**A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES**

August 14, 2016

Acts 13:1-52 / Key Verse: 13:47, “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

The book of Acts consists of two volumes. The volume 1 is Acts 1 to12. From Acts 13, the second volume starts. In volume 1, Apostle Peter was a main character. But from Acts 13, we see that Paul (formerly Saul) becomes a main character. In Acts’ second volume, Paul made 3 major mission journeys and he spread the gospel up to Rome as a prisoner. Today, Acts 13 is the first half of his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). In today’s passage, Paul shared the gospel mainly in two places. One was Cyprus where Barnabas’home town was. The other place was Pisidian Antioch (different from Syria Antioch). Especially when the Jews rejected to hear the gospel, instead of being discouraged, Paul firmly held God’s high calling for him to be a light for the Gentiles. As we study today’s passage, I pray that God may bless us to hear God’s high calling to be a light for the Gentiles newly and to know what it means and how we can live with this holy privilege.

**First, the Antioch church becomes a missionary sending church (1-3)**

In chapter 13, we find the Antioch church has matured to the point of sending missionaries. As we know, giving is a significant sign of maturity. This truth applies to the church as well. How could this happen? In the first place, they studied the Bible diligently. Look at verse 1. “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 Levite from Cyprus who had been a pillar of the Jerusalem church. He knew how to see the work of God in others and embrace them. Simeon was called “Niger,” meaning “black.” Perhaps he was from Africa. Lucius of Cyrene may have been a pioneer who first shared the gospel with Greeks. His Latin name indicates Roman influence. Manaen had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch; he must have been a privileged person. Saul had been a Pharisee; a highly educated teacher in Tarsus. This diverse group worked together in one spirit to serve God as Bible teachers. When they taught the word of God, the Antioch church naturally learned of God’s universal love and his heart desire for all mankind’s salvation. Where there is zeal of bible study, there is always zeal of serving God’s mission because the whole bible testifies about God’s love, heart desire, and zeal for fallen world.

In the second place, they worshiped God. Look at verse 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.’” The Antioch church worshiped God. The word “worship” means “intense love from the heart.” Sometimes, we become duty bound. So we come to worship service out of duty or obligation or some other wrong motives instead of pure love for God. But here, the missionary sending endeavor was rooted in pure worship to God. When we really love God, we can hear God’s voice to send us to those who have never heard about the love of God. If we don’t have such desire to share the gospel with others, it is a sign that we are missing true worship of God in any reason.

In the third place, they sought God’s direction in fasting prayer. Their worship was accompanied by fasting. Fasting prayer is an intensive and desperate prayer in seeking God’s guidance. Through fasting prayer, they earnestly and humbly sought the will of God for the Antioch church. Then the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul (later Paul). The Holy Spirit revealed a great plan of world mission through Barnabas and Saul when they worshipped God in sincere fasting prayer.

In the fourth place, they obeyed God’s direction. The Holy Spirit chose the most important two pillars in the Antioch church. It must have been very hard for the Antioch church to send Barnabas and Saul. However, in verse 3, they obeyed the Holy Spirit by placing their hands on them and send them off. They believed that the Lord of the church is not human leaders but the Holy Spirit himself. They entrusted the future of Antioch church to God’s hand and send off two most influential leaders for the world mission by faith.

As for us, recently the Holy Spirit gave us a direction of voluntary fasting prayer during Saturday and Sunday from yesterday to September 4th; for 4 weeks and I strongly believe that this is a very good guidance of the Holy Spirit for us as we prepare our new September semester. Through fasting prayer, we can expect that God will surely answer our prayers; prayers for our children, our new students, and our leaders and coworkers. May God pour out the spirit of prayer and the faith of the power of prayer into us so that we can advance the kingdom of God and see the glory of God in and thorough us in this coming new semester!

**Second, the Holy Spirit raises Paul as the mission leader (4-14).**

Look at verse 4. Barnabas and Saul, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, arrived at Salamis on the island of Cyprus. They proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. Then they traveled through the whole island and came to Paphos. There Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, and an intelligent man, sent for them. He really wanted to hear the word of God. Though a man of position, he was a thirsty soul, longing for God. It was an open door for ministry. However, Elymas the sorcerer opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

What happened? Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!” And, “Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” The holy anger of the Holy Spirit in Paul struck him and immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand (9-11). Paul rebuked the enemy with the Spirit of God severely. In this way, Paul stood absolutely on God’s side with gospel faith. God honored his faith and blinded Elymas. Thus, the proconsul was encouraged and believed the word of God.

Look closely at verse 13. It says, “From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.” Until now, the mission team has been known as “Barnabas and Saul.” From now on it is known as “Paul and his companions,” or “Paul and Barnabas.” Leadership of the mission has transferred from Barnabas to Paul. Perhaps this led John to return to Jerusalem. He liked to follow cousin Barnabas. He might have been frightened by Paul’s fighting spirit. To the team, it was a painful event. Anyway, they went on and arrived in Pisidian Antioch–not to be confused with Syrian Antioch, their home church. We must know that missionary work is a spiritual battle with the devil. Leaders must stand on God’s side with gospel faith.

**Third, Paul’s gospel message in Pisidian Antioch (15-41)**

When they arrived Pisidian Antioch, on the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue and sat down. After reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers said, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.” Paul seized the opportunity. He stood up, motioned with his hand and began to speak. He had a keen sense of God’s history and a clear gospel message. We can find three main points.

**In the first place, God sent the Savior of the world from the line of David***.* In verses 17-23, Paul summarizes the history of God’s work in Israel, culminating with his promise to David to send a Savior. From Exodus to David’s time, the Israelites revealed all the depravity of fallen man repeatedly again and again. But the holy and righteous God endured their misconduct patiently for a long time and finally when David became their king, God was pleased by David and he promised to send the Savior of the world from his line because he was a man after God’s own heart. As God promised, finally Jesus came. And this Jesus is the Savior of the world.

**In the second place, God sent Jesus to suffer, die and rise again.** In verses 24-31, Paul presents the facts of the life and death of Jesus. Jesus’ coming was prepared by John the Baptist. Jesus, as a good shepherd for the people of Israel, loved all kinds of sin-sick people and healed them all. Jesus drove out all the evil spirits. Jesus did exactly what the prophets foretold of the Messiah. Yet the people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus. With no charge, they had him condemned and crucified. However, his death was not a tragedy; it was the fulfillment of prophecy that the Messiah would come as the Lamb of God. Jesus’ death was to save men from their sins. Ultimately, Jesus died to obey his Father and fulfill God’s will for world salvation.

What did God do when his one and only Son Jesus was buried in a tomb after crucifixion? God raised him from the dead on the third day (30). By raising him God proved that he is living and almighty. By raising him, God destroyed the last enemy, death. By raising him God gave a living hope of the eternal kingdom of God to those who believe in the Son. Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection are historical facts. God established Jesus’ apostles as witnesses of these facts to all mankind.

**In the third place, Jesus’ resurrection brings forgiveness of sins and justification to all who believe**. In verses 32-41, Paul applies the gospel message to his listeners. By quoting several Old Testament prophecies, he shows that Jesus’ resurrection fulfilled the promises of God. Like Peter did in chapter 2, Paul quotes Psalm 16:10. He says in verse 35, “So it is stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’” Though David spoke the words of Psalm 16, and most of it can be applied to David, this part cannot. After David served God’s purpose in his own generation, he died and his body decayed. But Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, did not see decay (37). What this means to mankind is the focus of Paul’s message. Look at verses 38-39. “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the Law of Moses.” Through Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins. Not only so, but we are also justified–that is, declared “Not guilty.” Jesus paid it all. By faith in him we can stand before holy God as his righteous children. Those who believe the gospel are saved to the uttermost. But as Paul warns by quoting Habakkuk, those who scoff at the message will perish.

**Fourth, God makes his servants a light for the Gentiles (42-52)**

The people of Pisidian Antioch were deeply touched by Paul’s message. They invited him to speak again on the next Sabbath. After the meeting was over, many who heard the message followed Paul and Barnabas. The word of God worked mightily. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. However, when the Jews saw the crowds of Bible students, they became jealous and began to speak against Paul and Barnabas. It was a painful moment. How did Paul and Barnabas respond? Look at verses 46-47. “Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”’” Instead of being discouraged, they pressed forward through the open door to Gentile ministry, accepting God’s calling for them to be a light for the Gentiles.

According to Isaiah 9, ultimately Messiah Jesus is the light for the Gentiles. To the Jews, the Gentiles are non-Jews but fundamentally speaking, the Gentiles are all people who are living in the darkness without knowing God. Jesus reveals God’s love for all undeserving sinners through his death and resurrection. Jesus reveals God’s forgiveness and eternal life to the Gentiles. If anyone who hears the gospel of Jesus and accepts it, his or her darkness disappears and the light of life replaces their darkness. Jesus also told his disciples, “You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:14). When we accept Jesus and have him in our hearts, we can reflect the light of Jesus toward the dark world. It is the same principle as how moon can shine. As you know, sun shines by itself but moon cannot. Moon can shine only by refection of the light which it receives from the sun.

Personally, preparing this message, I learned that in order to live as a light practically I should repent the love of the world and the things of the world based on 1 John 2:15-16. Concretely speaking, I should not spend precious time in unnecessary internet site. When I am tired after work, I from time to time spent considerable time unnecessarily in internet site mindlessly instead of going to God through reading the Bible and meditating on it. I found myself how much I still love worldly pleasure rather than searching for delight from God’s word. I earnestly pray that God may help me to have broken and contrite heart before God about my sinful nature so that I can truly live as a light.

In conclusion, today we learn that God uses those who study the bible diligently, worship and obey him for his world salvation work. God calls us to be a light of the world. Without knowing Jesus, people cannot but live under the power of darkness; the power of sin and death. People need true light that can drive out all darkness from them. Jesus is the true light for them. His followers are also light for them because they have the light of Jesus in them. May God bless each of us newly to live as a light so that people under the power of darkness can recognize Jesus through us and be saved from their sins! Amen!