

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with 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 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (NIV 84)

Theme: You are called to be a servant of the Word

1. Called to spread the Word
2. Called to give up everything for the Word

A Division I athlete wants to make it at the next level. To get there he must work hard by putting in the work in the weight room, at practice, and outside of practice. He'll have to give up some of the pleasures of college if he wants his dreams to come true.

A High School Senior wants a full scholarship to the prestigious university. To get it, she will have to study hard, get a good ACT score, and join in some extra-curricular activities or organizations. So she will not be able to hang out with her friends as much as she wants to.

A 30 year-old starts a new job. He doesn't want to be stuck on the bottom forever and hopes to be promoted to greater positions in the future. In order to achieve this He'll have to work hard and long and be willing to go the extra mile. If he does this he won't be able to spend as much time with wife and kids.

You want others to hear about their Savior, Jesus Christ. In order to do this you must tell them the Word and you must support those who spread the Word for you. To accomplish this, you must be willing to give up your free time, your money, and possibly your reputation. For some this may be too much to give up—so they don't do it.

But today we see that we are called to serve the Lord, we are called to spread the Word and to give up everything for the Word.

It was about 15-20 years since Jesus ascended into heaven. The Christian Church was young. Yet, it was growing. The gospel was being spread throughout the known world. The Apostles went in different directions spreading the gospel. Other joined them in the cause. Churches were started in many different cities. As the Word was shared the Holy Spirit brought more people to faith. But not everything was great, there were some problems. The Christians were being persecuted. Many Christians were put to death because of their faith. Others had to flee for their lives.

But those who fled didn't give up in their faith. Instead, as they fled to foreign countries and cities they did not know, they shared the Word. Cities like Antioch. Antioch was about 300 miles North of Jerusalem. It was 16 miles from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and was the biggest city in Syria. It was also the sight of a very important congregation. It was the home congregation of some famous Christians. **Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Saul**—otherwise known as Paul all worshiped at this one congregation. Some of these people we know quite well, others not at all. But the fact that Luke mentions them means that they must have been well known at the time.

And these men weren't just members of the congregation, they were prophets and teachers. God spoke to them and they in turn told it to the people. They taught them the truth of God's word. They were those who shared the gospel. Some of these men were Jews, others were Greek, and another had a Latin nickname. They came from all walks of life. They didn't really have much in common. And yet they were perfectly united through faith in Jesus. They all believe in him as the World's only Savior. And they had one goal in mind—the spreading of God's Word.

And so they worked together. People who had nothing else in common working for Christ. It's nice to see. We see it in our congregation as well. There are many people here that you don't have much in common with. You may not hang out with each other outside of Church. And yet you are united with each other in faith. We work together to spread the Word. We want more people to come to faith and grow in that faith.

One day when some of the members in Antioch were doing the work of the Lord, the Holy Spirit came to them. And he told them to, **Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.** The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabus to do his work. And the work that God had in mind was to go on a mission trip. It would be the first of Paul's missionaries journeys. Luke records in Acts three of Paul's journeys. It seems as if he made at least one more. The purpose of Paul's trips was always the same: to spread the Word. He often started preaching God's Word to the Jews in the Synagogue. And whenever he spread the Word, the Holy Spirit worked faith into people's hearts. Many people became believers in Jesus Christ through God's word that Paul spoke. Paul was the founder of many different congregations throughout the world.

It was Paul's goal to share the Word to everyone at every place. At times, we may follow Paul, but many other instances we keep our mouths shut. Oh, we want people to hear the Word; we just don't want to spread the Word ourselves. "I just don't know what to say," you may claim. "I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. Or offending someone. No one is going to listen to me anyway. I'll just be wasting my time." We can make as many excuses as we want, but their just excuses. The bottom line is that when you refuse to share the Word you refuse to let the Holy Spirit do his work. For it is through the gospel that the Holy Spirit works. Whenever the Word is spread, he is working. He brings people to faith. And he strengthens that faith. Last week we talked about the power of the Word. How through it the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith. You a horrible sinner and enemy of God by nature now believe and follow him. That is the power of the gospel. That is the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. So we want to spread the Word. We want others to come to the one true faith. We want them to know their Savior. The Word was shared with us and now we follow God. So like Paul and Barnabus we want to share the Word with others, so they too may follow God.

It's one thing to want to do something, but it's an entirely different thing to actually do it. And as we said earlier, sharing the Word means to actually share the Word and be willing to give something up if need be.

That's what Paul and Barnabus were willing to do. Soon after the Holy Spirit called them they left on their trip. They left friends and family behind. They took only what they needed to spread the gospel. Although the Church in Antioch sent them off, they didn't provide any assistance. For awhile Paul and Barnabus had to finance the trip for themselves. In fact, on his second missionary journey in Corinth Paul worked as a tent maker to make ends meet. After awhile some congregations did help Paul out. The congregation in Philippi was the first to help Paul out in this important work. They gave up some of the comforts of this life for the sake of the gospel. But finances aren't the only thing Paul gave up to spread the gospel. He also gave up many of the pleasures of this life. Including his health. He was beaten and flogged, imprisoned, starved, and so on. During this first trip Paul visited the city of Iconium. Many people—both Jews and Gentiles believed God's Word. But there were other Jews who didn't believe. And they stirred up the people in order to kill Paul. So Paul fled to Lystra to preach the gospel. Then the unbelieving Jews came from Iconium and other cities to kill Paul. They dragged Paul outside of the city and after stoning him, left him to die. That might be enough to deter some people—but not Paul. He got up and went to the next city, Derbe and spread the Word.

Paul gave up much of the sake of the gospel. We too want to spread the gospel. We just don't want to give up as much as Paul. Often, we may only want to spread the gospel when it's convenient for us. But it takes time to share the Word. You must find time to talk to those you know--friends, relatives, fellow workers, and neighbors. At times they will not listen to you, so you have to spend even more time sharing the Word with them. And they still may not listen to you. Or it takes time to walk from house to house in order to canvass the neighborhood. Even if it's something simply like hanging a door hanger on people's houses, it takes weeks of planning and hours doing. It also takes finances. It also takes money make door hangers. It isn't free to print things that promote the Church. Money for websites, pamphlets, postcards and so on. You may never have the chance to fund your own mission trip. But you can help fund missionaries. Through your offerings you support our missionaries who go throughout the world to spread the gospel. And the more money that is given, the more missionaries we can send out. And the more people

who will here the Word. And the more people will be brought to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. And yet, we think that we have better things to do with our money. We could do a lot of fun things if we have more money, so instead of giving first to Christ, we give him what's left over.

We may not face the same type of persecution that Paul and Barnabus did, but that doesn't mean we won't face persecution at all for sharing the Word. Some people are going to be offended at the Word you share. And they will attack you. They will call you stupid and gullible. Unloving and intolerant. Your friends and neighbors may mock you and ridicule you. Your family members may not want anything to do with you because you try to share the Word with them. And because of these things, you are hesitant to spread the Word. You just can't give these things up. You have a reputation to uphold after all. So you keep your mouth shut and the Word to yourself.

“But that's not my job,” you may say. I don't have to spread the gospel—that is what we have a pastor for. We hired him to do his job. And it is his job to preach and spread God's Word—not mine. I have my own job. And it is true. The pastor has been called specifically to spread the gospel. But it is everyone's duty to spread the Word. It is the privilege of every Christian to tell others about Christ. As Peter tells us, we all have a call to share the gospel. **You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** A pastor cannot reach as many people as others. You come in contact with far more unbelievers every day than a pastor would in a week. Therefore, in order to preach the lost, all Christians must share the Word.

Take Paul's assistant, John, for example. We find out later that this John is actually John Mark, the cousin of Barnabus. He was most likely the one who wrote the gospel of Mark. And he accompanied Paul and Barnabus for awhile on their missionary journey. But he wasn't called to do so. Yet he wanted to spread the Word. He put his pleasure, money, and life to the side for the sake of Christ. He gave up everything in order for people to be brought to faith by the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

And we are willing to do the same. To follow Christ means, in part, to follow in his footsteps. And he tells us that because the world hated him, it will hate us to. That is something we gladly put up with for the sake of the Word. We are called to spread the Word. And whatever comes along with it, so be it. We are willing to do what it takes to make sure people are brought to faith and grow in that faith. We are willing to give up whatever it is for the sake of God's holy Word. And why would we be willing to do that? Because we understand the importance of the Word. We know the power of the Holy Spirit. And anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ will not join him in heaven. We love all people. We want everyone to be with us for eternity. So we spread the gospel to everyone. And we are willing to give up things to spread it. It is part of what we are called to do as Christians.

In order to make it as a professional athlete, get a Scholarship, or a promotion, you must be willing to work hard and to give something up, even if you don't have to. The same goes for spreading God's Word. We must actually do the work by spreading the gospel and be willing to give up the pleasures of this world if need be. And we are willing to do this so that the Holy Spirit can work through the Word that we spread and bring many people to faith in their one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.