

“Ready Or Not, Here I Come!”

Acts 13:1 – 14:28

Series: Book of Acts [#18]

June 1, 2008

Theme: **Faithful Believers Are Ready For Ministry.**

Introduction

“1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5-6-7-8-9-10! Ready or not, here I come!” That’s a familiar sound of the game *Hide and Seek*. Everyone, except the one who is *It*, runs to hide. Often whether the count is to 10 or 100, fast or slow, there is at least one who isn’t ready, and then is easily caught.

It is also like that with life in general. Whether the notice is long or short, there always are some people are not ready when the time comes. They then are *caught* in their ineffective efforts. Service for Christ is not an exception.

This morning we begin the third major section of the New Testament book of Acts.

- Part 1, chapters 1-7, *How the church began.*
- Part 2, chapters 8-12, *The church on the move in Judea & Syria.*
- Part 3, chapters 13-28, *The church on the move to all the world.*

Today we are looking at the first two chapters in this third section, chapters 13 and 14. Here we find an example of what it means to be ready to serve Christ. At the start, let’s be clear that being ready does not mean we have to know all the details of doctrine and practical ministry. Those believers in the church at Antioch were mostly new believers. New believers who were *ready* to serve Christ. So, we should not be hesitant or afraid to speak and serve because there are many things we don’t know. Neither should we try to excuse ourselves on that basis.

Faithful believers are ready for ministry. Let’s look at what it means to be ready, their example and then a few practical lessons.

Being Ready For Ministry.

God’s people are ready for ministry when they worship and work together. Look at the picture of the believers in Antioch as chapter 13 opens,

“Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting...” (13:1-2a)

God gifts every believer with some spiritual abilities. That group of new believers was not an exception. Whatever their occupations—businesspeople, farmers, builders, housewives,

students, government workers, retired — the people in this church were *actively ministering* with the spiritual abilities God gave them. And each one was not off doing *his own thing*. They were ministering together.

The reference to fasting, along with the last part of verse 2, points to their seeking God's direction for their ministry. So they both served and worshiped together.

If we are to be ready for the ministry God has for us, we also must worship and work together. That includes our times together here on Sundays. But this, of course, is only the tip of the iceberg. There are different ministries in which we can work together throughout the week. There are different opportunities for fellowship and worship throughout the week.

To be ready for the ministries God has for us as individuals and a church, let's make sure we don't succumb to an over emphasis on individualism. Let's make sure all of us worship and work together.

Secondly, to be ready means relying on God to work. Look at verse 2 again,

“While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

Those believers were active in ministry and worship knowing that God must direct and energize them in order to be effective. So they sought God together and relied on Him to work. And they were not disappointed!

Notice also that Barnabas and Saul did not announce to the group that God had called them to go out from Antioch as missionaries. The call was not given just to them.

Today we may rely on God to work, but not look to the church, the fellowship of other believers, as one of God's key ways of giving us direction for our own individual lives and ministries. When you and I are not seeking God's direction and work through other believers, we are ignoring part of His design for us.

And then, as we worship and work, as we rely on God to work, we must also obey God's direction when He speaks. Verse 3, “Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Remember, this was a church of mostly new believers. God said to them, “I want to take some men from your young, needy church and use them elsewhere. In fact, I want your most prominent and gifted men, Barnabas and Saul.” With what we understand about their situation, we would not be surprised to hear some protests and pleading, “But God, we're only a small group! We're new believers! We *need* these men! We know they can help others, but what will happen to *us* if they leave?” I am sure some of them were surprised, but there is no record of anyone protesting or pleading. Together they looked to God for His direction and work. When God answered, they obeyed.

What about us? As we serve God and seek His direction, when God directs us in

unexpected ways, how do we respond? If God directed us to take some of our key, most prominent, gifted people and send them out to some other place, would we immediately obey? Or, if God directed us to new ministries or changes in some of the ones we have, would we immediately obey?

Being ready for ministry means worshiping and working together, relying on God to work, and obeying His directions. That's the kind of readiness we see in Antioch. We also see in them...

An Example Of Ministry Flowing From Being Ready.

That small group of new believers followed God's directions and sent those two men out. Then, as it is said, "The rest is history." God used Saul, from now on known as Paul, and his small group to take the gospel beyond Palestine, into Asia Minor and Europe.

Chapters 13 and 14 summarize the first of three *missionary journeys* that Paul made. Let's check our maps for perspective—find it, and hold that place, follow the route as we walk through it.

- Check the back of your Bible (Paul's journeys, or his first journey).
- In the Pew Bibles, Map 9.
- We also have a map on the screen.

This example of ministry flowing from being ready begins with the work in Cyprus, covered in 13:4-12. They sailed southwest from Antioch to the island of Cypress. There already were believers there. Go back to 11:19,

“... those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and *Cyprus* and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.”

Paul & Barnabas' ministry in Cyprus began in the synagogues. The Roman proconsul, or governor, wanted to hear what they were preaching, but a magician-prophet named Bar-Jesus or Elymas tried to keep him from the truth. God dramatically judged him. The result of all this? Verse 12, “Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”

From Cyprus they sailed north to Asia Minor and on to the area of Galatia (maps—middle of Asia Minor, now Turkey). When they were at Perga, in the south on the coast, John Mark left and returned to Jerusalem (13:13).

Paul and Barnabas went north to Antioch—obviously a different Antioch, this one was referred to as Pisidian Antioch. Paul spoke in the synagogue and many responded positively. Drop down to 13:42,

“As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. Now when the

meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.” (13:42-43)

Then, 13:44,

“The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.” (13:44-45)

So, Paul and Barnabas moved on to preaching to the Gentiles. But the Jews organized a persecution against them and drove them out of that region.

They moved on to other cities. In Lystra, God healed a man lame from birth through Paul. Some of the people thought Paul & Barnabas were gods. But trouble came again. Go down to 14:19,

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.” (14:19-20)

Then they retraced their steps, encouraging believers along the way and made their way back *home* to Antioch (14:26-28). Let’s go to the end of chapter 14, verse 26,

“From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples.” (14:26-28)

Estimates of the length of this trip range from a year and a half to four years. It most likely was at least two years. The gospel was now solidly planted in Asia Minor. From there it could go East to Asia and West to Europe.

Now let’s move to look at some practical lessons for our ministry from this example.

Some Practical Lessons For Our Ministry.

Lesson number one, recognize and confront falsehood. Paul’s encounter with the false prophet-magician Elymas gives us a clear picture of this. The man’s character is not in doubt. Go up to the middle of 13:9,

“...Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, ‘You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the

straight ways of the Lord?’” (13:9b-10)

Paul confronted him and God judged him. Look at verse 11, Paul said,

“‘Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.’ And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.”

We too need to recognize and confront falsehood. By *falsehood* I am not referring to differences in what we call *distinctive* truths. That is, points which may be important to us such as the school of theology we follow, the form of church government we prefer, or how we observe communion and baptism. Rather, falsehood refers to errors on the basic, essential truths of the Christian faith.

As well, our attitude is not to be one of always suspecting and hunting for falsehood. Rather, we need to be able to readily spot and confront the falsehood we meet.

It saddens and concerns me that this critical point of readiness, of faithfulness is silently melting away among many. We have seen that in the last year as we confronted false teaching being given a platform in an organization with which we had an affiliation.

The second lesson is to accept disappointments and keep going. Paul and Barnabas experienced disappointment shortly after they arrived in Asia Minor. 13:13,

“Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.”

Luke does not go into details. John Mark was one of their assistants. We have a bit more from Luke later, 15:36,

“After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.” (15:36-38)

Thankfully, John Mark was used greatly by God with Barnabas, and then later with Paul.

But think of the disappointment Paul and Barnabas felt at this point. They finally reached Asia Minor. Then their valued assistant decided this was not for him and returned before they really got going. They were disappointed, but they kept going.

As long as we are on earth we will be disappointed by others, and we will also disappoint others. None of us are without weakness, flaws and failings in our actions, as well as our perception of others. The key is our response. Some people become angry, resentful and bitter. They stop and don't go on. Others absorb the shock and pain and continue on. Readiness for faithful, fruitful ministry includes accepting the disappointments and keeping

at it.

Lesson number three: be ready for reception and rejection of the gospel. Look again at Paul and Barnabas.

- At Pisidian Antioch at first there was a great response and acceptance, and then a great rejection.
- At Iconium. Let's go to 14:1-2,

“In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.”

Skip down to verse 5,

“And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region.” (14:5-6)

- And then again at Lystra. After the healing of the lame man, after the crowds hailed them as gods. 14:19-20 again,

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.”

Paul and Barnabas' ministry was fruitful, in part, because they were ready for people both to accept and reject the gospel.

So, what about us? If the real results of ministry are God's work, *and they are*, we should not be sidetracked by rejection or acceptance. Yes, we should evaluate the quality of our work for Christ, but we need to be ready for people to both accept and reject the truth of God. Our hearts ache for those who reject God's truth. Our hearts rejoice for those who receive it. We are to be ready for both responses.

The fourth lesson is to be prepared for danger. Review the dangers on this journey for Paul and Barnabas.

- They were interrupted, contradicted, ridiculed at Pisidian Antioch.
- There was a plot to stone them.
- Paul *was* stoned and left for dead at Lystra.

Later Paul wrote, in 2 Corinthians 11 about...

- imprisonments, beatings, lashings, being beaten with rods;
- being in dangerous seas and rivers, being shipwrecked;
- being in danger of robbers and enemies;
- facing hunger, sleepless nights, cold...

He faced all these dangers and more in his ministry for Christ. When you stop to think about it, it is amazing that Paul went on more than one missionary journey! But he did. He did because he was prepared for real dangers.

What dangers do we face? Thankfully, because of where we are in the world, the dangers we face are not anywhere as physically severe. But we face them. The spiritual danger is always present because Satan's forces are constantly at work to defeat God's people. We need to be prepared, to be ready for the ridicule, rejection and other dangers so we can keep on being faithful and fruitful.

Lesson number five is to do a thorough job. Paul and Barnabas did a thorough job. Drop down to 14:21,

“After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (14:21-23)

They took time, they made the effort to teach, encourage, strengthen, give hope, set things in order in these new churches.

Our rapid fire society looks for fast results, quick fixes, big gains with little effort or pain. Do we mirror the times, or the timeless principle of doing a thorough job? In our personal walk with God, our witness, our ministries, are we doing a thorough job?

Paul and Barnabas wanted to extend the gospel as far as they could. Travel compared to today was slow, to put it mildly. It all took a great deal of time and effort. Yet they didn't rush on because of the need elsewhere, nor did they fit their work for God in when they found time in their busy schedules of work, social life and relaxation. They *took* the time, they *made* the effort. To be ready, to be faithful and fruitful, we also need to do a thorough job.

The final lesson is that we must be accountable. Let's go back to the closing verses of chapter 14 again, verse 26,

“From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they

began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples.”

They were commissioned and sent out by the church as the church recognized God’s call on them. Paul and Barnabas were two energetic, determined, big-visioned men. But they were not out there doing their own thing. They knew that while they were ultimately responsible to God, they also were responsible to the believers that had commissioned, supported and encouraged them. They recognized their responsibility, their accountability.

None of us are called to be *Lone Rangers*, out there doing our own thing. We are part of a team. The late Bear Bryant, Alabama football coach, was asked about one of his players being selected as an All-American. He replied that since his goal was always a team effort, either all of his team should be All-Americans or none of them should be.

We are to be bold, energetic and determined. But we are also to be in submission and accountable to *our team*, our church. That’s part of readiness for faithful and fruitful ministry.

Conclusion.

Ready or not, ministry opportunities are coming.” Are we ready? Are you ready? Faithful believers are ready for ministry.

In the next few quiet moments with God,

- Thank Him for the privilege and responsibility of ministry.
- Begin to examine your readiness for ministry in terms of the lessons we have seen today.
- Determine to do your part to be ready now, and always.

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