

- Today we continue our series called Kingdom Come through the book of Acts and we've been asking the question: What would Ventura County look like if Jesus were king?
- And today we are asking what would our decision-making look like if Jesus were King? How do we find guidance? Acts 13:1-5

Now 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.

- Where do you look for guidance? What *ultimately* determines your decisions? And why should you trust that guidance?
- For some, family/parents ultimately decides. For others, friends...
 - If you are *not* a Christian, what shapes your decisions?
- The Christian life is about being fully alive in relationship with God. One of the powerful ways in which we experience this relationship is through his guidance. This is described beautifully in the phrase "sent by the Spirit of God."
- And we have learned over the past few weeks, the book of Acts records for us the earliest history of the church as the movement of Jesus followers spread the good news and turn the world upside-down. What does the kingdom of God coming in our lives look like? Incredible guidance in our decision making.
- But it is important to understand what this guidance is:
 - The Holy Spirit's guidance is more like a *train* than a *taxi*.
 - The taxi follows your instructions, the train does not!
- **The Spirit of God guides us in the mission of God with the power of God for the glory of God**

- And throughout this book you find numerous references to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- In fact, the resurrected Jesus told them not to attempt the Kingdom mission of God *without* the Spirit of God! (acts 1)
 - But how do I know I am being led by the Spirit?
- Now, a lot of Christians have theories of how they *know* the Spirit is speaking to them! Some say, “I just know.” But how?
 - Perhaps you have wondered “God, are you guiding me?”
- Is it a feeling, an audible voice, a burden? Where can we expect to find the Spirit’s guidance for our lives? In three areas:

1. The Clarity of God’s Word (Acts 13:1)

- a. We look for guidance in the clarity of God’s word
- b. Now, we must see the whole context of this chapter!

Acts 13:1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers

- c. They were gathered together for teaching and worship!
- d. All through the book we are told about the scriptures being preached, taught, explained, understood and obeyed.
- e. The leaders were led by the wisdom they had from the Word
- f. Indeed, the most reliable guide to God’s will is God’s Word!
- g. And the Spirit’s guidance for Kingdom mission will always be in line with the clarity of God’s word. So... that means:

h. We can expect the God’s guidance as we know God’s word

- i. We are never told to seek the Spirit *apart* from the Word! (We are never told to do that!)
- ii. And the Holy Spirit will never operate in a way that is independent of or contrary to the Bible.
- iii. Why would he? Why would the Spirit give us Scripture, tell us that it is fully authoritative for all of life, and then completely contradict it?
- iv. No, the Spirit anchors us *in* the Word of God and empowers us to live *out* the word of God!

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- a. This is important: To be led by the Spirit, refers to the whole of our lives, not *only* particular moments.

- b. And we believe that he has given us clarity where clarity is most needed! In other words, the decisions which carry the most weight, are decisions addressed in scripture. *examples*
- c. He guides us most clearly in his word, is always speaking to us today through his word! BUT... it's not just **knowing** ...
- d. **We can expect the Spirit's guidance as we obey God's word**
- e. The Spirit empowers us to obey his commands, affirm his values and be changed in our character!
- f. And his word gives us the commands, instructions, truths we need to know about this whole new direction.
 - v. So, guidance begins with the general responsibilities for all believers.
- g. **Practically: start with what you know the word calls you to do, commit to it!** (we see this in Acts! Study, gathering etc.)
- h. Or, to put it another way, God steers moving ships.
 - a. (get moving in obedience and expect him to steer us)
- i. The church, we see, always grounded and anchored themselves in the word of God, looked to obey Jesus' commands and assume that the Spirit was guiding them
- j. Think about it like this. The Spirit of God draws upon our knowledge of the Word to guide us like an Archer draws upon their arrows for their bow. If there are no arrows, the archer has nothing to work with! The most talented archer without arrows is ineffective!
- k. If you want the guidance of the Spirit, devote yourself to the word of God. Anchor yourself in the Clarity of God's word. BUT as you do, you will then discover a further way in which God guides you! In the clarity of God's word, but also:

2. The Mystery of God's Promptings (Acts 13:2)

- a. In Acts 13, we are told that the Holy Spirit spoke.
- b. Saul, we learned last week, was a persecutor... but he was saved! And later he is referred to as Paul, a new name to reflect his new life. Here in our text, he is still referred to as Saul. And what did he do? Join the rhythms and commitments of the church! And it was in this environment

Acts 13:2 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."

- c. In fact, over thirty times we are told that the Spirit spoke!
- d. However, we do not see any standard way in which He did!
- e. Meaning that there is no one detailed description of the experience of these promptings. They are varied.
- f. **We're not told how the Spirit spoke, just told that he did!**
- g. We should not fail to grasp that there will be some mystery!
- h. **Acts 16**, we are told that the Spirit forbade Paul continuing their preaching ministry in Asia. But we aren't told how!
- i. **Earlier in that same chapter**, we are told that the Spirit of God guided Paul through a dream, and Paul concluded that this was God's guidance! (Though we are not told how!)
- j. **Earlier, in Acts chapter 8**, we are told that a man named Phillip was prompted by the Spirit to share the truth about Jesus with a traveller that he had never met before.
- k. In what way did Phillip understand that this was God?
- l. **In Acts 10** the Spirit tells Peter not to fear the Roman...
- m. But how did that happen? We are not given one method! Rather a variety. Let me give you a few examples of unexpected promptings that we see in scripture and can possibly experience in our own lives. I will give 4
- n. **It could be Specific Burdens as you pray...**

Charles Spurgeon "He [the Spirit] guides us in prayer...he will often direct the mind to the special subject of prayer. He dwells within us as our Counsellor and points out to us what it is we should seek at the hands of God. We do not know why it is so, but we sometimes find our minds carried as by a strong undercurrent into a particular line of prayer for some definite purpose. It is not merely that our judgment leads us in that direction, though usually the Spirit of God acts upon us by enlightening our judgment, but we often feel an unaccountable and irresistible desire rising within our hearts."

- o. **A holy passion for a ministry or need!**
 - i. For me, preaching! (When I was in Bible school...)
- p. **Special insight into people or a situation!**
 - i. A strong impression about someone or situation
 - ii. The Spirit warned Paul about a shipwreck!
- q. **Miraculous arrangement of circumstances!**

- i. Paul would often interpret open opportunities as invitations for him to preach! (Me and my family)
- r. **Dreams and visions – It happened to Paul!**
 - i. Do they happen all the time? No, that's why it's called a miracle, not Wednesday! (Held loosely, not the same)
- s. This will look different for each of us, but we must be careful not to reduce this, there is a mystery!
- t. As followers of Jesus, **we must be open to such promptings!**
- u. Should we also be cautious? **Yes.** But *NOT* cautious about the Holy Spirit... only cautious about us as fallible humans, because are not always right in the way we interpret these promptings. We need to hold our interpretations loosely!
 - 1. It's often when people elevate their experience...
 - ii. See, people make it weird, not the Spirit!
- v. **So, please don't let caution turn you into a cynic!**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones "There is no question, but that God's people can look for and expect 'leadings,' 'guidance' indications of what they are meant to do . . . Men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something; they knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to them; and it transpired that it obviously was his leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility, we are again guilty of quenching the Spirit."

- w. Now, Paul did *not* think that these mysterious promptings were the *only* evidence of the Spirit's guidance! No! He talked about the *whole* of his life as being led by the Spirit.
- x. BUT, being anchored in the word, was always open!
- y. **And the Christian life is this wonderful union of the clarity of God's word and openness to the Spirit's promptings**
- z. In fact, it is in being grounded in clarity of God's word, that we will best discern the promptings of God's Spirit
 - i. And lastly, we do this **together!** We can expect

3. The Community of God's People (Acts 13:3)

- a. What we see here is not just an individual, but a community seeking to follow the clarity of the word by the power of God's Spirit.
- b. Now, I said at the beginning, some of us put family, friends counsel as the ultimate guide, which is wrong. God's Word

is. Having said that, underneath God's word, community can be a great, healthy source of affirmation and confirmation.

Acts 13:2-3 "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.

- c. Notice, Saul and Barnabas had apparently already had a sense of call given by God, it says "Set apart to me Saul and Barnabas for the work *I have called them to*"
- d. A call is often a strong desire, a growing inner conviction that you are being moved and gifted to a particular ministry
- e. In Acts, this call on Saul was confirmed in community
- f. On the one hand, the text says of Paul and Barnabas "the Spirit sent out" and on the other hand it says, "the church sent them out", this highlights the role of community!
- g. Though **unlike** the authority of Scripture, the counsel and confirmation of other Christians is nonetheless important!
- h. Look, people may not always be in line with the Word and Spirit, but often its part of how God can work to bring clarity. My gifts for example. (Comedian... singer... teacher)
 - i. Knowing this keeps us from extremes!
- i. One tendency is for us to be mechanical and institutional! No regard or awareness of the Spirit, just make all of our plans in ink and deliver them to God
- j. The other tendency, however, is toward radical individualism. We go around claiming that the Holy Spirit told us to do _____ yet without any reference to Scripture
- k. So, who sent them?... to quote the wonderful John Stott

John Stott "Would it not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so?"

- l. **What are the marks of a discerning community?** We should:
- m. **Worship** – the goal is not just to get some specific instructions, but to foster a relationship with the living God!
 - i. The goal of worship is not to get something from God, but to be with God! And yet, like a good parent, being with God, aligning ourselves with him, he will guide us!

- ii. Fill your life with things that stir up affection for Jesus!
 - n. **Pray** – Seek him, ask him!
 - o. **Trust** – Surrender to him and leave the results with him!
 - i. Now... having prayed, having discerned God's call they prepared themselves to act on it... we must step out
 - p. But how can we trust? What is it that made them willing to sacrifice, step out, take risks?
 - q. See this community in Antioch had a story that began before Acts 13... and it no doubt shaped them profoundly!
 - r. What is it that brought them to a point of being a dependent, listening, prayerful sending community? **Grace**
- Acts 11:21-23** When he (Barnabas) arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.
- s. It is the grace of God, doing for us what we could never do for ourselves, that opens our hearts to trust and obey.
 - t. At the end of the day, here's why you can trust God's guidance: He has invested far more in your life than you ever have or ever will.
 - u. Jesus, the perfect son of God, sinless and righteous in every way, gave the whole of his life for you... came to rescue you, died on a cross for your sins and to give you life.
 - v. Once you trust him, the biggest decision is already settled.
 - i. (One of the reasons you might be having a hard time trusting Him, is because you started believing other decisions are more important!)
 - w. If he has taken care of our greatest need, should we not trust him for guidance in everything else?
 - x. You and I need to trust that he cares for us far more than we do for ourselves. We see this in the cross. And that is why we can totally rely on the Spirit's guidance and give ourselves to his will because he gave his life for us.
 - y. When the Spirit sends you, He sends you with himself!
- (PRAY – CLARITY... COURAGE... and the conviction to be near to HIM)