

Easter egg story...children didn't see it because it was nestled in a tree and they were looking at the ground. I realized once again that I was watching kids who were unaware that they were taking part in a symbolic act – their actions served as a metaphor for the human condition. They were inadvertently acting out the story of mankind. Ever since Adam and Eve we have been looking down when we should be looking up. We are desperately searching for human solutions to our problems rather than seeking God. “In God we trust” has been replaced by “In science we trust.” In Acts 13-14 we see the results of an upward focus.

We have reached a major turning point in the book of Acts. For that matter, chapter 13 records a major turning point in church history. Peter – Paul, Jews – Gentiles, Jerusalem – Antioch.

The first one-fourth of the book of Acts takes place in Jerusalem. In spite of the Great Commission, no attempt is made to take the gospel to “all nations” until 8:3 when the church is “scattered” through persecution. In ch. 11 we learn about the significance of Antioch. (see graphic) If Jerusalem is mission control, Antioch is Cape Canaveral. As Paul and Barnabas set sail from Antioch on their first missionary journey, they have no church planting manual. But they do have the Holy Spirit. He is their constant companion. **The growth of the early church was a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit being working through single-minded followers of Jesus - common men and women with an uncommon devotion to the will of God.** While the world was looking down, they looked up and kept their eyes on the prize.

In the first five verses of ch. 13, we get a snapshot of some of the practices inspired by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of spreading the Good News of God's grace.

1. Collaboration...13:1. Barnabas is from Cyprus; Simeon and Lucius are most likely dark-skinned men from Africa; Manaen was a close friend of Herod Antipas; Saul, an observant Jew and former Pharisee. If you want to reach a diverse audience then it helps to have diverse messengers.

2. Adoration...13:2. Fasting was a regular part of their worship. The groans in their stomachs reminded them of the groans of those who were without hope in the world. (see also 14:23)

3. Identification...13:3. When the leaders of the church in Antioch lay their hands on Paul and Barnabas they were not only being obedient to the Holy Spirit but also committing their support to these two men who were leading the evangelistic effort

of the church. I feel like we have lost the importance of this practice. We don't seem to spend much time trying to discern what God wants us to do and identifying those we could send out to do it

4. Proclamation...13:4-5. Notice the boldness of their witness.

Elymas...13:6-12

13:46

14:2-3

14:5-7

There is one crowning characteristic I see in these chapters that made all the difference in the growth of the church and is the difference maker in churches today...

5. Devotion. As you read these two chapters it is easy to see why the gospel spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. Paul and Barnabas were completely devoted to making Jesus known. I am convinced that the most challenging disease for the church today is not Covid but divine amnesia. In a world where God is increasingly weightless, we are in danger of forgetting God.

The Los Angeles Times op-ed for Easter Sunday, "How Christians came to believe in heaven, hell and the immortal soul." Written by Bart Ehrman. Two days earlier, the LA Times published a Good Friday article, "Why America's record godlessness is good news for the nation." The article responds to the recent Gallup report that church membership has fallen below 50 percent for the first time. This is the same paper that used to list Bible reading for the week ahead when I was a kid.

This country has never been more violent, divided and chaotic than today. Yet rather than looking up and seeking God, we look elsewhere for solutions. This is not the first time God's people have forgotten Him. 1 Sam. 4:10-22...

Now consider Paul's sermon at the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch in 13:16-41. It is a long sermon so let me just point out one important feature. He mentions God nine times. Question, "How many times will you mention God today?"

Being a Christian, means believing that God is the main Actor in world events—that he is the most important Factor in all matters. Paul was talking to unbelievers here. He was evangelizing. And part of what he was trying to do was show them a way of looking at the world that sets the stage for the gospel—This is God's world.

He made it. He owns it and everyone in it. Everything without exception, has to do with God, and gets its meaning from God.

Armed with this knowledge, notice the determination of Paul and Barnabas.

13:49-52

14:19-28

“They declared all that God had done with them.” If I called on you right now and asked you to “declare all that God has done with you,” what would you report? God wants to do a work in you and through you, in this church and through this church. But the Holy Spirit is looking for men and women who are looking up, not looking down.