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Acts 13:1-12

Mitch Jolly

That song fires me up and I hope it does you, as well. My name is Mitch Jolly. I’m from Rome, Georgia, Three Rivers Church, and it’s a pleasure to be back with you. It’s been a while since I’ve been able to be here with you and it’s a joy to be able to come up and be with you tonight.

We are going to be in Acts 13:1-12. If you will permit me, I really want to hang out a little bit above the text and peek down into it. This is kind of the word that kept coming to mind as I was driving up this afternoon—to get at some *essence* of the Church. If I put a title over this—I’m not real creative, as a matter of fact I’m not creative at all—I don’t have a creative bone in my body so this isn’t a really creative title—but if I put a title on top of something I’ll put this on it, *The Powerfully Gifted Church of Jesus Christ*.

It’s really easy when we come to the book of Acts to highlight individuals. We make heroes out of people who aren’t heroes. In the narrative of the Gospel there is only one hero and that hero is Jesus Christ. So, we have a tendency to look at Paul and go, “Wow, Paul!” But Paul will say things along the way like, “This treasure of the Gospel is contained in a jar of clay” to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. But we want to look at the broke jar and go, “Wow, broke jar! Wow, hero.” And Paul is going, “There’s no hero here. Look at Jesus.” What’s crazy is that Paul uses these metaphors to point to Jesus and in particular he calls the Church the Body of Christ. Who is the head? Jesus. He calls us, that is, redeemed, saved, Spirit-filled followers of Jesus, the Body of Christ, and he sits as King over us, and we are to grow up into Him who is the head, and every joint and ligament is to supply a portion of that. Right? Does that smell like something Paul wrote? Right? But we want to look at Paul and go, “Ooh, look at Paul.” Let’s take an example from Paul’s life. What I want to do is step a little bit, maybe one step, back from Acts 13 and peek down in, and not look at Paul or Barnabas, but I want to see the Church at Antioch, the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Jesus in Antioch.

So, I probably have way more information than we have time for. I’m notorious for preaching forty-five minutes to an hour and I will try not to do that to you. I have a lot of stuff so I hope you’ll permit me to have some fun with you. I’m going to read Acts 13:1-12 and I’m going to begin to plow our way through some things here. So, Acts 13:1-12,

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 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.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. 6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. 7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy…

Boy, those are hard words, right?

…will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

There is so much here. When Brody said, “Hey, will you come preach this passage?” I said, “Verses one to three?” and he said, “No, verses one to twelve.” I was like, oh, boy. There’s lots here. So, I want to hang out above the text a little bit.

Sitting over this passage is Acts 1:3 and Acts 28:31. They are bookends. Just indulge me for a second and go to Acts 1:3. There is a literary device name for this and I’m not going to give it to you because that would just send me into a rabbit trail, and once I go down rabbit trails it’s a bad thing. Luke is writing here to Theophilus and he wrote about Jesus and what he said and did and now he is writing here to the same recipient to show them how the Church, by the work of the Holy Spirit, is advancing on mission. Verse 3,

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Then, in Acts 28:31, hopefully you know what is happening here. Paul is in Rome and under house arrest and he is welcoming people and, verse 30,

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

These bookend passages really tell us what’s happening in the book of Acts. Jesus gave them this good news of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, His salvation and His rule, and they are proclaiming this message. Jesus gave it to them and all through the book it’s their message, so that we end the book with Paul preaching the message that Jesus gave to them. What’s the scope of it? It’s Acts 1:8.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses…

It’s not optional. It’s not a suggestion. But “my people *will* be my witnesses”…

…in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

It’s not sequential, it’s not one then the other, but it’s, “You, my people, will preach this message and you are to do it all over the world simultaneously.” It’s a supernatural call, it’s a supernatural task, and it cannot be done in our power. It’s an impossible task apart from the powerful message of the Gospel of the kingdom. The Holy Spirit pushing that Word forward is what’s sitting over Acts 13 here in verses 1-12. The Gospel of the kingdom is this good news that Paul says in Romans 1:16 is powerful and it saves people supernaturally, without our assistance. We just have to preach it and He saves people with it. This Gospel births disciples and those disciples begin to make more disciples not later but then and as they begin to make disciples you are going to see some cool stuff. He births His Church not with preachers, not with pastors, but with general, run-of-the mill old disciples like us. That’s how He does it. That’s how Antioch got here. Alright? So that’s kind of what’s sitting over this passage.

So, what I have here are ten observations and then some things that maybe are barriers to us being like Antioch. I kind of went on a negative with my application. Rather than ‘let’s be like’ I looked at some things that may be some barriers to us. So, let’s look at some observations sitting above this text.

Observation number 1. Antioch was full of gifted people. Verse 1,

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers…

Antioch was full of gifted people. Now, listen, that’s not the exception, it’s the rule. Red Oak is full of gifted people because, check this out, Jesus doesn’t advance His kingdom with heroes. There is one hero and it’s Jesus. He advances His kingdom when you and I get that Gospel of the kingdom and preach it. And when we preach it He saves people and He plants churches. This church was full of gifted people because Jesus was in it. And if Jesus is in Red Oak you are full of gifted people. A gifted church is the rule. If we are ungifted, dare I say that we don’t have Jesus? As a matter of fact, Paul will teach us in Corinthians, and Ephesians, and Romans that where the Holy Spirit is He is giving gifts to serve each other and in the world, meaning you are a gifted people. Antioch is not exceptional. It is the rule and it’s normative and it should be normative for all of our churches.

Number two. Worshipping and fasting seem to be the fuel the Spirit uses to launch Antioch’s missional movement. Worshipping and fasting. Notice it doesn’t say preaching. Now, don’t hear me minimize preaching; that’s what I’m doing. It has a role in teaching doctrine and proclamation. It’s powerful. It’s full of grace. God fills the preaching of His Word with grace to help us persevere in the faith, to build faith. He does a thousand good things through the preaching of the Gospel. But notice how these two were launched from the church in Antioch. It was as they worshipped and fasted. It seems to be the fuel that launches this movement to the nations. So, they were worshipping, and the word ‘worship’ is interesting, too. It’s where we get the word ‘liturgy’ from and it has something to do with an order but it has more to do with a public order. In other words, this church in Antioch wasn’t hidden and sequestered off to themselves. They weren’t isolated to themselves. They were functioning in public with the Gospel. They were not hidden. Do you feel that? It is so easy in the Church in the west to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. What they were doing is they were worshipping. There was a public order to their worship and whatever that worship looked like—they might have been singing songs or somebody might have been preaching—there were teachers here but they were proclaiming the Gospel and they were worshipping the Lord somehow in public. It doesn’t tell us what it looked like; it’s just what the word means. But there was a public adoring of Jesus in their corporate message. Does that make sense? And it’s important to know it was as a whole church, not just one or two.

This morning we preached Isaiah 40:1-11. In verses 9-11, Isaiah breaks out into this command that Zion, the people of God, are to get up onto a mountain, and it’s one people, and this one people is to proclaim this one message, and that is, “Behold, look at our God, Jesus Christ.” So, this corporate body was worshipping together as one body the Lord Jesus somehow in a public fashion, and they were fasting, meaning they were doing without. In the Bible, when it speaks of fasting it’s not doing without internet or staying off of social media; it’s that they are not eating, because they want the Word of God. So, worshipping and fasting seem to be the fuel that launches this movement.

Number three. The Holy Spirit has a mission and it’s Jesus mission. That mission is to call the nations to worship. The Holy Spirit has a mission because, notice, while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said—He’s speaking. Remember in John 14, 15, and 16, the Holy Spirit’s job is to take His words, His mission, and apply it to us. He will be our counselor, our guide to truth, the one to remind us of everything that Jesus said. So, here’s the Holy Spirit, the heartbeat of the Church, at this church who is worshipping and fasting, and the Holy Spirit on mission speaks and says, “Set these guys apart for this task.” So, the Holy Spirit has a mission and His mission is Jesus’ mission, and Jesus’ mission is to call His body, the Church, to go call the nations to come worship Jesus. That’s the mission. That’s Jesus vision—that we, the body, would call the nations to worship Jesus. So, the Holy Spirit is not doing weird things—He is calling the Church out on a mission to go and preach this Gospel to the nations from Antioch.

Observation number four. Antioch prepared for being a sending agency through fasting and prayer. They didn’t know what a sending agency was; I totally get that. They had no clue what a sending agency was. As far as they were concerned they were the sending agency. Now, I said that on purpose and I wrote that down on purpose because we have this funky concept that somehow it’s another non-profit’s job to send people to the world. The Bible knows nothing of that. Do you know who sends people to the world in the Bible? The Church sends people to the world. Who funds those people going to the world? The Church funds those people going to the world so, therefore, Antioch prepared for this monumental Acts 1:8 task. Remember, the Gospel grew the kingdom in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, all at the same time. How do they prepare for this undoable, supernatural task? Worshipping and fasting. I find that absolutely fascinating. Because if you are taking my strategic leadership training—I teach people leadership development in the business world for fun, on the side, and do it in other countries for people who need leadership development—we start talking about strategic initiatives that are vertically aligned to the vision of your company. Now, if you are talking about going to the world and sending people to the world, I’m probably going to start with money, volume of people, and all kinds of strategies. What’s their strategy? Worshipping and fasting. This is a rabbit trail but God doesn’t do things the way we think He ought to do things.

I had a professor in graduate school who really instilled in me a biblical love for the nations. It’s not like he had it and the Bible didn’t, it’s just that he helped me to see it in the Bible. He took me out of the framework of entertainment for church and showed me how Jesus’ mission was the nations. Dr. Mike Barnett used to always say, “It’s in the manual.” He even had his Bible refitted at some point—the same Bible he had used for years. He had the cover taken off and a new cover put on and on the front it said, “The Manual.” What Dr. Barnett meant by that is that all the instructions on how to do Jesus’ mission are already written. You don’t have to go make it up. You don’t have to go have a brainstorming session. You don’t have to have a visioning session. You sit down and you open the manual and the Holy Spirit will call out His people to use God’s tools to do God’s work. His tool here was worshipping and fasting.

Number five. Antioch approved and confirmed the Spirit’s call on their members. Verse 3,

Then, after fasting and praying….

They brought fasting up again. Dad gum, what are they doing?

Then after fasting and praying…

Now prayer.

… they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

So, Antioch sided with the Spirit by fasting and praying. What’s interesting here is they didn’t pray and ask if what He was saying was true. “Oh, Holy Spirit, would you just confirm? We really like these guys and we don’t need them to go. So, would you drop us some confirmation? Make the fleece wet and the ground dry.” That’s not how they used prayer. They fasted and they began to pray in affirmation. Chances are their prayer is, “Lord, send them. Mobilize them. Do what you’ve got to do to make your way before them.” It’s not to get in agreement with; it’s in order to send them off. So, Antioch approves and they confirm the Spirit’s call through fasting and praying. That’s different, huh? That’s different.

Observation number six. Antioch was local…and they were global at the same time. Antioch was local and they were global at the same time. There is no indication here from Acts 13 that Barnabas and Paul stopped being in any way connected to the Church in Antioch. In fact, they are going to come back and report back to them. Meaning that Antioch had a ministry that spanned from Antioch to wherever those guys put their feet. Meaning that there was an intimate connection between the local body of Christ and the nations where the Gospel was going to be preached. They didn’t abandon them. They didn’t turn them over to somebody else. There was a lifeline of life to their people and therefore it made Antioch a local entity that had global footprints.

Observation number seven. Antioch was simply doing what it had been taught at its founding. Antioch was simply doing what it had been taught in its own founding. In order to show you that, go back to Acts 11:19-26. There are all kinds of good lessons here. Hang on in Acts 11, but in Acts 7 Stephen is stoned to death, right? In Acts 8, Saul approves of his execution. As a matter of fact, do you ever find it interesting that Saul is not actually doing the executing? He’s just watching over the coats. That’s always struck me as funny. Not ha-ha funny but, “You’re not a tough guy.” Paul will tell you later on that he’s not a good speaker. The Corinthian church says, “Your letters are weighty but when you show up you are kind of little and you don’t talk good.” He will say, “This treasure is held in a jar of clay to show the power is from God and not from me.” He’s not a hero. So, the Church is scattered in Acts 8:4,

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

It’s just the unnamed “those” who were scattered. There were no superstars, just followers of Jesus. What were they doing? Preaching. Alright? So, go to Acts 11:19,

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen….

So, what did God accomplish when Stephen was stoned to death? He scattered His Church. He said in Acts 1:8, “Jerusalem and Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” They were hanging out in Jerusalem. So, what does the Lord do? He brings about, in His good grace, a persecution, and sends them. Supernaturally, providentially, sovereignly sends them, but what do they do? They are preaching.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus…

…and to where?

…and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

How did Antioch get founded? Some people who were scattered preached the Gospel and a bunch of people got saved and a church was founded. No superstars, just disciples. Just disciples. The church says, “Hey, let’s send some experienced people to help them out, and Barnabas goes, and he disciples, and he brings Paul along, and they spend a year investing. So, when Antioch sends Barnabas and Paul out they are just doing what they learned in their own founding. They are just repeating the lesson. Antioch was planted by disciples preaching the Gospel and Antioch was simply sending people on mission just like people on mission from God had been sent to them.

Listen, multiplying the kingdom is not rocket science. It’s simply preaching the Gospel and when lost people get saved you start gathering. Then Jesus is able to raise up in His body, because it’s His body, biblical church leadership. This is why Paul will write to Titus, right? In Titus 1, he told them, “I’ve appointed you to go and raise up elders in every city.” Meaning there were churches planted by normal people and now was the time for biblical church leadership to arise. That’s backward of how we think, isn’t it? We think we need a preacher, somebody who talks good, to go plant a church, and the Bible is telling us it’s just all of us preaching Jesus, and if we will just preach this powerful message He will take it global as He saves people. So, Antioch is just doing what Antioch learned in its own founding. Isn’t that cool?

Guess what, Red Oak? You have a global footprint. I know you know that. And you know what? All you’ve got to do is replicate what you learned in your own founding. Go start. Go start work, preach Jesus, and watch Jesus save people.

This is a rabbit hole we’re going down for a second. We have a tendency to program out the Holy Spirit by trying to make the kingdom work of the Gospel harder than it needs to be. We are going to get to an application point here in just a second so hang tight with me.

Observation number eight. It’s easy to make this passage about Paul and Barnabas when, in fact, it’s about Jesus’ powerfully gifted body, the Church. This passage is not about Paul and Barnabas. It’s about the Church of Jesus Christ and its powerful, missional DNA. Do you understand that Jesus launched a movement to the nations with just a few disciples because the power is not in the disciples? The power is in the Gospel they carried, the missional DNA of the Holy Spirit who carries the message of Jesus. And when Jesus sent the Spirit to indwell us we have everything we need to accomplish the mission. Do you believe that? They believed it. When God sent them through persecution, they didn’t go carrying a ton of resources. They were persecuted. They went scattered, and they preached the Gospel, and He starts founding churches at Antioch. Isn’t that crazy? A rogue church gets started in a Hellenistic city by a bunch of people who got scattered and they are first called Christians there. Isn’t that great? We’re not insignificant because the Gospel is not insignificant, right?

Observation number nine. The Church has the missional DNA of the kingdom built into it because Jesus is the head, the Holy Spirit is the heartbeat, and the elect people are the members of the body who carry the mission. We have everything we need, everything we need. The more I travel around the world and the more our people engage around the world the more I see the Church doing more with less around the world than we do with more. We have budgets. The Church in the west has a gross domestic product. Most of the churches around the world don’t even have non-profit status and they make more disciples per dollar than we do. Isn’t that crazy? It’s because it’s not the dollar that plants churches or saves people, it’s the Gospel. It’s the missional DNA of the Gospel of the kingdom that we all carry because we’re saved. You have everything you need because you’ve got Jesus.

Observation number ten. By focusing on individual heroes who have what we consider to be valued skills. As a matter of fact, you go on and read in some of these encounters and Paul is called a god. Some people think he’s a god and they think he’s this particular god because he talks the best; at least they think he’s a good talker. So, they have this tendency to go to these skilled people and want to worship them, and Paul is like, “You can’t do that.” We have a tendency to focus on individual heroes who have a bunch of valued skills that we deem necessary and in so doing we have a tendency to diminish the missional DNA that all members of the body have and we make heroes of people who should not be heroes. If we exalt good preachers, as opposed to the faithful who just tell the Gospel in their daily vocation, we’ve made heroes out of people that shouldn’t be heroes and exalted to the place of Jesus those who should not be exalted there. There is one hero and it’s Jesus and we are all members of His body. We all carry a skillset He gave us. As a matter of fact, Psalm 139 tells us He wired it into us before we were ever born. It’s not less than, it’s not more than, it’s what He gave me for the advance of His kingdom. By exalting people to a hero status who we consider to have valued skills we diminish the skillset of other people in the body. What I want us to hear tonight is that this church at Antioch was founded by normal people, not Paul, not Barnabas, but normal people who went about preaching a powerful message. I don’t know about you but that gives me great hope. It gives me great hope.

So, what are some barriers? What are some barriers to being like Antioch? I don’t know about you but I want to be able to be an agent of seeing the powerful Gospel affect other cities and places around the world like we see in verses 4-12. These men go about not because they are special but because they have the missional DNA of the Gospel and they preach, and notice they do it in the public square. They’re not hiding from the city leaders. They’re not working on some fake platform so they don’t get into trouble. They’re not lying about who they are. They’re just preaching the Gospel. By the way, that’s a whole different talk. Paul was a tentmaker by trade and God used his vocation to give him access to the Roman world. That’s awesome. I want our church to be like that—that the person sitting, listening weekend and week out, being faithful to preach the Gospel in their job—don’t think that they have to leave their job to get into some level of ministry. They’re already in the ministry and have all the missional DNA they need. So, what are some barriers to being like Antioch?

Number one. Doctrinal integrity worked all the way down into our application. Doctrinal integrity worked all the way down into our application. I don’t think there’s any doubt that in your church and mine we know what the Church is and understand what the Church’s purpose is. What we now need to do is massage that down into the dirt of daily life and get our application dirty, right? Grind it down into what happens tomorrow morning when the alarm goes off and what happens tomorrow at lunch time. What happens when my coworkers are doing x, y, and z. In other words, we need to make more of the Church, not less. The Church is Jesus’ chosen vehicle to reach the world. Do you believe that? If the Church is Jesus’ chosen vehicle to reach the world then how we reach the world matters, does it not? It means we need to begin to think about how we mobilize the Church. If you’ve heard me speak before at one of the missions conferences or come to hear some of the things I’ve talked on before, you’ve heard me ask this question we ask all the time, and it’s, “What if the whole Church was the missionary?” Not, “What if the Church sent missionaries?” but “What if the whole Church was the missionary?” That’s a paradigm framework-shifting question. We need to make more of the Church, not less, because she is Jesus’ vehicle. And you know what? Ephesians tells us that He is still working on His bride, He’s refining us and making us more like himself, and growing us up into himself, and He is causing us to not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, but growing up into maturity into Christ. Every day we live we are growing up more into Jesus and learning more about Jesus, learning what it is to live His mission out as His hands and feet. We need to make more of that, not less. We need to figure more of that out, not less.

I’m going to be going out on sabbatical in February and March and my aim in study is to make more of the Church in our application to the west than we have in the past. I don’t mean “we” like “us” but I mean the Church in the west. I did this little exercise with some folks a couple of weeks ago and I asked them to just tell me the top five things you think about when you hear the word “church.” Some of the most frequent ones were non-profit, 501c3, building, and budget. I started going, “None of those have anything to do with what the Church is.” I challenge you, now that I’ve kind of messed up your mind a little bit with that, to let your mind go still for a little bit and think what are some of the things you think about when you think “church”? What we’ve done is we’ve made the Church something she’s not. She’s not a non-profit. She’s the bride of Jesus Christ and the hands and feet of the kingdom. She has a mission to make much of Jesus among every tribe, tongue, nation, and language. That’s who she is. She is His and we are being refined by Him because He loves us, and cares for us, and purchased us at the cross, and gave us a task to go and tell that glorious story to the world. And non-profit, building, and money has nothing to do with it. Nothing. So, we need to grind out a little more about what it means to be the Church local. Okay? You are going to have to do that on your own. I just need to leave that right there with you, okay?

Number two. What keeps us from being more like Antioch? I would say biblical literacy. I don’t mean the ability to read; I mean actual reading the Bible. I have a friend whose been working in this one particular part of the world for going on thirty years, a place where it’s not legal to be a Christian. So, he was sitting, because he’s bold, in a little café reading his Bible. His waiter spied him reading his Bible. He realized that he had been spied reading his Bible so he closed it and put it away, hoping not to stir a commotion. But he noticed that his waiter noticed it and scurried off and he thought, “Uh-oh, he’s going to get authorities.” The waiter comes back and he pulls out a couple of pages and they were two chapters of the book of Philippians. This man had planted a couple hundred churches on two pages that contained two chapters of the book of Philippians. How do you explain that to me except that the Gospel is powerful? Two chapters of Philippians was enough to save this guy and teach him how to go plant churches. We have trouble planting one or two. Not only do we have a whole Bible in English, we have multiple translations, right? As Dr. Barnett said, “It’s in the manual.” It’s there. God’s strategy is there. And I would say to us that we need to be better students of the Bible. Can I just say this? It doesn’t require a set of commentaries. It doesn’t require scholarly study. There’s nothing wrong with those things. I have a master’s degree in that stuff, even in biblical languages. But do you know what I’ve found? The more I travel the world the more I realize that people with no education or degree at all but who can read, and read the Bible, do more with what they know of the Bible than I do with what I know of the Bible and degree in it. Could it be that it’s just in the manual and the Gospel is really powerful? If I would read it, and know it, and apply it, and do it, Jesus would do supernatural things. That’s what happened in Acts 13. As they go about preaching the Gospel, God gives them a public witness, He sets them in front of a government official, they have encounters with dark forces of evil, the Gospel triumphs over them, and He saves public officials. Imagine that. Imagine that. We need to know our Bibles and just simply obey them. We say in our church that discipleship for us is ‘hear and obey.’ Learn to hear—know God’s Word and what it says. Learn to hear the Spirit’s counsel through His Word and then obey it, because Jesus said, in Matthew 7, “He who hears these words of mine and does them” are wise people who built their house on the rock. But those who hear and don’t do are foolish people who build on sand. So, it does no good for me to hear and know if I don’t act, does it? That’s what Jesus said, so therefore we need to know and then we need to practice. Good doctrine is essential but then good practice is also essential. Does that make sense? Biblical literacy.

Three. What keeps us from being more like Antioch? Personal and corporate discipline and holiness. They worshipped the Lord and they fasted. There was a corporate emphasis on a public display of affection for Jesus and doing without the natural to have the supernatural. There was a drive to be disciplined on the mission and to be holy. I think one of the greatest challenges we face in Rome, Georgia… You people will say this is the Bible Belt, right? This hasn’t been the Bible Belt for 200 years, it just hasn’t. In my town of 100,000 people, less than 20,000 claim any affiliation with any local church. If you just tally up local churches’ attendance, you get less than 10,000 in a town of 100,000. That’s not the Bible Belt. That’s not holiness. That’s not discipline. That’s a lot of people consuming spiritual goods and where you’re considered spiritual if you go to the right church, or have the right youth group, or the right children’s ministry, or the preacher listens to the right podcast, or you read the right books—not, are you obeying the mission? Personal and corporate discipline and holiness.

I teach this stuff in a country—I can’t say it because this is live—but I teach leadership development to government officials, and other people in our church do, in a Muslim country, and one of the first things we do is teach mission, vision, strategy, and tactics, and tactics are vertically aligned to vision. Your tactics have to align with what you are there for, right? Otherwise, why are you doing it, right? If the vision is God’s glory and the preaching of the Gospel among the nations, what does where you meet have to do with it? It’s not a tactic that matters. It’s a consumable commodity that makes people happy to get a product but it’s not a measurable tactic to achieving the mission. I’ll tell you a measurable tactic is how many people have you put around the world? How much money are we sending to the nations? Do you know the average money given in the western church to global work where the Gospel has not been is less than one-tenth of one percent? That says to me that in the west we need to do a better job of being disciplined and being holy with how we steward Jesus’ resources.

Number four. I’m almost done, I promise. The western construct of the Church contrasted with the New Testament idea of ecclesia. I mentioned to you already—building, money, and good preachers versus the called-out people of God. What we are going to see in the New Testament is that this Gospel goes forward on the backs of just normal folks like us who have jobs and preach the Gospel in our vocations.

Number five. Becoming a barrier to being like Antioch is becoming dependent on other non-profits for global effectiveness rather than bending our organizational efforts and budgets around finishing the Great Commission. What if the Church was the missionary? What if we bent our strategies and our budgets around the task?

Sixth and finally. What’s a barrier to being like Antioch? Abandoning our vocations to go into ministry. Vocational intentionality is our ticket to the hardest places on the planet. One of the things I’ve discovered is that there is no such thing in the New Testament as a closed country to a person who has a skillset. Countries are closed to professional missionaries. There is no country on the face of the planet closed to people who bring benefit to the public square. You know that? And the worst thing that can happen is when an electrician, a pipe-fitter, a lawyer, or a doctor quits their task to go into ministry. What I would say is to use that task and leverage it to work where you are and if God opens doors for you around the world take them. Because guess what? Because then they will pay you to do your job there. And guess what you do if you just obey Jesus and make disciples? Listen, you’re a church planter—shhh. I’m serious.

Just for illustration. If you walk into Rome, Georgia, we don’t have our own building. We rent space from a school but if you go into south Rome you will discover something cool. We actually own an entire elementary school. We don’t meet in the building we own but we own it. We own it but we don’t meet in it because the city gave it to us. Why did the city give us a building, a Christian non-profit? Because we’re of value to the city because of the work that we do in foster care and adoption. In fact, we get state money. And do you know what they don’t tell us? “You can’t make disciples.” You walk in and you will see on the wall, “In Jesus’ name.” Not, “In the name of God,” being generic, but “In Jesus’ name.” Why? Because we’re benefit-added to the state of Georgia. In fact, we are the model of foster care and adoptive services for the entire state and we are getting national attention for that work. And do you know what I’ve discovered? The city, the state, and the country do not care if you make disciples using their money if you are benefit-added to them. So, you know what I would say? Let’s stop leaving the public square for ministry and start preaching the Gospel in the public square in avenues God has given us and just see if perhaps He will do something cool with it. I would say to you that if you’re a follower of Jesus Christ you have everything you need for the effective preaching the Gospel to the nations, just like the Church at Antioch did. I’m encouraged by Antioch. Red Oak, you need to be encouraged by Antioch, because not only is that already happening in your church but He’s not done with you. You have an entire world out there and He’s working in you to mobilize you to it. So, I want to encourage you to stay the course. Stay the course. Don’t give up on it. Don’t give up on Jesus’ methodologies. Don’t stop preaching the Gospel; it is the power source of that. Lean into Jesus and His methodology harder and more. Apply the truth we know better, and as we do that I assure you that we will see a global movement of the kingdom of God, because Jesus said it will be so. It will be so.

Let’s pray and then we are going to worship together.

Lord, we pray in Jesus’ name that you will help us continue to make much out of your kingdom and the Gospel. Holy Spirit, I pray that even sitting in this room tonight that you would speak to hearts and set apart individuals for tasks that you have laid out for them; that you would affirm things that you’ve already been working in souls about. I pray that you would give faith, encourage faith, grow faith, and dig deeper with faith to keep persevering in hard things and not quit on them. Lord, I pray that you will help us to lean hard into Jesus’ Christ and Him crucified and the application of that message to the Church and then the Church to the world. Help us to figure that out and not get paralyzed by things that aren’t in the manual. Holy Spirit, Jesus said you are our counselor, helper, and guide to truth, so counsel us, help us, and guide us into the truth of how to do that well. Then, I pray that you would help us to worship you well. As we enjoy you together, I pray that you would be pleased, and lifted up, and that we would be encouraged. We pray this in Jesus’ name.