

## A Missionary Church- Acts 13:1-4

Someone has said that the measure of a great church is not its seating capacity but its sending capacity. By this metric, the church at Antioch was a great church. It was the first church to send out frontier missionaries. In our text, we are told about three things about this missionary church: the Church's Leaders, Fasting and Sending.

Look first at its leaders. Notice the plurality of their leaders. There wasn't just one shepherd leader. There was five. The rest of the New Testament makes it clear that churches were and should lead by a plurality of Elders or Pastors. Also, notice the ministry of their leaders. These leaders were prophets and teachers. Both were essentially the proclamation of God's word. The ability to proclaim the word of God is a primary requirement for those who would be Elders or Pastors. This ministry is also the primary responsibility of those who are the shepherd leaders in a church. Finally, notice the diversity of their leaders. The names, homelands and the descriptions found here and elsewhere about these leaders show that they were from different races, places and classes. Their diversity certainly reflected the diversity of the church, which was united around the Word of God, proclaimed by these leaders.

Also, look at the fasting of the Church at Antioch. There are several things to observe about their fasting pointed out in John Piper's book, *A Hunger for God*. The fasting we read about here was under the new covenant, corporate, accompanied by worship and prayer, and the occasion for the Spirit's special guidance that changed the course of human history. The fact that it was after Christ's coming indicates that fasting wasn't a part of OT spirituality that was not intended to be a part of NT spiritual practice. The corporate nature of this fasting also shows that Jesus did not teach that no one must know that a disciple is fasting, for it to be pleasing to God. To tell others is wrong if our motive in making it known is to be praised by men, but this doesn't mean others can't know. It is also significant that this fasting came before and after the special guidance of the Holy Spirit. This church was worshipping as it was fasting, because it was captivated by the glory of God. After being told to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work they had been called to do, the church fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them and sent them out. This blessing of their going in connection with fasting and prayer indicates also that this church was hungry for the blessing of God on these men as they were sent off.

John Piper wrote this about their fasting "This fasting changed the course of human history. It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of this moment in the history of the world. Before, there seems to be no organized mission of the church beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Before this Paul had made no missionary journeys westward to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, or Spain. Before this Paul had written none of his letters which were as a result of his missionary travels. It was the beginning of a mission movement that has yielded today 1.3 billion adherents of the Christian religion."

This church was surrendered to the mission of God, even though it meant sending off two of their gifted and valued leaders. Our God is a missionary God and by the Spirit He directed this church to be a missionary church. They were willing to lose their own so the gospel of God would be spread further out towards the end of the world. Because of their sacrifice the message went out farther that God became man in order to become sin as he died, and then he rose from the dead so rebels would be saved from the penalty and power of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.