

They Gathered the Church

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

PRAYER

So, in the last few weeks we have seen the Apostles in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In each place, they preached to the Jews in the Synagogue, had certain immediate success, and then the Jews followed them from each place they had been before, turning the Jews and Gentiles in the cities against them. Each time, they fled when it got physical, and Paul was in fact beaten in Lystra. But then, they returned back through that list of cities in reverse order, stopping to encourage the believers who had come to faith during their missionary journey. This is where we pick up.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

Pisidia is where Antioch was, the second Antioch first mentioned in the Bible. The first was in Turkey, where the believers were first called Christians. Then, they came to Pamphylia, which is the town of Perga, where they visited on their way through, but where it seems they didn't stop to preach, probably because it didn't have a synagogue or a substantial Jewish community. However, this time they stopped to preach. Look to verse 25.

25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia,

Having preached exhaustively to the Jews, now they felt free to evangelize purely Gentile communities like Perga. They then went to Attalia, which was about 20 miles away. This city, also known as Antalya, was founded about 200 years before Christ by the king of Pergamum and is today the fifth most populated city in Turkey and is best known as a resort town. It doesn't appear as though they did any preaching in Attalia, and if they did it's not recorded. This was a detour they didn't make on the first leg of their journey. Probably they went because it was a port city on the mouth of the Catarrhactes river, and they sailed out of it. Look to verse 26.

26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

Here they sailed around the island of Cypress, which they stopped at on the way there, and wound up back at the first Antioch, the one in Turkey. Luke alludes to this being the place, "where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work [they had to do]." I'll remind you of that passage, found in Acts 13:

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger,[a] Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2

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

So Paul, Barnabas and his companions – minus Mark, who had already come back home – come back to Antioch, to the very church that had commissioned them for their journey.

27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Please note what happened. The church commissioned them for their journey. They left on their journey. They returned from the journey back to the church who had commissioned them. They gathered the church together, and then debriefed the church on what had happened, making special mention of how God had brought the faith to the Gentiles, even though they had went to preach to the Jews first.

28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

The Apostles, Paul and Barnabas in particular, remained with the church in Antioch for quite a while. No doubt, they were continuing to teach them and encourage them. Ellicott's commentary says, "The words probably cover an interval of more than a year, during which it is reasonable to suppose that the preaching of the two Apostles drew together a large number of Gentile converts." Barnes' notes assumes it was longer, writing "If the transactions recorded in this chapter occurred, as is supposed, about 45 a.d. or 46 a.d., and the council at Jerusalem assembled 51 a.d. or 53 a.d., as is supposed, then here is an interval of from five to eight years in which we have no account of them." Others seem to suggest they remained there four to five years, meaning that Antioch really served as the hub of Apostolic missionary activity in the earliest of years in the church. Probably, this is because Jerusalem was too hostile an environment, given the persecution that was, ironically, started by Paul while he was unconverted.

And that's the exposition. It's just a short passage today, and next week we will get into what is my favorite part of Acts, the Jerusalem Council. It's there that we see a number of very, very important revelations about the church, doctrine, and Apostolic authority. But until we get there, we need to pause and reflect a bit more on this passage, and draw from the deep well of Scripture so that we can glean the best truth that God has for us there. So, let's do that.

We're going to look a bit deeper at two verses here. One will deal with the topic of missions, and the other the topic of the church's support for religious riots.

27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

I'm going to go quickly through the observations we glean here.

1. The church is to oversee the sending of missionaries. Note that the Antioch church commissioned them. The Apostles did not commission themselves. We read Acts not just as a book of history describing what was done, but a book of Inspired Write prescribing what we should do. Mission boards have no place whatsoever in the commissioning of missionaries. I saw this week the International Mission Board commissioning service of new international missionaries at the national convention of our denomination. The IMB has no more business commissioning missionaries than it does administering the Lord's Supper or conducting baptisms. While there may be a role for missions organizations that is Biblical, chiefly the fostering of cooperation between local churches, it is not their role to send missionaries. Mission boards may facilitate or assist local churches, but not supplant them. To be the sending organization, if the organization is not the church, is to usurp the church's authority and responsibility. While multiple churches may partner together to send a missionary, those missionaries must ultimately be held accountable to those local churches, and not to mission agencies outside the local church. And frankly, if we were to stick to that today, we would not only see churches increase their giving to missions because they would play an essential and hands-on role in the missions process, you wouldn't see most of the giving dollar be eaten away by bureaucracy of the organization, and neither would you see incompetent or unprepared missionaries because local churches would not send them. When there is a mission board between the missionary and the church, it serves as a loophole to Biblical stewardship and accountability.

2. The Apostles answered to the local church. Please note that these were Apostles. In the case of Paul, that's a capital-A Apostle. He was hand-selected by Jesus. And yet, he answered to the local church. I would submit to you that there has never been a missionary better qualified than Paul, and yet, he came back to answer to the local church. Why? The local church and only the local church is the Body of Christ. It is THE representative of Jesus on Earth. There is none other. There is no other place to which one must report or receive their authority. There is no room, no need, and really, no way someone should support a missionary who is not answerable to their local church or to the local churches who sent them. We get calls often of evangelists, musicians, entertainers, and missionaries who ask to speak, sing, preach or solicit funds from our congregation. My question is always the same; what church is sending you to us? If they have no answer, or if they answer, "Well, it's just me," then I politely decline their offer. If you want to work for Jesus, you work through and for his body.

3. Because the local church is ultimately responsible for missions activity, the church should be doing missions activity. One of the consequences of engaging so long in an unbiblical missiology is suffering from an apathy that arises from outsourcing what the church is supposed to do. For so long, evangelical Christians have simply sent a check to a missions organization and let them recruit and send missionaries. And with that, comes a separation from missions itself. The solution to diminish this apathy is not sending unqualified laypeople to the mission field as tourists or vacationaries to get excited about world travel or multicultural experiences, but to actually raise the support and commission qualified individuals to go out on behalf of the Fellowship Baptist Church in the name of Jesus to preach the Gospel to the nations. One of the reasons to give faithfully is to support individuals who we know by name who have been vetted by our church and sent by our church. By the way, the reason you should give a proportion of your income, that means a percentage, of how God has blessed

you, and to faithfully stick with that – EVEN IF ALL THE NEEDS OF YOUR LOCAL CHURCH ARE BEING MET – is because we’ve the responsibility to care for the needs of missionaries around the world.

Friends, we have to, as the Fellowship Baptist Church, get our financial health in order and become motivated to be sacrificial to send the Gospel around the world. We have to. And that will take each and every family in our body doing what they can to accomplish the Great Commission. It isn’t a matter of losing some people and being smaller this year than last. The fact is, if every family gave faithfully in the New Testament sense there are enough of us to easily put a new missionary on the field, fully supported AND to take care of all of our responsibilities at home.

The next place I want to look at more deeply and explain the so-what of the sermon, is a different part of verse 27.

27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

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