

***The Great Stories of the Early Church***  
***37 - Paul and Barnabas01***  
***Prayer and the Work of God***  
*Acts 13*

Acts 13:1-4

- 1 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 Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- 2 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.
- 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
- 4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. KJV

**Introduction:**

Here we have an interesting collection of godly men who are apparently in the leadership of the fledgling church of Antioch.

We have already been introduced to Barnabas. He was an influential disciple of the church at Jerusalem when Paul escaped from Damascus and returned there as a believer. If you will recall, the church leaders were rightfully afraid of him but Barnabas believed his conversion and took him in, acting as his agent to introduce him to the rest of the church. Barnabas had remained in Jerusalem until after the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed but then had been sent by the church to the new group of believers that the Lord was raising up in Antioch. From there he had gone on a mission to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch.

Simeon was probably an African from the area we now know as Libya. Some have speculated that he was in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion and had been the one who had helped Jesus with the cross when He could carry it no longer.

Matt 27:29-32

- 29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!
- 30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.
- 31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.
- 32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. KJV

Simon and Simeon were two spellings of the same name. Concerning Cyrene, it was an ancient Greek and Roman city in what is now Libya Africa. It was the oldest and most important of the five Greek cities in the region. Jews born there would have spoken Greek as their first language.

We notice that Lucius was also from Cyrene. He and Simeon were probably among some who have already been mentioned.

Acts 11:19-21

- 19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.
- 20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.
- 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. KJV

Then, there was Manean, a most interesting character. “Our margin has given the proper meaning of the original word *suntrophos* (NT:4939), a foster-brother; i.e. Manaen was the son of the woman who nursed Herod Antipus; *and the son, also, whose milk the young Herod shared*. Of a person whose name was Manaen or Menahem, and who was in the court of Herod, we read several things in the Jewish writers. They say that this man had the gift of prophecy, and that he told Herod, when he was but a child, that he would be king. When Herod became king he sent for him to his court, and held him in great estimation. It might have been the son of this Menahem of whom Luke here speaks. Dr. Lightfoot has shown this to be at least possible.” (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft)

And, finally, Saul, a Jew born in Tarsus of a high ranking and wealthy family who could afford to have him educated in the finest school in Israel, taught by the most prestigious scholar of that century, Gamaliel. His own testimony was that he was among the most respected Jews of his day.

Phil 3:4-6

- 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:
- 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;
- 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. KJV

This group was an elite group in its own right. There were no ignoramouses here. One classically trained as a Roman and one as a Jew. The others had been educated into Christianity by the apostles at Jerusalem. Maybe one of the most impressive groups ever assembled outside of Jerusalem itself.

But, in v.2 we see a church functioning very differently from any church we have ever experienced. “**As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted...**” Luke wrote but we have no reference point for what that meant. One writer suggested this.

**“On Mondays and Thursdays it was usual with the more pious Jews to attend the public service in their synagogues, and to fast; the former is what we are to**

**understand by ministering to the Lord. On the Sabbaths they attended the service in the synagogue, but did not fast.** The Greek word, leitourgountoon (NT:3008), signifies performing the office of praying, supplicating, rendering thanks, etc.: hence, the word leitourgia (NT:3009), liturgy, the work of prayer, etc., from litee, supplication, according to some; or rather from leitos, common, and ergon (NT:2041), work, the common or public work, in which all the people were engaged.” (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Biblesoft)

This may have been something of what they were doing but I doubt that they were doing it in the synagogue. Undoubtedly they had their attention fixed on the Lord Himself, on His Word, and on the task to which they had been called. They may have been engaged in a meeting of wondrous reflection on the great truths to which they had been exposed. They may have been sharing with one another what they had learned from God's Word and how they might teach those things to the people. Or they may simply have been before the Lord in a time of praising Him for all that He had done. In any case, they got the attention of heaven, for heaven had been directing their attention toward the Lord. And the Holy Spirit spoke.

I am often brought to question why our church services were so different from theirs.

Has a better methodology been found?

Did their system fail?

Were these men too foolish and ignorant to know how to function properly?

Have our “preacher schools” developed more powerful and efficient means of getting things done for God?

Did the Holy Spirit reject their approach, refusing to bless it?

Has He blessed our system more powerfully, showing that He approves more of the way we do things than He did of theirs?

We actually know the proper answers to these questions and history has proven those answers correct. Every time the people of God have replicated this model with any degree of faithfulness, God the Holy Spirit has come and blessed them. Rarely, if ever, has He done that apart from activity resembling what was going on at Antioch.

Here is a group of men who were not facing some kind of disaster. (We typically reserve serious prayer for times of impending doom.) They didn't seem to be dealing with persecution, a dwindling church life, some sudden downturn in the economy, or a plague either in the city or in the church. Yet, they are “ministering to the Lord and fasting,” whatever for?

This seems to have been their normal manner of interacting with God as a group.

Think about that.

Possibly, it was only these five preachers who devoted themselves in that way...but is that the mode of preachers in our day? I can tell you that it is not. They do not gather regularly, without provocation, to fast and pray.

So, why do we wonder that Christianity is where it is? Why are we shocked that it has no power, that the Holy Spirit diligently stays away?

## **“The Holy Ghost said...”**

It is without question that certain things were done in the First Century when the apostles were alive and ministering that are not done any more in the same ways they were done then.

The Charismatic movement is so far off the rails when it comes to biblical patterns and examples that they have no credibility.

The eccentric preachers who have claimed special abilities and/or unique revelations have almost all been discredited.

That being said, we must not allow our rejections of the fraudulent ‘manifestations’ of the Holy Spirit drive us so far in reaction that we cannot hear the testimony of history. God has moved at times in extraordinary ways and has done amazing things for His people when they have given themselves to follow in obedience the examples and teachings of scripture concerning prayer.

Let me remind you of some of those scriptures.

Luke 18:1-8

- 1 **And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;**
- 2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
- 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
- 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
- 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
- 6 **And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.**
- 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?
- 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? KJV

Luke 21:34-36

- 34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.
- 35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.
- 36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. KJV

Luke 22:40-46

- 40 And when he was at the place, he said unto them, **Pray that ye enter not into temptation.**
- 41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

- 42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.
- 43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.
- 44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
- 45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,
- 46 And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and **pray, lest ye enter into temptation.** KJV

Eph 6:13-20

- 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
- 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
- 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
- 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
- 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
- 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;
- 19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,
- 20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. KJV

1 Thess 5:17

- 17 Pray without ceasing. KJV

1 Tim 2:1-8

- 1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;
- 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
- 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
- 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
- 5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;
- 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.
- 7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.
- 8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.
- KJV

Jude 17-21

- 17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

- 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.
- 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.
- 20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,
- 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. KJV

(Luke 18) Men ought to pray faithfully, consistently, and continually. They should never cease to be active in prayer and they should not lose heart when God delays in His answers. They should not give up until their petitions are granted. This assumes, of course, that all things are as they should be and the requests are such things as would advance the Kingdom of God. “Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss,” said James.

This does not mean that we are to do nothing but pray since we are commanded to do other things as well. But prayer is to be an important and fundamental part of our lives.

We are to learn how to do it, master the art of it and then faithfully execute our duty in it.

(Luke 21) We are to be diligently responsible for ourselves, especially for our minds (heart) so that foolish, irresponsible, and lazy behavior does not take over.

We are to faithfully and earnestly pay attention and continually pray for deliverance from these things that we might escape them and stand in the Judgement as one who has been found faithful.

**Prayer, real prayer, is the essential element in our protections from our own waywardness.**

(Luke 22) Twice Jesus warned the disciples in the Garden to pray so that they would not fall victim to temptation. They chose not to stir themselves up from sleep and they did fall victim to the temptation to abandon the commitments they had made to the Lord.

In those three passages we have the primary reasons that the church, when it was right, has been a people and a place of prayer.

**They have needs that can only be granted by the Lord.**

**They have hearts that will surely stray unless strictly governed.**

**They have an enemy who tempts them to abandon their God.**

If you think the Church can survive without diligent, persistent, faithful prayer, both personal and corporate, just look around with honest eyes. What we have today is that which prayerlessness produces.

The leaders of the church at Antioch prayed because they were intelligent, redeemed men who were awake to their desperate need, their sinfulness, and the power of the enemy, not because they were ignorant savages afraid of the dark.

They sought the Lord diligently because faithful men not only taught them what the Lord had

said but had modeled His passion in prayer before them.

But there is another element involved which is the most difficult thing in Christianity to hold fast.

Rev 2:1-7

- 1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;
- 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:
- 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.
- 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.
- 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.
- 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. KJV

They had a burning love for the Lord Jesus Christ which is the dearest gift of the grace of God, the very key to everything else, and the first thing that is lost in any decline from spiritual progress. These men also knew that and were fiercely determined not to allow that love for Him to wane in their lives.

**So, how does a Christian, or a church, recover that love for the Lord Jesus that would lead them to diligently pray like those early Christians did?**

That is maybe the greatest question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I will share with you what I have come to believe. We must hold on to what we have been taught and reject most of what we have seen as examples.

We are in a situation, I think, much like the faithful Jews of Jesus' day. To them, He said this.

Matt 23:1-3

- 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. KJV

The Pharisees had a good theology but were terrible in their practice. Many in our day are in the same boat. They speak of holiness, of faithfulness, of prayer, of the power of God, and of our need for an Awakening but they are pursuing those things feebly if at all in practical terms. Practically our faith has devolved into various forms of superficial religion, all show and little

substance.

The theology that has been developed by the conservative wing of the Evangelical Church over the last 500 years is, for the most part, sound.

The practice, however, the way that we have come to 'do church' is deeply flawed. I say that because the church of our day resembles the early church in few ways. Every discrepancy between us and them must be considered error and something to be corrected.

We hear much talk of the Reformation and 'being Reformed' but the only reformation worth pursuing in my opinion is that which takes us back to the original model for the church, back to earnest prayer, back to 'ministering to the Lord,' back to God's empowering of His faithful people.

These folks at Antioch had both theology and substance, which is the reason they were used in such a mighty way. Jerusalem birthed the church but Antioch launched it to the world.

Phil 3:17

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. KJV

2 Thess 3:7-9

7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. KJV

We see in the letters to the 7 pastors of the churches of Asia that as early as the end of the First Century many were losing their love of the Lord Jesus and were changing the manner of worship taught to them by the apostles.

Ever since then there has been a movement to make the church more palatable to the world and a tiny, determined movement to recapture the true love for God experienced by the church in her infancy.

This work in any church must be both an individual work and a corporate one.

Individually each member must seek to lay hold of that love for God that has been lost or, in some cases, never found in the first place.

Corporately we must seek to recover the mode and spirit of worship known and experienced by the saints who have walked with God in power.