

Small Groups @ TBC  
Sermon Discussion Notes

**Date of sermon:** June 18<sup>th</sup> 2017

**Speaker:** Paul Ferguson

**Title:** Following Jesus...

**Introduction:** the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul is a hugely significant moment for the church at Antioch. This in a sense is the culmination of all that had been happening in Paul's life up until this point. You will remember at his conversion on the Damascus road it was very clearly put to him that he would be a light to the Gentiles. Even though God had called Paul to this ministry this did not in any way sideline the role of the local church in playing a part in this process. The church at Antioch was clearly a church that sought to listen to God and was not afraid to give away their best namely Paul and Barnabas. The rest of the book of Acts follows the outworking of this commissioning and sending of Paul, Barnabas and the others who would join Paul at a later date. What we sought to explore on Sunday morning were some thoughts around following Jesus.

**Review:** Invite those who listened to the talk to give a summary.

**Read:** Acts 12: 25 - 13: 3

**Reflect:**

**1. God calls ordinary people**

It can be very easy to be 'floored by giants'. That is to say, when we read the lives of the great saints like Paul we can be so awed by the things that they did, said and achieved that we can be left thinking how hard it is to relate to their experience. It is important to remember that Paul was an ordinary man with great strengths but weaknesses too. Why are we tempted to look at the lives of the great saints or even our fellow Christians and feel somewhat inferior-maybe we say God can't use me?

Furthermore, Paul's former life and formal education which resulted in great learning was not put to waste. God took hold of that and it was used to great effect as we can read from the many letters that Paul wrote that are included in the New Testament. In the same way Moses' former life as a prince of Egypt and latterly as a shepherd was, if you like, the raw material used to fulfil the task for which God has called. Read Exodus 4 and reflect on the task to which Moses was being called and the resources that God had already given him?

1

**Leaders:** feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.

**Don't feel you have to use all of the material,** but  
do try to keep the shape of Review – Read – Reflect – Respond  
and **DO make room for the 'And Finally' questions!**

Think about the gifts and abilities that God has given you, how might you more fully put them at God's disposal?

There is an even more significant point to make. We can be overly concerned about what we should be doing and not asking the question who am I becoming.

nearly all the great biblical characters one could name, whether Paul or Moses or David-the great King David! All had to be formed as people and continue this process throughout their lives. Sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully. The desert seems to have played a significant role in all of these peoples development including Jesus himself. Exodus 2; Galatians 1: 17; 1 Samuel 23: 14; Matthew 4: 1-11. Reflect on why these desert places or lonely places were so formative in the lives of these people? Think about some of the things that have shaped to you as a person?

## 2. Local Church

The local church is the context where both Barnabas and Paul gladly served. Read the last little section of Acts 11, what does this tell us about Paul and Barnabas? Reflect on the importance of serving others and following Jesus?

The commissioning that Paul and Barnabas received came out of an atmosphere of worship and also fasting. One of the dangers that we can fall into is viewing things like fasting and worship as a way of getting what we want from God. How might we view these things properly? Consider how worship and fasting orientate us toward God? Think about the place of Christian disciplines within your discipleship and how these things can play a part in us following Jesus?

The discovery of God's purpose for Paul and Barnabas happened within the community. I wonder how this differs from what can be our highly individualistic perspective on faith and calling? What are the issues potentially from us taking the line that says: "I will do what I think God is calling me to do?" What are the pitfalls and weaknesses with this approach? How might we think about it differently?

The laying on of hands amongst many other things signified the church's participation in Paul and Barnabas's mission. Paul and Barnabas were representatives of Christ but also of their local sending church. Think about some of the people that we as a church community pray for when they go on mission? How does this perspective of our participation in the work that they're engaged with change the way we think and act?

## 3. Journey

Following Jesus is a journey. Paul and Barnabas set about a literal and metaphorical journey. They would go places but they would also develop and grow as people enter into a deeper knowledge of Christ. Paul as we read his words in

2

**Leaders:** feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.

**Don't feel you have to use all of the material,** but do try to keep the shape of Review – Read – Reflect – Respond and **DO make room for the 'And Finally' questions!**

Philippians 2 we hear that he hadn't in any sense arrived at the end of his journey but his desire was that he would know Christ more. I wonder if you find the metaphor journey helpful? If so explore this thought, what is helpful this metaphor?

Paul was a man with great dreams and desires we read in Romans chapter 15 that he had a dream to preach the gospel in Spain. It seems that he might not have achieved that. In Acts chapter 16 we see that Paul and Silas are on their way to" Bithynia-that's where they want to go. But God stepped in and redirected them via vision of a man from Macedonia calling them to come and help. How do we strike a balance between following direct instructions from God and using our own sense of wanting to do something? How do we sift through our motivations for wanting to pursue a certain path?

#### 4. Perseverance

when following Christ perseverance is one of the most important factors. So many things will conspire to divert us or cause us to give up. There is this repeated pattern in Acts - And obstacle occurs often in the form of persecution then the obstacle is overcome and the gospel is preached.

Leading up to our reading today in the previous chapter we see that James the brother of John had been murdered. Peter was imprisoned and then miraculously released. Then in Chapter 12 and verse 24 we read that the word of God continue to spread and flourish.

Difficulty can cause us to conserve to retreat and even to give up. But the opposite seems to happen in these accounts of the early Christians. Luke the writer of Acts wants to, amongst other things, demonstrate that the gospel cannot be thwarted. How do we act when difficulty comes? Have there been things that have caused us to want to give up? How does knowing that the gospel is unstoppable and will in good time bear fruit help us in our witness and following Jesus?

#### And finally:

- As you conclude, ask each person:
- What is the main thing you are taking away as an action point?  
Explore the challenge of
- How can we pray for you?
- Is there anything we can check on next time we meet?

**Leaders:** feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.

**Don't feel you have to use all of the material,** but do try to keep the shape of Review – Read – Reflect – Respond and **DO make room for the 'And Finally' questions!**