20260927 The Spirit-Led Mission

Acts 11:19-26;13:1-4,NASB

We continue our sermon series on Acts. In a sense, the book could also be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." It tells the story of how the Holy Spirit worked through believers to spread the gospel from Jerusalem throughout the vast regions of the Roman Empire. We know that when people come to believe the gospel, it is ultimately the result of God's work. Yet God chooses to work with us. If it is God's work, why does He want us involved?

At a company I worked for in China, we held a special annual event called "Bring Your Child to Work Day." On that day, parents could bring their children to the office. The company not only gave the children a tour of the office so they could see where their parents worked but also encouraged each employee to design a simple task so that the children could take part in their parents' work. For instance, some employees would let their children press the start button on a testing system. Others let them dial into a video conference, while some asked them to help organize documents. When the children finished their tasks, their parents would celebrate, saying, "Well done! It was great having you with me today." Of course, the parents did not really need their children's help. The purpose was to invite the children into their parents' world. When working with their parents, they could get to know their parents better and grow closer to them in love.

Our heavenly Father is like that too. God had already determined to redeem sinners in Christ. Christ accomplished salvation on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applies that salvation to His people. And when the Holy Spirit goes to work, He brings God's children to work with Him. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to follow God's plan: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Mission is God's work, and He invites us into His work.

Today we will see the Holy Spirit leading believers on mission, building believers in the church, and then sending the church on mission.

I. Believers on Mission

[19]So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. [20]But there

were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks as well, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus. [21] *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*

First, the passage shows that the Holy Spirit used circumstances—even persecution—to lead God's children to bring the gospel to more people. As Jesus had said, the gospel would begin in Jerusalem, spread to Samaria, and then go to the ends of the earth. On the day of Pentecost, about three thousand people came to faith. After that, the number of believers grew rapidly, and before long there were about five thousand men alone. Yet the work of taking the gospel farther afield, especially to the Gentiles, had not yet truly begun. Persecution, however, became a tool in God's hand to move the gospel beyond Jerusalem. After Stephen was martyred, "on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles." (Acts 8:1). Wherever they went, the believers preached the gospel. Today's passage tells us that some of them went even farther—to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

Today, God also places us in different settings—in our families, our communities, and our workplaces, and maybe He even takes us to new places. Wherever He places us, He wants us to take part in His work of salvation. Sharing the gospel is often not easy. We fear rejection and worry the timing may not be right, so we keep telling ourselves, "Maybe later – I will share the gospel at the right time." More than twenty years ago, God gave me a rare opportunity to work as the assistant to the company's Asia-Pacific president. I knew I should share the gospel with my boss, but I felt too much pressure, so I kept putting it off again and again. Two years later, he was promoted and moved to the United States. Not long after that, his wife became seriously ill, and the pressure of his work made it difficult for him to care for his family. In the end, he decided to resign. At his farewell party, the Holy Spirit convicted me deeply. When he came over and hugged me, I could not hold back my tears. I said to him, "I'm sorry. I worked for you for so long, but I never shared the gospel—the greatest blessing God has given us—with you."

A few years later, I learned that he had come to faith through someone else. And I sensed that the Lord was speaking to me like Mordecai saying to Queen Esther when the Israelites were in danger of a holocaust. Esther was so scared to step out to save them. Mordecai said to her, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" I didn't step out to share the life-saving

Gospel with my boss. God saved him through other people. I What a weak person I was! I failed the Lord, and I failed my boss. I confessed to God, and I was also filled with gratitude. God not only saved my former boss; He also forgave me for failing to share the gospel out of fear. Jesus died for my sins on the cross so that I could be forgiven and begin again. We all have weaknesses, but the Lord will make us stand again to share His Gospel.

But you may say, "I don't know enough about the gospel, and I'm not very good with words." But God does not require us to wait until we are mature before sharing the gospel. We share what we know. The passage tells us that "some believers preached the gospel only to Jews, while others from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and also spoke to Greek-speaking people, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus." Some of the early Jewish believers may not yet have fully understood God's purpose in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, but they knew that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord. And they shared Christ according to what they knew. Others went a step further and shared the gospel with Gentiles. In the same way, you and I need to be faithful to the Lord with what knowledge He has entrusted us with and continue to share the gospel nonetheless.

Before Rosie and I became Christians, an elderly sister once told Rosie, "Believe in Jesus. Jesus can save you, and He can heal sickness." Her theology might not have been complete. But she shared the Jesus she knew, and through that, Rosie was drawn to seek Him. We share what we know. When we are asked questions we cannot answer, we can simply be honest and invite the person to come to church to seek answers together with us.

You may not be good with words, but God gives different gifts to different believers. When we were in China, our church had an effective way to evangelize – we held "Gospel Tea Gatherings." Some prepared refreshments, some invited friends, some spent time with guests, and some explained the gospel. Today, the Holy Spirit is using MBCC's Alpha Course powerfully. You can invite a friend, sit with them and share, help prepare food, or pray for the gathering. According to the gifts God has given us, we do what we can and share the gospel together.

God is a God on mission, and He has also invited every Christian to join Him. We share the gospel with the people around us, whether within our own culture or across cultures. We share what we know, and we faithfully do what we can.

Verse 21 sums up the result of these disciples' obedience: "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." When we proclaim the gospel, God works through us to bless the people around us, bringing them out of darkness and turning them to Himself.

So, once we have helped someone come to faith in Jesus, is the mission complete? Not yet. God's salvation not only delivers people from sin and gives them new life; He also brings His people into the church, the body of Christ, where they can know Him more deeply.

II. Believers in Church

[25]And Barnabas left for Tarsus to look for Saul;[26]and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers of people; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. [13:1]Now there were prophets and teachers at Antioch, in the church that was there: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

After believing in Jesus, is it enough to simply come to church for an hour and a half on Sunday? Not really. The Holy Spirit does not only bring people to Christ; He brings them into Christ's church so that they can grow into mature disciples. That is why Barnabas and Paul spent a whole year in the church at Antioch teaching God's people. And we see the Holy Spirit puts prophets and teachers in the church.

Discipleship grounded in biblical truth is essential to the believers' spiritual growth. The truth sets Christians free and enables us to follow Jesus. Christians shaped by the truth will live their lives differently from the world around them. The passage says, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." This shows that people recognized them as a distinct group of people who followed Jesus. Their way of life became a witness to Christ.

When I first became a Christian, I attended a church with close ties to the government. Because of the political situation, the church had only a few life groups for older adults and no structured courses to teach believers. Rosie and I would go to Sunday worship almost as if we were going to a theater to watch a movie: once the service was over, everyone simply went home. God was gracious to us and got us to study the Bible through programs on a gospel radio station. But that was still very different from experiencing life in church. We did not really know how to apply our faith to everyday life. Then, by His grace, God led us to a family church. There we truly began to experience church life, and our lives were transformed. For the first time, we discovered how beautiful and exciting the Christian life could be, and how deeply we could experience both God's love and the love of fellow believers in Christ.

The Holy Spirit not only brings people to Christ; He brings them into Christ's church so that they can grow into

mature disciples. At MBCC, we also help people grow through life groups and equipping courses. I sincerely encourage everyone to join a life group and help new believers come to church so they can be built up in faith.

III. Church on Mission

[2] While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them." [3] Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. [4] So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus."

Two weeks ago, Pastor Duane spoke about God's plan of redemption, which is to redeem every people group in Christ and bring them together as one family. In Acts chapters 1–12, we mainly see individual believers sharing the gospel in different places. But in Antioch, for the first time, we see an entire local church intentionally seeking the Holy Spirit, discerning His call, and sending missionaries to take the gospel into Gentile regions.

"While they were serving the Lord and fasting." This was not simply Barnabas and Saul having a private sense of calling. The church was worshipping, fasting, listening, and responding together. The Spirit speaks when God's people unite in serving the Lord and seeking His will. The Spirit specifically set apart Barnabas and Saul for the Gentile mission. The whole church obeyed the Holy Spirit, laid hands on the two men, and sent them out on mission. The church's obedience in Antioch opened the way for Paul's three missionary journeys, through which the gospel spread into Asia Minor and Europe.

God's principle has always been clear: God blesses His people so they may become a blessing to all nations. As God's people come to know Him more deeply, they experience His love more fully, and that love motivates them to bless others.

Two of our church elders have also been involved in overseas missions for many years. They have shared the gospel in rural Cambodia and the Philippines, and have helped establish schools. Through their ministry, many local people believed the gospel and turned to Christ.

I thank God that this same desire to bless others through the gospel is already visible among us at MBCC. For various reasons and because of our different circumstances, not all of us can travel to other countries to share the gospel. But the Holy Spirit can still move us through Christ's love. He also gives us different gifts to support

the mission. Perhaps God moves you to pray faithfully, perhaps to give financially, or perhaps He gives you the ability to help with logistics, hospitality, or other forms of support. Each of us can do our part, work together in unity, and provide strong support for those serving on the mission field.

Summary

To sum up today's message, God wants His children to grow to become more like Him. God is the God who blesses all peoples through the gospel of Christ, and He brings us into His work. As the Holy Spirit carries out God's saving work, He calls us to join Him. He leads God's children to share the Gospel with those around them. He brings believers into the church to build them up in the Truth. And He sends blessed churches to bless more people.

We are all people blessed by God, and we are led by the Holy Spirit to bless others. The results of our mission efforts are in God's hands; our responsibility is to faithfully share the Gospel. Sometimes He allows us to see many people turn to Christ. At other times, He lets us sow the seed for someone else to harvest. In every case, we are taking part in His work.

The Spirit does the saving; we faithfully participate. May God bless us so that, through us, many more people may be blessed and come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!