



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 13:1-4

“Antioch and the New Testament Church”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Luke, who is the inspired historian of the early church, is continuing his account of the experiences of the body of believers and in verse 1 of chapter 13, of his wonderful history book, he writes.

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.’ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this lovely day; this marvelous creation of Thine is designed for our blessing. We thank Thee that we have a great

creator God, who has brought this whole universe into being, in order to serve the purposes of divine redemption. And we especially today, on the Lord's Day, the Day of the Resurrection, give Thee thanks for the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that the blood has been shed, the covenant has been ratified, forgiveness of sins is preached through Him, from Jerusalem to the four corners of the earth. We rejoice, Lord, in all that Thou hast done and art doing. And we ask, Lord, that Thou wilt continue to accomplish all of Thy purposes that, ultimately, we may give Thee thanks for all that Thou hast devised and planned, and have seen come to pass in the annals of history.

We especially, also, give Thee thanks for the unfinished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, His work of praying at the right hand of our God on High, His work of intercession, His work of advocacy. And we thank Thee, too, for the unfinished work of His coming again, and we look forward to that. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. And then, Lord, we thank Thee for the blessings of life that guide our steps and guard our way, as we live this particular life that Thou hast given us to live. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt enable us individually, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, to serve Thee in a way that will please Thee and in a fruitful way that may be the means of blessing for others as well. We thank Thee for all of the material blessings of life, especially for the spiritual blessings of life, and we give Thee thanks, too, Lord, for the Christian church. We realize we are not yet sanctified and, therefore, we are growing unto a perfect man, as the apostle puts it in one of his letters. But, we desire, Lord, that the whole body may reach its maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we pray Thy blessing upon the church composed of those who have by Thy grace, been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. And then, Lord, we pray for our country; we ask Thy blessing upon it, upon our President, upon the governments under which we are living. We particularly remember, Lord, those in the calendar of concern whose physical problems and other kinds of problems are a concern to them and to their friends

and relatives. And, Lord, we ask Thy ministry to them. For this local church, Lord, we pray; for our elders and for our deacons and for our members and friends and visitors today. O God, may Thy great, all-powerful, all-gracious hand minister to all of us. Bless the ministry of the word.

We pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning in our continuation of the study of the Book of the Acts, is “Antioch and the New Testament Church.” One of the interesting things to me is the fact that in my life, I guess it’s because I have lived so many years, I find that some of the things that I learned in elementary school, I know that I learned them because at one time I studied them and I knew them, I think, at one time, have somehow or other, through neglect or otherwise, have vanished from my thinking.

Now, one thing that I think about that comes up today as I think about this message that we are to look at, is the fact that years ago, I understood what was meant by the Continental Divide. And I have stood on the Continental Divide. Well, some of the things that I have forgotten have come back to me when I have decided, well, I will look in the encyclopedia and see what it says about the Continental Divide. And in the Continental Divide section of the encyclopedia, you will find things like the Continental Divide is the watershed from which the various streams of our mountains flow into various parts of our country and then, ultimately, to the different oceans. You find something like this; the Divide is a high place in the land, placed so that, I want to say “Who placed it?” But placed so that the streams on one side flow in the opposite direction from the streams on the other side. And, as you well know, in the Continental Divide of our continent, at Cut Bank Pass in Glacier National Park, there are three brooks that are so close to each other, that you can actually as an individual pour water into all three and know that the water from one brook will, ultimately, reach Hudson Bay; and then the other brook, water will eventually reach the Gulf of Mexico; and then, from the third brook, the water will reach the Pacific Ocean. There are several places where you

can put water into these little brooks and they will flow into the Gulf or flow into the Pacific, and they are all right by each other because the Continental Divide is the high part of the land, running north and south through the Rocky Mountains, dividing the flow of the head-waters and the river systems and, ultimately, the waters that flow off of our mountains.

Now, when we think about Continental Divide or watershed, which is another term for it, we can apply this illustratively to Acts chapter 13, because this is something of the Continental Divide or the watershed, of the Book of Acts. And we have reached that point in our exposition of this book. If you will think, for just a moment, back to the original commission that the Lord Jesus gave the church. It was this, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in Judea and in all Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

And then in chapter 2, Luke recorded the coming of the Holy Spirit and in the intervening chapters to chapter 13, the word of God has gone out, primarily, in Jerusalem, Judea and in Samaria. But then Antioch, through the preaching of the word of God by individuals forced out due to persecutions in Jerusalem and Judea, became the headquarters of the Christian church. And so there is a new work of the Holy Spirit here in Acts chapter 13, that signifies a new emphasis in the book. The Gospel now goes to the uttermost part of the earth. The emphases in chapter 2 through chapter 12 and chapter 13 and 28, are different. In the first section of the book, it is Peter who is the prominent character, if we were to select one. Whereas, now, Paul becomes the prominent figure. In the first part of the book, it is Jerusalem that is the prominent city, but now Antioch, well, obviously, becomes something of the headquarters of the Christian movement. And it was Palestine and its environs, which was the area that the Gospel ministry was played out in. But now, the whole world becomes the sphere of the ministry of the word.

The Church at Antioch, then, is a very important church; the Church at Jerusalem was an important church. This church is a church that gives us a great deal to think about because in one sense, it's a kind of model church.

Now, there was a great Southern Baptist preacher of a generation ago, Robert G. Lee, from Memphis, who used to talk about mediocrity with irony, by pointing to the folly of being miniature Methodists, puny Presbyterians, bantam Baptists, pigmy Pentecostals, and midget Mennonites. And then, sometime, in connection with this, he would tell the story of a man who, with his wife, went to a party. And this fellow wanted to be something of the life of the party, and he tried to be. And his wife, in the course of the conversations that evening, commented that he was a model husband. Well, he was not exactly sure what she meant by that and so he went home and decided while she wasn't looking that he would look up the word model.

Have you ever had an argument with your wife, and you have insisted that a word should be spelled a certain way, and or, some other fact is true and when you reach home, when she wasn't looking, you went to the encyclopedia to see if you really were right?

Well, he wanted to see if he was understanding exactly what “model” meant, and so, he finally found model and he found the definition was; a small imitation of the real thing. [Laughter] And he realized that his wife's compliment, which he thought was a pretty good compliment, was not necessarily a compliment.

Well, it has been said that Antioch is a model New Testament Church. In fact, some years ago when I preached on it, that was the title that I gave; “Antioch, a Model New Testament Church.” But we're not talking about mediocrity; we're talking about a church according to the New Testament doctrine and teaching. It is a remarkable church and it's important for us for that reason.

So we want to spend just a few moments this morning on the few verses that we've read for the Scripture reading. Luke begins the chapter by saying, “Now there were

in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers.” Of course, when we read, “There was a church at Antioch,” we are to understand that this church is the result, not of official action, nor of the construction of a building, but of the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. One can go back in the Book of Acts to earlier chapters, such as chapter 11, and read verse 19, “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto Jews only.” And we read, “And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, evangelizing or preaching the Lord Jesus or Jesus as Lord.” So Antioch was a church that had come into existence through the preaching of the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s the way a church comes into existence. It comes into existence by the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. Put very simply, it is the word and the Spirit by which the church came into existence.

Now, if we could keep that in our minds and keep it straight in our minds, it would deliver us from a lot of error. The church is not that which justifies the word of God. The church is not that organization which gives authority to the Bible. It is the word of God that is responsible for the church. And so we should never think that because we have a church, and the church makes certain pronouncements concerning the word of God and even occasionally in some parts, raises tradition to the same status as the word of God, that that is true. For it is not the church that authorizes the Scriptures; it is the truth of the Scripture in the power of the Spirit that is responsible for the existence of a Christian church. And so the church is always to be judged by Scripture; not Scripture by the church. That simple principle would deliver us from a great deal of error.

Antioch is in that respect a model New Testament church; it has come into existence through the preaching of the word of God. In this church there were “certain prophets and teachers.” Now, it’s interesting that the ones who are mentioned, they are certainly individuals who come from wide backgrounds. There is Barnabas, a Jewish

man, a man who was called earlier in this particular book a son of exhortation or consolation. So, evidently, he had the gift of exhorting. He certainly was a distinguished teacher of the word of God and already an experienced man. So Barnabas is a Jewish man, he comes from Cyprus, where they spoke excellent Greek. He was related to some of the individuals in the city of Jerusalem; undoubtedly, a man of unusual stature. Simeon who was called Niger. Niger means of dark complexion, but Simeon is a Jewish name. So, he was a Jewish man. Lucius of Cyrene, Cyrene in North Africa, so here is a man from a different area, North Africa. And Manaen, an unusual background this man had because he had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. Evidently, a man who was acquainted with the court; a man, no doubt, of high distinction in public life, but nevertheless, had come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as his savior and had been gifted by God as a prophet or a teacher. And then, last of all, Saul; one can see from this, of course, the lesson of the unifying influence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early church. Distinguished men and then others whose history we are really ignorant of.

Now, I'd just like to point out a couple of rather obvious things, which, I think, nevertheless, are important. There are some things that we need to distinguish, if we are to read the word of God concerning the church correctly. We should distinguish the terms “graces,” “offices,” and “gifts.” It will help us in understanding the New Testament and its teaching concerning the church, if we are able to distinguish graces, offices and gifts.

Graces are those virtues that are given to the saints, through the Holy Spirit, as he works in their lives. These things are the manifestations of the work of the Spirit in his sanctifying influence in our lives. The grace of mercy, the grace of love, the grace – and we could list, the fruit of the spirit here; love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, self-control. These are graces produced in individual lives by the Holy Spirit. They are for all Christians; we are all to grow in the graces of the word of God.

Offices, however, is something different. Offices is a term that has to do with functions in the local church. Not every Christian is an officer; only some men are officers. Elders, deacons, they are men appointed by the Holy Spirit, who hold office. So offices refer to functions in the local church. They are for some men, for oversight and for service. The elders for oversight; the deacons serving as helpers of the elders for ministry in the church.

The third work, gifts, spiritual gifts; spiritual gifts are abilities that are given to every Christian, for service in the local church. Now, these gifts are gifts that are utterance gifts, occasionally, and there are nonutterance gifts, occasionally. In other words, the two-fold division of the gifts is utterance and nonutterance. Now, we can, of course, give other types of classification. I don't know whether we have time to do that; we'll just leave that as it is, but gifts are for all; they differ, but they are for spiritual service. So graces, offices, gifts: every Christian has a gift. In one sense, every Christian has an office, for all of us are priests. But special offices of elder and deacon belong to certain men, appointed by the Holy Spirit, and then, the graces they are for all of us through the Holy Spirit to be cultivated in our lives.

Now, I think, if you will look carefully at this particular church's description and the others in the New Testament, you will notice something is missing. Why did not Luke tell us who was the pastor of this church? Now, of all the human churches that we talk about today, one of the first questions that anyone asks about a church is, who is the pastor of the church? Now, don't you think, if that was characteristic of the early church that someone would have gone to Luke immediately and said, “Look, Luke, you need to insert a marginal reading there, and tell us who the pastor of the church is. Because you don't mention who the pastor of the church at Antioch is.”

Well, as a matter of fact, if you look at all the other epistles of the New Testament, you will find no mention of the pastors of them either. Now, some people are a little disturbed by this, because that's what they've grown up, they can hardly think of a church

without a pastor. And so even in churches that don't have pastors, they find it so embarrassing that they have to think up a name; that is, of some man who happens to preach in the church and call him the pastor of the church, because they feel so embarrassed and disturbed that they are a member of a church that not only does not have a pastor but does not intend to have a pastor. That seems so strange. Would you have been happy in one of the early churches? Would you have found that since it didn't have a pastor, you would have been very upset and disturbed? I don't think so. If you were one of those early Christians that wouldn't have occurred to you. That's something that has been brought into the Christian church down through the years. The idea of a church with a person holding the office of pastor is not known to the New Testament. It's like a little pamphlet I have, I think, I have it in my Bible here. I brought it out and showed it to Martha the other day. “What does the Bible teach about infant baptism?” Now, obviously, this is a piece of propaganda because it says, “What does the Bible teach about infant baptism?” And then you open it up to read it and then there is nothing on the pages of it. [Laughter] So, I'm not surprised when I look at the back and see this is the product of a Baptist Truth Depot, of Willowdale, Ontario, Canada. That's a little piece of propaganda for the Baptist church, which does not believe in infant baptism.

But when it comes to the subject of the pastor of the church, one could write a little pamphlet like that and say, “What does the New Testament say about the office of the pastor?” And you could open it up, and if the pages were blank, it could represent essentially what the New Testament has to say about the office of the pastor.

Perhaps you are thinking, well, doesn't it say something about pastor-teacher? Well, yes, it does. In Ephesians chapter 4 in verse 11 and verse 12, we have reference to certain spiritual gifts that were given to the churches: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Many Greek students feel that there is some question about this, that those two words should be rendered with a hyphen, pastor-teachers. Now, the important thing to note is that the text says they are given to the church. Now, it's not a

reference to the local church; it's a reference to the whole Church. The whole Church is given apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. They are gifted men. The office of pastor is something else. That's evident as the context of Ephesians 4 unfolds. But while some have interpreted it otherwise, it really does not have justification exegetically or hermeneutically. That text simply says that some men “have the gift of pastor-teacher.” So it's all right for pastor-teachers to exist and minister in a church, but the idea of “the pastor” as an office of the church, over the church, with administrative responsibility, that is absent from the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the elders are they who have oversight over the church. The elders, officers, the elders have oversight. A pastor-teacher may teach in an assembly, and he may shepherd the flock with them, but the elders have the responsibility of shepherding the flock. So that's why Paul when he writes his epistles never mentions anyone as the pastor of the church. They did not have the pastor of a church. They may have had pastor-teachers, like they had teachers and evangelists, and those who had the gift of exhortation, but they were gifted men who ministered in the church, but did not have organizational responsibility with the elders.

You'll notice, also, that this church had five of these pastors or these apostles, I should say, and teachers. In other words, the number of the men who had spiritual gifts was limited to those chosen by the Holy Spirit. Or put another way, the number of gifted men is limited by the sovereign will of God, through the Spirit.

One of the things emphasized over and over in the New Testament, when you read of spiritual gifts is that they are placed in the local church as He, the Spirit, wills or as God wills. So whether we have one pastor-teacher or two pastor-teachers or five pastor-teachers or five prophets and teachers, as Antioch had; this is according to the directing sovereign will of God the Holy Spirit. We don't look out at a congregation and say, look, we've got two hundred people here. We ought to have five percent elders and three percent deacons and the rest, the flock. And, therefore, five percent of two hundred

is ten; we ought to have ten elders, so let's appoint ten elders. All of that is human reasoning. What we do is to see whom the Spirit has appointed as elder, and you can tell who is an appointee of the Holy Spirit by the fact that they function as elders or they function as deacons. That's the best evidence that they've been appointed by God. They function that way and, furthermore, they have doctrinal understanding that is in harmony with the elders who serve in the church, which, in turn, should be in harmony with the word of God. So, the number of elders or the number of deacons or the number of gifted men is the sovereign responsibility of the Lord God, through the Spirit. It's not our responsibility at all.

Now, if you think, of course, as you analyze a local church; we ought to have two or three more elders, do you know how to obtain two or three more elders? No, don't go out and lay hands on someone who has been un-appointed by the Holy Spirit. You will cause trouble. Take your request to the Lord God and ask him, if it be his will to appoint elders. And that they manifest their appointment by functioning as a shepherd in the flock of God. And God will answer your prayers. That's the way to go about it.

Now, notice that the work of shepherding was done by the elders and the pastor-teachers. Now, we don't have time to talk about that, but it's evident in this church, as one studies it, that that was what was happening.

Notice, too, that a man may be a teacher without necessarily being an officer of the church. There were at Antioch “certain prophets and teachers.” These are gifted men. Nothing is said about them being elders. Ministry is done by gifted men, not by any man. We know that in the church at Antioch, there evidently were other teachers, too. In chapter 15 in verse 35, we read, concerning Antioch, “Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” So in the church at Antioch, there was a flourishing ministry of the word of God. Ministry is done by gifted men. And I think what is interesting about this, too, is the fact that we have five men here, and every one of you in this audience, probably, has heard of

Barnabas and Paul. But how much have you ever heard of Lucius and Simeon and Manaen. Well, the only thing said about them in Scripture is what is said here. These three men move off the pages of Scripture without further mention of them into oblivion. But, Paul and Barnabas, they have the immortality of individuals who are mentioned in the word of God and some of their great experiences are found there, too. We all know Paul and Barnabas, but of the others, we have no knowledge, except that which is mentioned here. That illustrates the fact that when we get to heaven, we're going to discover some very interesting things have been done that were not on the pages of Holy Scripture. And we shall find out about Lucius and Manaen and Simeon and many others, also.

Now, I won't say anything further about the gifts, except to say this; that gifts are both temporary and permanent. That's evident from the fact that apostles are mentioned here. Apostles are those who have a special permission from the Lord Jesus, the Risen Lord, and they have given us the written word of God. They are the instrumentalities of divine revelation for us. We don't have any apostles today.

Now, the churches had apostles, who went out and performed little tasks, and they are called apostles. But they are apostles of the churches, not apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the technical sense in which we are speaking.

Prophets were individuals who gave divine revelation. Prophets are not individuals who just teach the word. They are individuals who give divine revelation; whether it's of the future or whether it's of the present is beside the point. It's divine revelation. We do not have any prophets today. We have lots of people claiming to be prophets today. But, if you will examine their prophecies, you will discover they are no prophets. And then we even have people who say that they are apostles today. Absurd. There are no apostles in the New Testament sense. There are no prophets in the New Testament sense today. Some of these gifts were temporary, some were permanent, as

the church unfolded historically certain things were needed at certain times; when the needs passed off the scene, so did the gifted men pass off the scene.

Now, let's look at what happened here in this church of which Luke is concerned. He says in the 2nd verse as he talks about the commissioning by the Spirit, “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted.” This word “ministered” incidentally, is a word that was used primarily of priestly service to God. And so since every one of the members of the church are priests, by the way, if you are a believer in Christ, did you know that you hold an office? Yes, you hold an office. You hold an office of priest. What does a priest do? Well, one thing he does, worships. To observe, to carry out your priestly ministry, you may worship the Lord. There are some other things, too, that have to do with priestly service. I won't talk about them now. It would be the proper time, I guess, in some churches, to say the second thing a priest does is give and will the deacons please come forward for the morning offering. But we don't do things that way in Believers Chapel, as you well know.

Let's concentrate on worship. And we read here, as they were ministering to the Lord, and as they were fasting. Now, they were engaged in priestly service. And it's obvious, it seems to me, that what they were doing was they were carrying out the things that the early church carried out. What did they carry out? What characterized the early church? Discussion of programs? Every member canvas? Etcetera, etcetera. Well, the New Testament says, regarding the church at Jerusalem, they continued steadfastly, in the apostle's doctrine and in the fellowship of the breaking of bread and prayers. That is, an early church was characterized by these three things: they listened to the ministry of the word of God and then they observed the Lord's Supper and they prayed. The fellowship of the Lord's Supper and prayer, around that table and the hearing of the ministry of the word characterized the early church. That was designed to build them up and strengthen them so that they could go out and reach the people who were outside of the local church. So as they were ministering to the Lord; that is, as they were breaking bread and

as they were praying and as they were listening to the ministry of the word of God, the Holy Spirit spoke in their meeting.

How do you think he spoke? Do you think, suddenly, as there was a quietness after someone had spoken, and they were meditating, thinking about the Lord’s death and what he had accomplished, there suddenly came into the room where they were meeting a deep booming voice that could be identified as the voice of God? I doubt that. I know here it says that there were prophets and teachers in this church.

Now, since a prophet was an individual who spoke the word of God and since we’ve already had in Acts chapter 11, reference to Agabus, one of them, verse 27, “And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” He was a true prophet; what he prophesied came to pass.

I suggest to you, as they were quiet, one of the men stood up, one of these men, Barnabas, Saul, Simeon, Lucius or Manaen, and said, I believe that God the Holy Spirit has spoken to me, and he has given me a message to give to you, and the message is that we are to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto the Lord God has called them. So, in other words, God spoke to that local church through the prophets who were there.

Now, who chose the men? Well, we read that the prophets said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” It is the Holy Spirit not the church who chose the men. The Lord, through the Spirit, is the guide of the church. He is the head of the church and through the Spirit, he speaks to and guides his church. So the Spirit is the one who chose the men, as the Lord’s representative, and he said then that the church was to separate the two.

You know, I believe that these lessons that are given us here, by this account, are designed to be applied to our churches today. And I believe that God is able to speak through his servants today, just as he spoke then. Now, I do believe that we do not have

prophets today, because we have the word of God. And so we do not need that form of ministry. But we are just as able to find the will of God in our local church.

When I was just a new Christian, and had begun going to theological seminary, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in a meeting at the seminary made the statement that, “God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear.” I thought that was a great saying. “God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear.” I went home and rejoiced in that saying, for about five years, maybe ten. “God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear.” And then I began to think about that statement. “God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear, a willing heart hear.” And then I realized that Dr. Chafer’s statement was really a semi-Pelagian statement. In other words, it was grounded in the fact of the doctrine of free-will. “God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing heart hear,” but as for an unwilling heart, God cannot speak to them. How terrible. What kind of a God do we have? Do we have one who is limited by the wills of men? Why, any reading of the word of God would show you that was not true. Let me just give you one instance. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” Paul told the Philippians. I say that, as his spokesman to you Dallasites, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you; both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.” So God is able to speak loud enough to make an unwilling heart hear because he makes unwilling hearts willing. In fact, God is able to speak loud enough to make a hard heart hear because that’s what he had to do in order to get my attention because my heart was a hardened heart. And by the grace of God the Holy Spirit, he spoke to it and, ultimately, I heard. And, in fact, he still has a difficult time reaching me, often. God is able to speak loud enough to make a heart hear. And so he spoke in this assembly and he said, “I want Barnabas and Saul.”

Now, that’s an interesting thing. The church is called to submit to the Holy Spirit. The church doesn’t select. God selects. But the church is called to submit to the Holy Spirit. And after God has selected the men, they are separated, recognized publicly, and

God’s work is recognized publicly, and God’s work moves on. “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul.’”

What do you think those two men did, at that moment? Well, do you think that what they did was to immediately go around the corner to a printer’s office and say, “Look, we’ve been called by the Lord, we think, and we need some prayer letters printed up in order that we might find financial support for what we’re going to do. And, furthermore, we need some resumes drawn up so we can send them out to the other churches that they will have us come in and we can do our deputational work and take up some offerings, so that perhaps we will be supplied with funds while we carry on the work of the Lord.” Do you think that is what happened?

Now, some of you are looking very ashamed. That isn’t what happened. Look. If God puts his hand upon an individual to do his work, he will supply the funds. In fact, one of the infallible tests of the divine call is that the funds are supplied without appeal to the saints. Does that upset you? I hope so. I hope so! I hope it causes you to think and to realize that when God calls men to his work, he will supply their needs. And one of the things that is suspicious about a call from God is the frantic activity of individuals in appealing for funds. Solicitation. One of the nicest ways of discovering if God has really called you to a work is to have him supply the funds without solicitation. If he wants you or me or anyone else to do his work, he will meet the needs. That holds for individuals. That holds for churches. That holds for Believers Chapel. If he wants us to persist in the preaching of the Gospel, he will supply the needs and we will look to him. If our funds do not come in, there is a message in that. The message; well, he wants us to draw in our horns. If no money comes in, he doesn’t want us to exist anymore, perhaps. That’s happened to thousands and multitudes of churches, down through the years.

This past week at Trinity Seminary, the superintendents, oh, I guess about twenty or twenty-five of them from the Evangelical Free Church of America came on the campus and all of the activity of the young preachers to have an appointment with the

superintendents that they might get a job. And so there was a great deal of frantic activity. One of the students walking by my side on Friday afternoon said, he's a simple minded fellow, he's the kind of fellow who believes that if God has called you, He'll supply the funds. And, furthermore, he'll supply a pulpit for you too. And this young fellow is just growing in the things of the Lord, and he's preached in a lot of places already. He's got two or three places trying to get him to serve as preacher. And he has served as preacher already, but he feels he wants to do some further training and he hasn't appealed for anything. And so he said to me, he said, “You know, Dr. Johnson said there's been a lot of feverish activity on the campus the last couple of days.” He's new at Trinity. And so don't take it back to Chicago until June. Then it's all right. You can take it back then. And I tell them that up there anyway. But, anyway, he said, “You know, Dr. Johnson said these students here, they are feverishly talking to these superintendents to get a job.” He turned to me and he said, “Why don't they pray about it?” Now, I don't think that those men are not praying, but what he was suggesting was that there seemed to be far more activity in trying to get a position than in appealing to the Lord God in the privacy of their lives in prayer.

And so, anyway, in the Church at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were chosen, the two most eminent, if we were to evaluate them ourselves, the two most eminent and gifted men were called to perform this task. And so they were, after the church had fasted and after they had prayed, the church laid hands on them, and they were sent away. This doesn't have a thing to do with ordination to the Gospel ministry. Look! Barnabas and Saul had been preaching for months and years before this. This was a particular call from the Spirit, having to do with the first missionary journey out from Antioch and they were commended to that specific task. And when they returned, and the description is given at the end of chapter 14, they rehearsed before the church the things that the Lord had done through them and their commissioning was over. So they laid hands upon them in identification with them, and they were sent forth. It was a

happy time, not everybody goes, but everybody can have a part in it. And so they laid hands upon Barnabas and Saul. And, when they all have reached to heaven, those in Antioch discover that they had a part, too, in the ministry of these two gifted men, who went out to found the churches in Southern Asia Minor.

They fasted, they prayed, they laid hands upon them. And one might think that it was the prophets and teachers, who were the nearest antecedents here, who laid hands upon them. But when they came back, they reported to the whole church. And so, I assume, that if the prophets and teachers laid hands on them, it was the church in the person of the five, who identified themselves with them, and they sent them away.

Now, there's an interesting little message in the word “sent” here. In verse 3, near the end of the verse, where we read, “They sent them away.” Then, in verse 4, we also read, “So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit.” Those two words in the original text are different. The first word means “to release.” The second word means “to send.” So it was the Holy Spirit who sent them; it was the church that laid hands upon them and released them. The one who took the initiative in all of this, as he does in all of salvation, is the Lord God through the Spirit.

All right, our time is up. Let me ask and answer this question in a sentence or two. What are the requisites for a New Testament Church? Well, among them is the existence of believers and the possession of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't speak to the promiscuous crowd, to the religious leaders of the town council. It is the presence of gifted men, simplicity, equality, and maturity in the local church. There is the activity of worship. They fasted and they ministered to the Lord around the Lord's Table in prayer as they heard the ministry of the word of God. The activity of worship under the oversight of the elders in expectancy of God's working, and then the obedience of the called. Sent by the Spirit, released by the church, and filled by the Spirit, as we read in the 9th verse, Barnabas and Saul carry on their ministry. All are called to witness, the only

question is where. O, how important it is for us to respond in obedience to God’s speaking to us.

If you are here today and you have never believed in our Lord, of course, the basis of salvation is what Christ has done on the cross at Calvary; and if by God’s grace, you have been convicted of your sin, salvation is offered to you through the blood that was shed and you may receive the forgiveness of sins by the reception of the Lord Jesus as your own Savior right at this moment, in a personal decision, made between you and the Lord. If you are a believer, your happiness in your Christian life will be determined by the obedience, which God the Holy Spirit enables you to render to the Lord.

Some years ago, in a great missionary rally, at Royal Albert Hall in London, England, a clergyman turned to the Duke of Wellington, who was there. The Iron Duke, whose armies had defeated Napoleon. And the clergyman asked the Duke, “My Lord, do you believe in missions?” And Wellington replied, “What are your marching orders?” And the clergyman said, “Well, of course, the Bible says go in to all the world.” And the Duke replied, “Then you have nothing to say about it. As a soldier, you’re to obey orders.”

We are given orders to witness to our Lord. Those are our orders, all of us, we are to obey them. May God help us to obey them in the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the freedom given us in the word of God and may God’s hand be upon this assembly, that it follows the teaching of the word of God as long as it’s in existence. Deliver us from man-made modifications of the teaching of the word of God and give us some individuals in the assembly who are strong enough and spiritually courageous enough to stand up in the midst of our society, for what God says in his word.

Let’s stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Lord, we are so thankful to Thee for these marvelous indications of all that Thou hast done for the Christian church. When we think, Lord, of the simplicity of the early church and its freedom and its power, O how we long to see the same things

accomplished today through this assembly and others like it. And, Lord, if there should be someone in this audience, who has never believed in Christ, bring conviction of sin and judgment to come. And may, O God, there also be conviction of Christ’s saving work. May there be the fleeing of the spirit to Him for forgiveness of sins.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.