

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (29-6-1997 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

The missionary

Acts 13:2-14

Additional Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

### Introduction

We are going to look at the men whom the Holy Spirit used for the missionary work of the church at Antioch. We will consider their call, equipment and their characters. These things are true for every age, not just the first century. And they are true for every Christian, because all in one sense are full time workers and in every situation we are servants of the Lord.

### The call which God gave

While the church was busy worshipping, praying and serving, the Holy Spirit made His call (Acts 13:2). The men chosen were already active and occupied in the Lord's work. They had already been of service in witness and preaching. They knew already what it was to seek God's face in prayer. As we prove faithful in the task to which we are appointed, the opportunity comes for future revelation. When we are faithful in small and insignificant matters, it is proof that we are fit to undertake larger work.

No one starts at the top of the ladder in God's service. We progress from small beginnings to greater responsibilities. When we have proved ourselves committed to the small things in church life and in our personal walk, then we will receive the call of the Holy Spirit to a larger sphere and wider responsibilities. We are under the Holy Spirit's direction.

There are many calls in the Christian life. The call to repentance, to Christ, to consecration of service, then to a particular sphere of work. In the call to service, including missionary service, God implants a deep personal conviction that this is what we are to do. It is a call which persists, deepens and will not let us go. It also needs to be confirmed by the Word, circumstances, and godly advice. We know God's hand is upon us personally, we feel Him say, "Thou art the man".

Unless God has called, our endeavours will be a total and absolute waste of time. **I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied** (Jeremiah 23:21). "That hundreds have missed their way and stumbled against the pulpit is evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches" (Spurgeon). Without God's call, we can expect no blessing. Without God's call, we can never continue when difficulties and problems arise after early excitement has gone. No one would be able to keep going with devotion unless they can look back and say, "I was called".

A true call is something from which we cannot escape. It becomes an obsession, and there is no alternative. It comes in various ways and the conviction grows over the months. Verses of Scripture grab us, we become aware of a need and are convicted that we are meant to meet that need. Some examples: John G. Paton felt called to the South Sea Islands at a time when the church could not get workers to go there; James

Chalmers heard from his Sunday School teacher about the Fiji Cannibals, years before he was converted, and then when he became a Christian he remembered his vow; Adoniram Judson was called to Burma following a sermon; John Scudder went to India because of a tract on missionary needs; David Livingstone was challenged about China through an article he read – but ended up in Africa because of the Opium War in China. None of these men saw a vision, or dreamed a dream, or heard an audible voice calling them. But their lives were totally consecrated. They heard a general appeal which was made to many other people, but God made it vital to them and personal to them. It was clear, unmistakable and irresistible.

No one dare serve the Lord without a call. All are called to service. All are called to a particular sphere. All this is supremely true in the case of those who are ministers or missionaries in the narrower and more specialized sense. Are you doing your daily work and Church work by His appointment? Is God calling anyone in a more specialized sense to a form of Christian service? Is God calling someone overseas? Is God calling someone to a change in direction? Will you be obedient to His call?

#### The equipment which God provided

**The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul.... sent on their way by the Holy Spirit... Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit....And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2,4,9,52).** By the Holy Spirit these men were called, and having sent them, He filled them, equipped them, strengthened them and used them. By Him they were called, they preached the Word, met with opposition, had their steps guided, and were given the words to say. The Christian church was not to be run by human plans and programmes, but by divine instruction. It was not a secular club, but rather a body under divine direction.

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic of the Christian life and Christian church. Talk of guidance, holy living, Bible living, Word of God, united in Christ, power in service, vital prayers, abundant life, more than conquerors, spiritual fruit – all these remain words and clichés till we take the doctrine of the Holy Spirit very seriously. It is not enough to hold an orthodox view of the Holy Spirit. He has to be a reality in our lives. We have to be surrendered to Him, filled by Him, possessed by Him, and then He makes these truths come alive in us. What I offer, He takes; what He takes, He cleanses, fills and uses.

What changes does the Holy Spirit make in a Christian's life and how does He equip and use us when He has His way in the life?

#### The character of the missionary

- (a) Concerned for loved ones. The first place Paul and Barnabas visited on their missionary journey was Cyprus, Barnabas's home. He wanted his loved ones to share the riches of Christ. This beautiful and wealthy island had rich copper mines, big ship building industry, perfect climate, was nicknamed "The happy isle", but it was dark and needy. Immorality was rife in the capital, Paphos, and Venus the goddess of love was widely worshipped. Private wizards, fortunetellers, magic and spells made it an

intensely superstitious place. Barnabas knew the great need of the people – and he wanted to lead them to Christ.

- (b) Adapted to new situations. Note Saul's name changed to Paul. Nearly all Jews had two names: a Jewish name for own circle of friends, and a Greek name for the wider world. Paul now took a Gentile name rather than the grand name of Israel's first king, making it easier to work with Gentiles this way. The Gospel is unchanging, but methods may need to change, and missionaries need to be sensitive to this.
- (c) Put good of the work before personal needs. Barnabas had once been the "senior partner", having been the one who introduced Paul to the Jerusalem church. But soon Paul took precedence, as the more able and gifted leader. Paul rose to the surface and took charge. It is a tribute to Barnabas's character that resentment and jealousy did not get in the way of God's work. He was prepared to take second place.
- (d) Tenacity and stickability. "When you open heaven, you also open hell." Very soon these men faced opposition and resistance: Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8); desertion by John Mark (Acts 13:13); riots in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45); stoning at Iconium and Lystra, Paul left for dead (Acts 14:5,19). This was a foretaste of things to come: **I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked** (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). But determination, persistence and doggedness continued. **I consider my life worth nothing to me** (Acts 20:24). **I press on** (Philippians 3:12). Paul had "purpose ribbed and edged with steel". So many Christian workers could do with some of Paul's stickability; many give up at the first sign of difficulty, or when it interferes too much with personal life. Things will only be accomplished by those who can say: **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith** (2 Timothy 4:7).

### Conclusion

The missionaries whose exploits we are about to study received the call of the Holy Spirit. He provided all the equipment they needed for the task, and He formed the necessary character in them. All Christians need to strive to know God, and know Him better than we have ever known Him before.