

FRIDAY 29 July 2022 "God's Calling" (Acts 13:2-5)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends on this the last Friday of July,

Have you had the experience of being in worship, either alone or with a group, when suddenly you sensed GOD was speaking to you, calling you to some specific action? What did you do with that experience my friends?

Yesterday I left you arriving in Antioch, Syria with Barnabas, Saul and their young friend John Mark. They'd traveled from Jerusalem about 400 miles so it would have taken several days, and I imagine John Mark had heard many things about this great city and the Jesus movement which had earned the nickname "**Christians**"! Very quickly Barnabas and Saul would have resumed their teaching of these Jesus followers in Antioch and also recounted their experiences while they had been in Jerusalem, including sharing the sad news that the apostle James, the brother of John had been executed by King Herod. *But, of course, that sad news was countered by the exciting story of Peter's deliverance, by an angel, from King Herod's dungeon prison!* (Acts 12:1-19)

We don't know exactly how much time passed in Antioch before their life changing worship experience, but Dr. Luke explains it this way: ***"While they were worshipping the LORD and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for ME Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'*** (Acts 13:2) You'll remember yesterday we looked at the very diverse group of leaders the Holy Spirit had assembled for the Jesus movement in the multicultural city of Antioch. They were Barnabas, the Jewish Levite from the Island of Cyprus; Simeon called Niger; Lucius from the north African city of Cyrene; Manaen, who had been raised with Herod Antipas; and Saul the Pharisee turned evangelist. *I presume it was these leaders who sensed this remarkable message from God and were responsible to discuss what it meant, decide what course of action to take and then follow through obediently.*

So, if you were in a worship service and you sensed such a message from God, what would you do? Down through Jewish history, as recorded in many places in the Old Testament, God made His plan clear to ordinary people like you and me. But I notice one common factor. *They were people who believed in God and wanted to honor Him with their lives.*

Over the years I've been fascinated looking closely at every such 'calling' from God... how it happened, what God said to the person, and how they responded. This is what happened to Moses at the burning bush, remember in Exodus 3? And it happened when God selected Joshua to succeed Moses as leader of His people. (Numbers 27:18) And God did this when He spoke to little boy Samuel calling him to become the spiritual leader of His people (1 Samuel 3) and when God sent Samuel to anoint both Saul and later David to be the first and second King of His people. (1 Samuel 9 & 16)

Perhaps one of the most dramatic such experiences happened to Isaiah the prophet while he was worshiping and grieving the death of King Uzziah as recorded in Isaiah 6. In all these, and many more examples, I see these key things, my friends: **First**, the person having the encounter with God understood the miracle that was taking place and they were overwhelmed that God would reach to them with a specific assignment for them. **Also**, they worshiped in response and felt totally inadequate to what God was calling them to do. **But in every case, they took action.** *I see no example in the Bible where a person had an encounter with God in which they sensed a clear calling from God to a particular course of action, and they simply walked away disregarding what had happened!*

While Luke doesn't tell us, I imagine those five leaders of the Jesus movement in Antioch went immediately to deep discussion and further prayer, seeking to understand exactly what the Holy Spirit had in mind for Barnabas and Saul. The instruction they had heard was clear and simple: **"Set apart for ME Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them"** "Set Apart" was something very familiar to the history of God working with His people Israel. It is the word **"consecrate"**. That would have involved praying over them, setting them apart from the group for whatever God wanted to do in, with and through them. *For them, it would have meant disengaging from everything else to be fully consecrated and available to do only and fully whatever assignment God gave them.*

The very specific selection of Barnabas and Saul was significant. This was not an election by popular vote. It was not a call for volunteers. *God was specifically selecting these two men for a very specific assignment.* No doubt, no debate, no discussion. The only thing that was somewhat ambiguous was this little phrase: **"...for the work to which I have called them."** What work was God calling Barnabas and Saul to engage as their new assignment from God? What would it mean for them? Would they have to leave Antioch, or could it be accomplished there?

Evidently as these leaders prayed and discussed together, the Holy Spirit gave them more details than Luke gives us, for the action they took was definitive as Luke describes it: **"So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Selucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper."** (Acts 13:3-5) I wonder what you see my friends?

Seems to me they had concluded *the Holy Spirit wanted them to LEAVE the exciting, multicultural Jesus movement in Antioch and travel to places where neither Jesus nor any of His apostles had yet gone for the purpose of doing what they had been doing in Antioch... telling the story of Jesus and teaching His Gospel message to any who would listen, beginning with Jews in their synagogues.* Since we have no record, the Holy Spirit had specifically included John Mark in those instructions, yet John Mark went along with Barnabas and Saul, this was either young John Mark's idea of

continuing his traveling adventure and so he requested the privilege of going with them or it was Barnabas or Saul who saw potential in this young man and wanted more time to help develop in him that spiritual potential. Of course, Luke's comment '**as their helper**' also suggests a very practical reality... Barnabas and Saul would welcome someone coming with them to help them with whatever challenges they may face along the way.

We are left to wonder why they chose the path to Seleucia and on to Cyprus? It appears the Holy Spirit led them, and of course Cyprus was Barnabas' home, so he could be their travel guide and perhaps help them find a welcome, at least in the places Barnabas was known. *It would be a familiar place to start their God given assignment.* This my friends is commonly known as Saul's **first of three missionary journeys.**

We have no indication either Barnabas or Saul had any idea where their travels would take them, it would be a day by day, even hour by hour, journey of faith, following, to the best of their ability, the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, let's travel with them over these next days. Let's watch carefully to see what the Holy Spirit led them to experience and how they handled the unexpected. Let's see if we can discern WHY God gave these two specific men this particular assignment. And let's watch to see how it affected young John Mark. Meanwhile, for today may I ask you these questions...

Have you ever been present when either you or someone you know received a specific call to action from God? Take a moment and write a paragraph or two about what happened in that event. Also, *if you received that call from God and you have followed His call to you, what has been the result in your life and the lives of those you've touched along the way?* And finally, let's all look closely at our hearts today... are you positioned and ready if God were to reach to you **TODAY** with a fresh calling to action? What would you do? Here's a song to help you consider this strategic potential of this moment, my friends:

Today's Scripture is Acts 13:2-5.