

Series: Transition

January 26, 2020

## **Title: Crossroads**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: Acts 13:1-4**

## **Antioch**

### **Antioch, A.D. 45:**

Every so often something happens that changes our world forever. Think for example of the representatives from the 13 colonies who gathered in Philadelphia on a sweltering July 4<sup>th</sup> to sign the Declaration of independence. Their action launched the founding of a new nation that would be an influence and defender of liberty for centuries to come. The world *changed* on July 4, 1776. And it changed because brave people dared to think outside the box.

### **[Slide 2]**

Something even more life-changing happened in a city called Syrian Antioch just 12 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The elders of the church in Antioch sensed the leading of the Holy Spirit to choose two of their number to become missionaries to the Roman Empire. It is because of that prayerful decision that we are here today.

### **A new experiment:**

Why did this happen in the city of Antioch and not in Jerusalem? The answer lies in the fact that it was in Antioch that Jewish people and Gentiles first worshiped together as the church of Jesus Christ.

Luke writes:

### **[Slide 3]**

*Acts 11:19-21 NIV*

*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks*

*also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

The church in Jerusalem sent a leader named Barnabas to check things out. Barnabas could see that God was truly blessing this brand new experiment, and went looking for an old acquaintance named Saul to come and help with the teaching of the many new converts. For a year they worked side by side, teaching "great numbers of people" (Acts 11:26 NIV). They made such an impact on their city that they even earned a nickname:

#### **[Slide 4]**

*Acts 11:26b NIV*

*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

#### **Ready to change the world:**

Here was a hardy band of believers in Jesus who were ready to change the world. Some of them were Jewish in background and culture. Some of them were Greek or Roman in background and culture. Some had worshiped the God of the Bible from infancy; some had been pagans worshiping them many Gods of the Greeks and Romans. Now, they were all followers of Jesus and worshipers of the One True God.

In Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire at that time, it was possible to think way outside the box that had defined faith in Jesus in Jerusalem. Antioch was a cosmopolitan city, capital of Syria, enriched by its connections with the entire empire. It was a place where people were always coming and going. It was in a place and time when new things were possible. No wonder Jews and Greeks had first worshiped together on a regular basis in Antioch! And the Christians in Antioch caught the vision of sharing what God was doing in their midst with others both near and far. They were ready to change the world.

#### **Seeking the Holy Spirit**

##### **A strange band of world-changers:**

Luke introduces us to the small group of men who made the momentous and world-changing decision to bring the Good News about Jesus to the whole wide world:

**[Slide 5]**

*Acts 13:1 NIV*

*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.*

Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus who was deeply connected with the mother church in Jerusalem. He had been sent to Antioch, you remember, to check on this new phenomenon of Jews and non-Jews meeting and worshiping together. He was the connection with the first Christian generation.

Simeon was from North Africa. His nickname meant "Black." Likewise, Lucius was from North Africa. Manaen had been a court official of the Herod who had killed John the Baptist and had participated in the trial of Jesus. He came from the upper echelons of his society. And then there was Saul, later known as Paul. Saul had been a radically conservative and devout Pharisee. He had systematically hunted down, persecuted and killed Christians in Jerusalem! Now this diverse band of believers were all in the same church -- all in the same room! – praying and worshiping together. That's part of what it takes to change the world.

**Enter the Holy Spirit:**

But most importantly, they were willing to listen to what God was saying to them. Luke tells us:

**[Slide 6]**

*Acts 13:2 NIV*

*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."*

You don't change the world for God unless you let God do the talking! Instead of trying to come up with some scheme on their own, they spent their time in God's presence. They took the time to fast and pray, shutting out other distractions so that they could hear God's voice more clearly. They depended on the Holy Spirit to lead them.

And God *did* speak to them. He singled out two of their number – Barnabas and Saul – for a special assignment: "to work to which I have called them."

Note: the Holy Spirit *already had a job for them to do*. This world-changing mission was something that God was birthing according to His plan. It wasn't something that Barnabas and Saul would cook up. It was conceived by the Holy Spirit alone. No wonder it was so important for the leaders of the church in Antioch to *listen to the Holy Spirit!*

### **Sent on their way:**

The next step was to put God's plan in motion.

### **[Slide 7]**

*Acts 13:3 NIV*

*So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

God created the world-changing assignment. God chose the two people to begin carrying it out.

People like you and me listened to Him and chose the team according to His leading and instruction. People like you and me placed their hands on them and sent them on their way.

God works through people who are willing to listen to Him and do as He leads. He teams up with us, equips us, leads the way. He uses us to be world-changers.

As they began their mission, Luke reminds us that ultimately it is God who is in charge!

### **[Slide 8]**

*Acts 13:4 NIV*

*The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

Remember how he said just one verse before that the elders of the church in Antioch "sent them off"? Now he tells us that in a much deeper sense they were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit would go with them each step of the way. It would be a kind of new Exodus journey into a new Promised Land. No longer would the Promised Land be a patch of real

estate in Palestine. Now, the Holy Spirit was leading God's people out to fill the entire world with the knowledge of God through Jesus.

## **Crossroads**

**St. Albans, A.D. 2020**

### **[Slide 9]**

Our church is standing at its own crossroads. Like the believers in ancient Antioch, we too have the opportunity to make decisions that will impact our families, our community and our world.

For one thing, we're a church in an unchurched state and a post-Christian culture. If Paul were to visit us, he would no doubt be able to relate to the pagan influences that abound in our society. He would understand the fact that so many people, especially younger people, have no familiarity with the story of Jesus.

Like the church in Antioch, we're a mixture of people with deep roots in their faith and people who are seeking to discover who God is. We're a mixture of people who grew up learning Bible stories in Sunday School and people who don't know Malachi from Mark.

The decisions we make as a church, particularly as we seek a new pastor, will determine how we join God in changing our world.

### **Seeking the Holy Spirit:**

We will never figure this all out on our own! Reaching our community for Jesus will not be just a matter of good marketing and polished services. We will only fulfill our God-given assignment if we do what the elders in Antioch did: worship the Lord, fast, and listen to what the Holy Spirit says.

Remember, our assignment has already been created by the Holy Spirit. When He spoke to the elders in Antioch, He said: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul *for the work to which I have called them.*" (Acts 13:2 NIV) Only God knows our assignment. He isn't asking us to figure it out. He has already called the right person for the job and put the burden in his heart to carry it out.

Neither will we figure out who the best pastor for the church will be. God has made that decision as well. He is calling us to listen to Him and affirm His

choice. How does that happen? Only through focused listening to Him. That's where prayer and fasting come in.

In a matter of weeks the members of the church will be introduced to a candidate for consideration as the next pastor of Church of the Rock. You can be assured that the Pastoral Search Committee has spent many hours seeking God to do their best to present to you the right person. Now it will be your turn to listen to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you. Let Him guide you as you get to know this person and consider whether or not he will be our next pastor.

**Crossroads:**

God has a plan. God has a person. God works through you and me, revealing His plan to us. As we stand at the crossroads, He will be standing right there alongside of us, just as He was when a diverse group of elders launched a missionary movement that changed the world. He will lead us just as He led Barnabas and Saul. He will change our world through us. But only if we put Him first, hear His voice, and do what He tells us to do!