Called to Go

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Acts 13:1-5

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. [2]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.' [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 also to assist them.

1. Chloe Kim

The Winter Olympics have come and gone once again. This year the US won 23 medals including 9 gold, 8 silver, and 6 bronze medals. Every Olympics we hear stories of athletes and the amazing things they have done to win at the Olympic games. This year, a lot of news surrounded snowboarder Chloe Kim. Chloe is 17 years old and competed in the Women's snowboard halfpipe. She took the gold medal for the US team and has become the youngest person in her category to win a medal.

The BBC published an article that made me think. In the article, the writer asked, "Would Chloe Kim have made it as a South Korean?" The reporter asked whether someone like Chloe could have achieved her dream in a situation like Korea where parents and children focus solely on getting into the best colleges. Good schools mean good jobs, good marriages, and good professional lives in Korea.

Chloe's parents moved to the US in 1982. Her father called her Olympic win his "American dream." If Chloe's parents hadn't come to the US, it's likely that Chloe would have never become the person that she is today. Leaving your home country and moving to another country is difficult and scary. But the move to the US gave Chloe's family the ability to achieve their dreams.

2. Barnabas and Paul

In the Bible, we find a lot of people who leave their comfort zone to go and do something they aren't comfortable with. For many of these people this isn't to achieve their personal dreams however. It is to fulfill God's dreams. When we read the Bible, we see a consistent pattern. God calls the people to do something, and they will have to leave their hometowns and their comforts behind to follow after God.

Today's scripture talks about the Spirit's call of Barnabas and Saul (later called Paul) and their first missionary journey. Acts 13:1 says, "***Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.***" At the time, the center of the church was still in Jerusalem and a missionary church was being established in Antioch. How did the church at Antioch get started?

You may remember that the martyrdom of Stephen incited Saul to persecute the church more vigorously, and because of persecution, Christians who lived in Jerusalem were scattered to the Gentile lands such as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Antioch was a commercial center and the home of a large Jewish community. The church at Antioch would become the first church that supported Paul & Barnabas' missionary journeys.

Who are the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch? The Bible does not tell us who they are, but they would have been the key leaders of the church at Antioch. We see that five of them seem to have different racial and cultural backgrounds. We do not know exactly what prophets and teachers do, but Acts 11:27 & 28 say, "***At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius***." In the early church, there were several people who had the gift of prophecy.

Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. His original name was Joseph (4:36). He is the one who introduced Saul to Jesus' disciples after Saul was converted (9:27). We do not know whether Barnabas is one of prophets or teachers. There is also little mentioned about the other three leaders: Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen. We see, though, that Saul's name is found at the end of the list, which helps us understand that Saul became one of the newest leaders in the group.

3. The Holy Spirit's Command

How does Paul's missionary journey begin? One day, five of the men were worshipping and fasting. ***"The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'"*** (verse 2). Luke tells us here that Paul's missionary journey is started by the Holy Spirit's directive. We see that the Holy Spirit directs the church on what to do, and that this is a consistent trend throughout Acts.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus says to his disciples before his ascension. "***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***." Chapter 2 in the Book of Acts tells us about Pentecost when the Holy Spirit

came upon Jesus' disciples. And in Acts 8:26 and the following, the Holy Spirit says to Philip to go down from Jerusalem to Gaza to help an Ethiopian eunuch to understand what the prophet Isaiah says.

What does the church at Antioch do when the congregation hears the voice from the Spirit? Verse 3 says, "***After fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off***." When the church at Antioch knew that the Holy Spirit wanted them to send Barnabas and Saul out to preach the Gospel, they prayed and then sent them out without hesitation.

It is important to remember that Barnabas and Saul were like the senior pastor and associate pastor of the church. The church at Antioch was very young. There would have been a lot of things that the new church would need to do to grow. And yet, the Holy Spirit called the church to make missions their top priority and to send their leaders out to share the good news of Jesus.

What about for us today? What do you think the Holy Spirit wants to say to us about missions today? You may have already heard, but last week, the well-known evangelist, Dr. Billy Graham passed away at the age of 99. During his life, Billy Graham preached to over 215 million people in 185 countries. He led 400 crusades, missions, and evangelical rallies. He also served as a counselor and minister to a dozen US presidents. The life of Billy Graham also impacted my faith journey. In 1973, Billy Graham went to Seoul, Korea to preach the Gospel. Over one million people gathered to hear his message. I went and attended the revival service for five days.

Billy Graham was one of the leaders in the greater Christian church who had a great influence throughout his life. Throughout the years, Billy Graham listened and was filled with the Holy Spirit and led a life that followed after the Spirit's leading to help positively impact people around the world.

4. Paul's Missionary Journey

We see this same Spirit-led life when we look at the journeys of Barnabas and Saul. From verse 4, we see Paul's first missionary journey begins. What is surprising is that we see the reference of Paul's name before anybody else. In verse 13, Luke says, "***Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia***." His Hebrew name Saul is changed into Paul, his Roman name. From here until the end of the Book of Acts, Paul is the main figure. What kind of impact does Paul's missionary journey have? Through Paul's missionary journeys, the Gospel is spread in Asia Minor and Europe. At first, Paul preaches in the town synagogues, but when many of the Jews reject Jesus, Paul recognizes God's call of witnessing to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:36 and the following tells us about Paul's second missionary journey. This time, Paul is with Silas instead of Barnabas. Barnabas goes to Cyprus with John Mark. There are now two missionary teams. During his second

missionary journey, Paul makes disciples from all different backgrounds in different locations.

In Acts 18:23 and the following, we find Paul's third missionary journey. At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul knew he would soon be imprisoned and perhaps killed. Paul invites the leaders of the church at Ephesus and shares his commitment to Christ. "***As a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace***" (Acts 20:22-24).

After Paul was baptized by Ananias in Damascus, he always lived his life following the Holy Spirit. Although there was much to fear, Paul didn't live in worry or fear of anything. He devoted his life to Christ completely. During his missionary journeys, Paul preached about the grace of freedom from sin through Christ, he trained disciples, and he helped establish churches throughout Asia Minor and Europe. Paul would sacrifice even his life through his missionary journey, but Paul's life would have a lasting impact on the entire Christian faith and the development of Christianity throughout the world.

5. Conclusion

There are so many people in the world who are in need of help. Over 5 billion people do not believe in Jesus. As we know through our personal experiences, however, everyone needs the good news of Jesus and God's love and saving grace through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Dr. Billy Graham preached a simple message that played a significant role throughout the 20th century. He invited people to trust in Christ and to follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior. About two thousand years ago, the Antioch church sent Barnabas and Saul to preach the gospel because they felt the leading of the Spirit to do so. What is the Holy Spirit asking you and me to do in our time? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us?

6. Application

The Holy Spirit has been leading our church throughout the year and continues to guide the decisions we make about the church over time. Today after coffee hour, our elder team, finance committee and trustees will share about what God has been doing in 2017 and what the Holy Spirit is leading us for the near future. If you are interested in what God and the Spirit have been doing, please stay and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The church is a gathering of people who want to pursue a relationship with God, who want to hear the good news of Jesus, and who want to listen to God's voice and allow God to be the leader who directs our lives. May God give us the grace to be disciples of Jesus and followers after the leading of the Holy Spirit. Amen.