucius, who came from Cyrene in northern Africa. Simeon, who is also a Jew, but his second name, Niger, which means black and perhaps described his swarthy complexion, is a Roman name and reveals that he moved in Roman circles. There was Mannion, a man with aristocratic and courtly connections, while Paul himself here was a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia and a trained rabbi.

And in that little band, there was exemplified the unifying influence of Christianity. Men from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered a togetherness in Christ because they had discovered the secret of Christ. For any who come into Jesus immediately find themselves in fellowship with one another.

And although representing many backgrounds and many cultures and even many races, these men were one in Christ as teachers and prophets in that local assembly at Antioch long, long ago. Now in this context, we have three great principles which are bound up in this theme of the mission of the Spirit. And we see that the mission of the Spirit is fulfilled first of all in the calling of missionaries, secondly in the sending of missionaries, and thirdly in the blessing of missionaries.

Let's look at these together very closely this morning because they represent our own situation right here at Calvary. The calling of missionaries. Verse 2, As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, unto the work whereunto I have called them.

Here is a truly remarkable statement. Such were the conditions at the church at Antioch that God was able to make clear to the leaders as well as the members of this assembly that two men, two men in this assembly were going to be separated for a specific work of extension evangelism. The mode of communication by which the Holy Spirit made this clear need not disturb us one little bit.

In all probability, the call of God was articulated through the lips of the prophets, speaking through a sudden burst of simultaneous inspiration, in which God laid upon them the names of two people, the most indispensable as a matter of fact in the whole assembly, Saul and Barnabas, and inspired and moved from heaven to name these two within the leadership of the church and then the membership of the church. There was unanimity in accepting that this was the call of God upon two indispensable men to be flung far hence in the extension work of evangelism. The important feature to hold our attention this morning was the fact that the church was spiritually attuned to the voice of God and therefore heard the voice of God.

Consider this a little more closely. What were these conditions which made it possible for God to break through from heaven and name two individuals in the church and say, I want them separated unto me for the work whereunto I have called them? What were the conditions? And are these conditions binding for the rest of the dispensation? Positively, yes. This is the sample and example church of the entire New Testament for the whole age of the spirit.

For those who might argue that Jerusalem was particularly Jewish, for those who might argue that there were characteristics of the church at Jerusalem that cannot be repeated elsewhere, can never argue that way in relation to the church at Antioch. This is the watershed of the entire book. This brings us the example of the Holy Spirit for all time.

Let's look at these conditions which prevailed. First of all, there was a fellowship of the spirit. The chapter opens, if you'll notice, in verse one with these words, Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers.

I've hesitated on those words in the church because I intend to underline them. The phrase in the church indicates that God did not have to speak outside of the church, but rather in and through the local church. And this could have never happened without the fellowship of the spirit.

There was a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace so that there was no doubt about this matter. There was an absolute unity about this matter. There was a unanimity about this matter.

The reason why it's so difficult to discern the will of God in our day is because of dissension and confusion in our local churches. Indeed, so often the Lord Jesus, in this Laodicean period, has to stand right outside of the church and say, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him and he with me.

But here was a fellowship of the spirit in which God could break through, and through the leadership of the church, bring a message from heaven which was accepted by the church with glorious unanimity and oneness. The fellowship of the spirit. You can't study your New Testament very far without discovering that this is one of the supreme characteristics of a spirit-filled church.

The communication, the fellowship, the participation, the sharing of the spirit. If a church is spirit-filled, then we share that common life. And since the Godhead is not divided, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he who brings the mind of the Godhead into a church in which he is sovereign will find a unanimous response

from heaven.

Oh, for a church that enjoys the fellowship of the spirit. But in the second place, will you notice that there was another condition that characterized this local assembly, a ministry of the spirit. Verse 2. As they ministered to the Lord, the Holy Ghost said.

As they ministered to the Lord, the Holy Ghost said. The verb translated ministered is commonly used both in the Greek Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, as well as the New Testament, to describe the work of priests and Levites in the temple. In later ecclesiastical language, it was associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

It stood for what we call today liturgy, or set forms of worship. In practical terms, of course, it spells out the spirit-filled ministry which was being exercised by these prophets and by these teachers in the church at Antioch. And undoubtedly it included what Luke describes as the follow-through of the effusion of the day of Pentecost.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. As they gathered together for the set forms of service with the liturgy which was being developed, the songs and the hymns and the celebrations of the sacraments, the mighty Spirit of God picked up the prophet and spoke forth with insight and foresight, picked up the teacher and instructed in the deep truths of God. The people were nourished and edified and challenged.

Here was a church then where the gifts, the gifts of the Spirit were being exercised. In the local assembly, they ministered to the Lord. But there was a third condition which qualified this assembly to hear the voice of God, not only the fellowship of the Spirit and the ministry of the Spirit, but the discipline of the Spirit, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted.

This word fasted indicates that by virtue of submission to the Holy Spirit there was a willingness amongst the leadership and the membership to forego such legitimate things as food and sleep and social intercourse in order that they might give themselves more to prayer and to the waiting upon the Lord. Here is a discipline which can only be exercised in the Holy Ghost. The reason we do not have more prayer and fasting in our day is because we know so little of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our individual and corporate lives.

Here were people who were ready, because of the leadership and because of the pressure of the Spirit upon them, to forego sleep, to forego social intercourse, to forego food if necessary, in order that they might give themselves entirely to prayer and to the waiting upon God in the knowledge of His will. Thus we see that it was in such a spiritual climate, in such a spiritual context, that God broke through from heaven and said, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, to the work whereunto I have called them. Scholars point out that the words, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, suggest a command in answer to prayer which must be acted on at once.

It's a special construction there that demands an immediate response. This wasn't something that they could wait for endlessly. Having waited upon the Lord in prayer, God broke through, and it was as clear as daylight.

This was the action they must take, and none demurred. So the mission of the Spirit involves the calling of missionaries. And beloved, if we're ever going to see the calling of God in our midst to an even greater

extent than that which we've enjoyed at this time, we too must know the fellowship of the Spirit.

We too must know the ministry of the Spirit. We too must know the discipline of the Spirit. And how does this come about? By an individual and corporate submission to the sovereignty of the Lord, the Spirit, in his own church.

But let's move on a little further. The mission of the Spirit involves the calling of missionaries. So it does.

But it also includes the sending of missionaries. So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost departed. Alas, alas, there are many caught, but very often they don't go forth.

I remember my father speaking on a similar text as this many years ago. And to illustrate the point, he brought into his message a little inscription he saw on a candle that was put on a little table in a country house down in Barnstable in Devon, England. And with a twinkle in his eye he said, right across this candle, he read the words one morning as he got up, Many are called, but few get up.

And one could almost adapt that this morning and say, Many are called, but few go forth. Few go forth. In the mission of the Spirit we see not only the calling of missionaries, but the sending of missionaries.

So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost departed. Once the mind of the Lord was made known to the leaders and members of the church, there was, one, the recognition of missionaries. The recognition of the missionaries.

Look at verse 3, we read that when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon them, they sent them away. The laying on of hands was a formal act by which the church attested her acceptance of the divine mission to which God had called these two men. It is important to observe, however, that such a recognition was followed again by much prayer and fasting.

How they should shame and convict our own prayerlessness and lack of waiting upon God in our generation. We ordain ministers, we elect officers, we commission missionaries with little more than a single prayer on the occasion, and God bless you. But to study these verses and to read of the prayer and fasting that preceded the sending forth of these two men is to learn the secret of the mighty power of God that fell upon these men as they went forth from that assembly.

There was the recognition of the missionaries. They laid their hands upon them. This morning, in the presence of God and of this congregation, we're going to do just that with another brother who goes forth from us, recommissioned to the work in Japan with his beloved wife and family.

With the recognition of the missionaries, will you notice there was the release of the missionaries. And when they had fasted and prayed, they sent them away. Verse 3, the Greek word there is, they released them.

It's exactly that. That's the best English word to fit it. They released them.

It's not the same word as is translated for the Holy Spirit here. The Holy Spirit sent them, but the Church released them. The word sent means released.

I repeat, it was the Holy Spirit who sent them forth, but it was the Church who released them. In other words, the Church set them free by prayerfully caring for their personal and practical needs. There are those who maintain that the Church at Antioch didn't fulfill their obligations to these two as they should

have done, but whether or not this can be established doesn't alter the principle of the Holy Ghost which is enunciated here, that it's incumbent upon every local assembly to release those who are called.

If the Holy Spirit would send them forth, we are to release them from all care and anxiety, morally, financially, prayerfully, and every other way, that they may go forth in absolute freedom in the Holy Ghost. They released them. And with that releasing we read something else here.

Not only do we notice the recognition of the missionaries and the release of the missionaries, but the recommendation of the missionaries. For in chapter 15, verse 40, concerning these very same missionaries we read, they were recommended unto the grace of God. Looking back, this is what the disciples in other churches said.

They were recommended from the Church at Antioch to the grace of God. This is Luke's way of beautifully describing the prayer backing with which the two apostles went forth, and also the commendation of these two to other Christians and to other assemblies and to other places where their missionary journeys would take them. It's a wonderful joy for anyone to go forth with a recommendation of the Church.

Anyone not desiring this is out of accord with New Testament teaching. And cannot therefore expect the full blessing of God upon his or her ministry. This has always been God's way.

And the fact that churches have lost this vision doesn't alter God's truth. God's truth isn't adjusted to modern circumstances. Modern circumstances have to bend to God's absolute truth.

And it's God's purpose that missionaries should not only be recognized in the local church and released from the local church to do their missionary work, but recommended unto the grace of God. And that grace of God is revealed in other places too, so that wherever they go they carry the recommendation of their own local church. I come from local church, so and so, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Receive thee as becometh saints to the glory of God. So we see that this sending forth of missionaries constitutes the fulfillment of the mission of the Holy Spirit. Indeed the very words, they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, represents the Greek word that's translated elsewhere, apostles, same word, sent forth, apostles, sent forth missionaries.

And it is the office and function of the Holy Spirit to thrust forth missionaries into the harvest field. But let us hasten in conclusion to observe the third movement of this amazing passage, the calling of missionaries, the sending of missionaries, and thirdly, the blessing of missionaries. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

That's the last verse of the chapter. And these words beautifully climax the chapter. A chapter full of blessing.

Read through these verses and see how these apostles, these missionaries, were abundantly blessed. And while studying the chapter in detail at your leisure, let's just lift out four little glimpses into the blessing of the Spirit upon these missionaries. And may I pause here to say that this should not only characterize those who go forth to serve the Lord overseas, but you and I who go forth from our homes to be missionaries in our offices, in our universities, in our shops, in our factories, in our various avocations day by day.

What was this fourfold blessing? Look quickly with me at verse seven. The blessing of witnessing for Christ. In verse five we read they preached the Word of God.

This, of course, they did in every place. And God visited them in mighty miracles. And in verse seven we read of an outstanding conversion.

Sergius Paulus, the governor of the island of Paphos, who was wonderfully transformed. Why? Because the Spirit of God was upon these missionaries. And as they sailed to this little island and preached the Gospel, the very governor of the island committed his life to Jesus Christ.

Turn over the page and notice the blessing of battling for Christ. In this very same island, Elymus the sorcerer, for so his name is by interpretation, withstood them. And we read then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Verses eight to ten.

Missionaries can't be faithful to the Word of God without encountering satanic opposition. Ask our brethren who come home from the field and they'll tell you the truth. Indeed, some have described satanic opposition which descends upon them.

And I'm telling you, it's unbelievably frightening to hear the stories of some missionaries' experiences as they sense the whole of hell let loose upon them. But isn't it wonderful to know that if you're commissioned in God's way and the Holy Spirit is upon you, you can stand even in the presence of satanic opposition and say, O thou full of all subtlety, being full of the Holy Ghost, and seeing the hand of judgment come down upon all satanic opposition. The blessing of witnessing for Christ.

The blessing of battling for Christ. Thirdly, the blessing of harvesting for Christ. Verses forty-eight to forty-nine.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the Lord as many as ordained to eternal life believed and the Word of the Lord was published through all the region. It's wonderful to see the individual conversions, but it's wonderful to hear tidings from the various fields like we've heard from Rwanda over the last thirty years of revival where literally hundreds are turning to the Lord. Where the Spirit is being poured forth and multitudes are being harvested for our glorious husbandman in heaven who awaits that final harvest before he's coming back again.

The blessing of witnessing for Christ. The blessing of battling for Christ. The blessing of harvesting for Christ.

And finally, the blessing of suffering for Christ. Yes, this is in it too. And beloved Bill Vickman, as you go forth, I want to remind you that this is included in this fourfold blessing of this chapter.

The blessing also of suffering for Christ. For in verses fifty to fifty-one we read, But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium.

It has been said that no man can live and preach in the Holy Ghost without creating a revival or a riot. How this is illustrated throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Paul and Barnabas were not exempt.

They were persecuted and expelled out of the coasts. But they did exactly what their Lord commanded them. Having done their best to present the challenge, having been expelled out of the coasts, they shook the dust from their feet in judgment upon a city that had rejected them and went on to further service.

And so the chapter concludes with these words, The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. You ask why? The answer is simple. These called and sent men were experiencing the blessing of witnessing, the blessing of battling, the blessing of harvesting, the blessing of suffering for Christ.

So they were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. So we have seen what constitutes the mission of the Spirit. It's simply this.

The calling, sending and blessing of missionaries. And God has never changed His methods. And it's thrilling to watch in the following chapter that we can deal with this morning.

The return of these missionaries to their own local assembly. The calling of the Church together and rehearsing in their presence all that God had gloriously done in them and through them in opening the door of evangelism to the Gentiles. Don't you long for this to be the pattern for our local assembly? This is the mighty Spirit of God working in the Church in conditions where His voice can be heard.

The fellowship of the Spirit the ministry of the Spirit the discipline of the Spirit this is God's purpose in sending forth missionaries by our recognition of them by our releasing of them by our recommending of them. This is God's purpose ever in the blessing of missionaries. When God from heaven pours out His Spirit on those of us who are missionaries at home every day of our lives mothers in their homes fathers in their workplace young people at school or missionaries across the sea for ours is the task of witnessing of battling of harvesting of suffering for Christ.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every single day closed as we dropped on our knees with these words then were the disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. This is the mission of the Spirit from now until Jesus comes back again. And so my friend I say to you as we've often sung and perhaps never understood O thy in haste thy mission high fulfilling to tell all the world that God is light that He who made all nations is not willing one soul should perish lost in shades of night publish glad tidings tidings of peace tidings of Jesus redemption and release and I say to us here this morning pastor and people included we who represent a little bit of Zion we who represent the local church right here in Manhattan at this particular spot of ground O Calvary Baptist Church haste thy mission high fulfilling for this is the mission of the Holy Spirit let us pray Gracious Lord we hush our hearts in thy presence in order that the impact of thy truth may come through to make indelible impressions upon us such impressions that will draw from us the absolute response and obedience of our willing minds and hearts and wills Lord we long that we shall be caught up in the mission of the Spirit O save us from being bypassed save us from missing out on that which is thy full purpose for our individual as well as corporate life so we pray that thou would make us men and women who are truly yielded to the sovereignty of the Spirit therefore filled with the fullness of the Spirit because we ask it for Jesus Christ's sake Amen

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