

**Ripples 17: Mission Paradigm**  
**Part One: Going Out in Mission**  
**Acts 12.25-14.21**

**June 8**

**David Henderson**

A long time ago, right after we moved here, we were driving back from seeing friends in Colorado and we stopped at a hotel somewhere near Kansas City. At the end of our stay we all got on the elevator and the older couple that was already on the elevator stepped back to make room for all of us and all of our luggage.

As the elevator slowly made its way down they started talking to our kids, who were all under ten at that point, and as it happens they were really attentive and polite and responsive to this couple.

When we got to the lobby the couple stopped us and they were really complimentary of the kids. We thanked them, chatted for a moment more and then told them we needed to get on our way because we were trying to get back to West Lafayette before nightfall. They smiled and said, "Oh, we know. We're part of your congregation."

When we got to the car, as I was putting our suitcases in, Sharon pulled the kids together to encourage them. She told the kids how we had all thought we were total strangers here, but it turned out the couple on the elevator knew us, and they had been watching us, and how affirming they had been of the kids, and how you never know, and then she summed up by saying, "So kids, the point of the story is, the point of the story is – honey, what is the point of the story?"

We've been walking through the Book of Acts, which captures the history of the first thirty years of the church.

As you know, there's nothing very tidy about history. History unfolds in a lurchy, person-by-person, situation-by-situation, sort of way, one story following another in a way that can seem pretty random. That's can feel true of the history of the church.

But behind that seemingly random unfolding of the history of the church are divine purposes and divine principles that govern the way the story unfolded then, and that govern the way the story still unfolds today as the church continues to carry out its mission.

And having those principles in mind can help us understand the point of the story that our heavenly Father wants to unfold for his children.

What we'd like to do this morning is take one portion of that history, in this case, Paul's first mission journey, and step back a few steps and look at the kingdom principles that it illustrates.

This morning, in part one, we'll be focusing on the outward bound portion, exploring the intentional *mission* strategy of Paul and his team as they reach new people for Christ, and invite them to give their allegiance to Jesus as King.

Then next Sunday we'll focus on the return portion of the trip, and their intentional *ministry* strategy as they stop along the way back to strengthen and encourage the growing church.

So let's turn to Paul's first mission journey, recorded for us in Acts 13 and 14. Because it's such a large chunk of Scripture I'm just going to highlight the main elements, reading some sections here and there, and then we're going to explore four connected principles that give the trip its shape and approach, and help make the point of the story clearer as we think about our own call to share the good news today.

First let me hop back a chapter and give just a little bit of context.

In Acts 11.19 we're told that the thing that drives this third major expansion wave and pushes the church out to the uttermost ends of the earth is the persecution that began to come upon the church. When that happens, followers of Christ leave Jerusalem and move to other cities and other countries, taking the gospel with them.

Some move to Phoenicia, the seacoast area just beyond Judea and Samaria, that we know today as Lebanon and Jordan.

Some move to Cyprus, an island about sixty miles off the coast that was one of the most important crossroads in the Mediterranean Sea.

And some move to Antioch, a city of five or six hundred thousand people, the third largest city in the Roman empire, located at the key strategic northeast corner of the Mediterranean where Syria and Turkey come together today.

In Antioch, the church began to grow rapidly among both Jews and non-Jews. Picking up in 11.22:

<sup>22</sup> News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he 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.

<sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul [also known by his Greek name Paul], <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

Okay, with that, let's hop to the beginning of chapter 13

<sup>1</sup> 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.

What an amazing collection of servants! You can see God's hand in gathering such a gifted group of leaders.

Barnabas, one of the key leaders of the early church, from the island of Cyprus, a generous and gracious man with vision and courage and a deep heart of encouragement.

Simeon, called Niger. Simeon is a Jewish name, and Niger is the Latin word meaning dark or black. This was not at a slur. It was a common last name, and it was an even more common nickname. It seems likely that Simeon was a Jewish Christian who came from one of the large Jewish communities in North Africa.

Lucius of Cyrene. Lucius is a Greek name. Cyrene was one of the most important Roman cities on the north coast of Africa, located in present day Libya.

Manaen, a man of rank and privilege, who grew up eating at the same table with Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, the one who jailed and beheaded John the Baptist.

And Saul, one of the foremost rising Jewish scholars and a rabid persecutor of the church, whose life was suddenly turned upside down when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus five years earlier, and who is now one of the most effective teachers in the entire church.

What a collection of leaders! Greek and Jewish. Older and younger. From different cities and countries and ethnicities all around the Mediterranean. And now God is about to redistribute this team he has so intentionally gathered together in Antioch. You can see God's wisdom in gathering them; you can also see God's wisdom in redistributing them.

Acts 13.2

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting – it's not clear if that means this leadership team was worshiping together or the whole church was – the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

<sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

Here's a map that shows how their first journey will unfold.

### Paul's First Recorded Missionary Journey



In Cyprus they began to follow a predictable ministry pattern, probably one that Paul had already developed in his earlier mission work in Tarsus and Cilicia and Syria. When they come to a new city, they go first to the Jewish community, speaking to the people God has prepared through the Scriptures to expect the coming Messiah. Then, if their message is unwelcome, they shift their ministry focus to the people of other nations and faiths.

We're told that Paul, Barnabas, and Barnabas's cousin John Mark traveled from one end of the island to the other sharing the good news of Jesus.

When they got to Paphos, the capital city, they encountered two things. The proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus, whose heart was very open to their message, and one of his advisers, Elymas, a sorcerer and false prophet who did everything he could to undermine their message.

As a representative of the inbreaking kingdom of light, Paul confronts this representative of the kingdom of darkness, pronouncing God's judgment against him as one who is seeking to stand in the way of God's purposes, and delivering the message that God will

temporarily blind him in order to help him, like Paul, to truly see. Seeing this prophetic display of God's power the proconsul gives his life to Christ.

### Paul's First Recorded Missionary Journey



After concluding their ministry on the island of Cyprus, they turn north, taking a ship to Perga. At that point, John Mark turns back, but the other two walk up into the region of Pisidia. Arriving in the main city of Pisidian Antioch, they go to the Jewish community to share their message.

The leaders of the synagogue invite Paul to speak, and he stands and shares a presentation of the gospel that we have recorded for us in quite a bit of detail in chapter 13.

He begins by reminding the Jewish people of God's great act of rescue, when he brought them out of Egypt. Then he reminds them of the way that God has established leaders for his people at each new stage of their redemptive history: Samuel, Saul, David. And he calls to mind God's promise that someone from the bloodline of David will come one day and rule on the throne forever.

And that king, Paul says, has in fact now come.

<sup>23</sup> "From [David's] descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.

In fulfillment of the Scriptures, Jesus came, and he ministered to the people, but the religious leaders put Jesus to death on a cross, and placed his body in a tomb:

<sup>30</sup> But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

<sup>32</sup> "We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors <sup>33</sup> he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

When Paul finished his message, the response was overwhelming. Those who heard him speak sought him out and asked him to tell them more, and – verse 44

<sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

But while the response was overwhelming, it certainly wasn't all supportive.

<sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

So Paul and Barnabas shifted their focus to the non-Jewish community, telling the Jewish people

<sup>46</sup> “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it . . . we now turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Eventually, prominent men and women in the city step in: Enough of this. They stir up persecution against the disciples, who are driven out of the city with threats to their lives.

At that point they are led by the Spirit to turn back toward the Cilician mountains, and they head for the cities along the Roman Road that heads East.

First they come to Iconium, where they have an almost identical experience to the one they had in Pisidian Antioch.

Chapter 14:

<sup>1</sup> At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. <sup>2</sup> But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

<sup>4</sup> The people . . . were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

Eventually, threatened again with death, Paul and Barnabas flee that city too.

From there it was on to Lystra, and then to Derbe, both cities in the Lycaonian valley, where they continued to preach the good news.

A bit of fascinating background will help us understand what happens when they get to Lystra.

Paul and Barnabas have come into a region known as Phrygia. The Phrygians took the ancient gods and goddesses seriously, and part of their faith was the belief that sometimes the gods put on human disguises and came to visit them.

In one popular legend, the old fable of Baucis and Philemon, Zeus and Hermes come to the people living in this very valley. They are warmly welcomed by everyone except one couple. When Baucis and Philemon fail to extend hospitality to the gods, Zeus and Hermes destroyed the whole valley by flooding it.

With that background, let's pick up the account of Paul and Barnabas in chapter 14.8:

<sup>8</sup> In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed <sup>10</sup> and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

<sup>11</sup> When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

<sup>13</sup> The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

<sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup> "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

<sup>16</sup> In the past, he let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup> Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." <sup>18</sup> Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

People from the town of Lystra too began to come to faith. But then, the Jews from Iconium arrived and riled up the crowd and turned them against them. This time they stoned Paul and left him for dead. But Paul miraculously survived, and the believers took him home and cared for him.

Then they sent him on his way to Derbe, a city farther up the valley, where once again he preached the gospel, and a number of men and women there put their faith in Jesus.

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What I'd like to do now is take a step or two back from this jumbled set of stories and notice the consistent Kingdom principles that inform this journey and each subsequent trip that the early church will undertake as it seeks to share the good news with the world that hasn't heard, and see if we can discover the point of Luke sharing it with us.

In a sense this is like looking at an advent calendar that has a complex picture on the front, but then you find the little numbers and open the little doors and beneath them you find the scripture passage that explains what's going on in that part of the picture.

So what I'd like to do is have us find four of those little panels and open them up and reflect on them for a minute.

The first principle is found beneath the opening events in the story, when the leaders of the church in Antioch gathered together, and maybe the whole church with them, and worshiped and prayed together. The first principle is:

### **1. Worshiping God will mean saying yes to God**

When we worship we don't just offer our praise and gratitude to the King. We offer him our lives. Remembering that we exist not just because of God but also for God, so when we worship we relinquish our control, inviting Jesus to take charge. Bowing before Jesus in worship is a way of saying yes. "Not my will but yours be done, Lord."

It's the New Testament principle we see spelled out for us in Romans 12.1.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

That's the principle that explains what happens in Acts 13.2-3, when they are worshiping together and they discern the Spirit saying to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." And they say yes. They place their hands on them and do as they are asked.

\* \* \*

The second pop-up panel is found right next to the first one, in those same verses at the beginning of Acts 13.

Worshiping God will mean saying yes to God

### **2. Saying yes to God will mean being sent by God in his name**

Acts 13.3-4 says



They placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went.

This isn't a random thing that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Spirit. We as followers of Jesus are *sent ones*. That's what the word apostle means. Not just a few of us, the missionaries, the pastors. All of us.

Here's the Kingdom principle that underlies this moment. The risen Lord Jesus says to his church:

John 20.21

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

This call doesn't come as a surprise to them. While he was still with them he gave them a couple of practice runs. In Luke 9 he gathers commissions and sends the twelve, "sending them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God," it says in Luke 9.2.

And then in Luke 10 he sends them out again, this time with sixty more of his disciples. "Go! I am sending you out!", he says in Luke 10.3.

It's a word he echoes, of course, in Matthew 28, when he says to all of us, through all the ages: "Go."

It's one of the reasons we have a world map on the wall in the Landing. As we come in, of course, it reminds us that God welcomes – and we welcome – everyone from every nation and ethnicity without exception. And as we go out, it reminds us that God is a sending God and we are a sent people. We are a commissioned people – co-missioned – called to join God on his mission to the world.

Go where? Wherever he tells us to go. For most of us that will mean next door, to the house or apartment or desk next to us.

For some of us that may take us farther across lines of difference, as it has for those who serve at Murdock or LUM, to Westville Prison, or for our students involved in the Plunge experience to Lafayette..

And for some it may take us further still, including the many from our church family who have gone on a short term mission trip to another culture – if you are physically able we hope everyone in the church family will go at some point – and the sizeable number who have felt God's call to long term missions, and who have been commissioned and sent out from Covenant to serve in places all around the world.

"Go" is a word the King whispers to every one of his subjects.

Let me stay with this principle a bit longer. Here are two other little doors that we can pop up related to this part of the story.

**a. As we go, we can and should expect God to go before us**

God will lead us.

God will equip us.

God will provide for us.

God will bring us to the people he intends us to serve with.

God will bring us to the people he intends us to serve.

God will go with us.

And God will use us.

And one of the most important ways he goes before us, as we go out into the world to share his good news, is to ready the hearts of those to whom he sends us. In Acts 13.48, describing the response to Paul's message in Pisidian Antioch, Luke says,

The Gentiles were glad and honored the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

That's clear evidence of the Kingdom principle found in Zephaniah 3.17

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.

As we go, we can and should expect God to go before us. But the other panel that pops open at the same time says this.

**b. As we go, we can and should expect the Evil One to oppose us**

Paul and Barnabas experienced two things everywhere they went: open hearts and closed hearts.

Do you remember in 14.4 it says something that could have been written about every place they went, and everywhere that Jesus went before them, and everywhere the church has gone since: "The people ... were divided." Some received their message; others rejected it.

In his conversation with Elymas in Acts 13 Paul makes it clear that he understands that behind closed human hearts something else is at work, an Evil being who opposes the spreading of the good news.

The divided response and the wall of opposition we sometimes encounter shouldn't surprise us. This gives expression to the Kingdom principle found in Ephesians 6.12-13

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So, as we go, we can and should expect God to go before us  
And we can and should expect the Evil One to oppose us

\* \* \*

To find the third panel, we need to travel over to the island of Cyprus, to the city of Paphos. Interestingly, there is an identical panel found up at Iconium, and another down in Jerusalem. You see it wherever the church goes. Here's the third connected principle.

Worshiping God will mean saying yes to God

Saying yes to God will mean being sent by God in his name

### **3. Being sent in his name will mean loving those God puts before us**

There are three interconnected passages in the Book of Acts that I think are fascinating. They are Acts 3.4, 13.9, and 14.9. All three use the same Greek word that means "look at someone intently, observe them with great interest, study them closely."

It's the opposite of a casual glance. It means really seeing a person, which can only happen, as Ash and Heather have been teaching us this weekend, when you *love* them, when you see them through the eyes of seeking God's best for them.

What Peter does with the crippled man in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 3 is the same thing Paul does with Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus in Acts 13 and with the lame man in Lystra in Acts 14. He sees them. Really sees them. He sees into them, sees them from God's perspective, sees them with a loving regard, and with spiritual discernment, and responds accordingly.

In Acts 13 seeing the deceiving and deceived man leads to a confrontation which ultimately opens a way to the possibility of salvation. And in chapter 14 seeing the crippled man leads to healing, which also opens the way to salvation.

Paul doesn't just look at these men. He *sees* them.

In these and other interactions Paul and Barnabas live out the Kingdom principle we find throughout the New Testament:

Ephesians 5.2

Live a life of love.

I Corinthians 16.14

Do everything in love.

The fourth panel pops up at every stop along the length of the trip: in Salamis, in Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

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Here's the fourth connected principle.

Worshiping God will mean saying yes to God

Saying yes to God will mean being sent by God in his name

Being sent in his name will mean loving those God puts before us

#### **4. Loving those God puts before us will eventually mean speaking about Jesus**

Yes, as followers of Jesus, we are called to love, to serve, to care for, to sacrifice for, but there will come a time when we are called to speak up. Look at Paul's example:

Acts 13.5 They proclaimed the word of God

Acts 13.32 We tell you the good news

Acts 14.1 They spoke effectively

Acts 14.21 They preached the gospel

"How can a person believe unless someone has told them?" Paul asks in Romans 10. "I believe, therefore I speak," he says in II Corinthians 4.

Here is the kingdom principle at work. When the time is right, as the Spirit gives us words, we open our mouths and we speak. I Peter 3.15-16:

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

And when we speak, here at two further Kingdom principles that play out. First,

**a. As we speak, we should always begin where they are.** Not where we wish they were. And not where we are. But wherever it is that they are. This is part of what it means to love the person God puts before us.

Look at how beautifully Paul and Barnabas model this.

When he speaks with those from a Jewish background, Paul begins with their Jewish beliefs and points to their recognized authority: the Jewish Scriptures. But when he speaks with the pagan Greeks, he doesn't make them start with *his* recognized

authority. He starts with theirs: in this case, nature, and the Greek philosophers, and experience.

In all of this Paul lives out the kingdom principle of Romans 15.7:

Welcome one another, then, just as Christ welcomed you, in order to bring praise to God.

You may remember that the word "welcome" is a word made of two other words: one that means move toward, the other that means draw in. Jesus didn't wait for us to meet him on his terms. He came to us, moving toward us, meeting us where we are, and then drew us from there toward himself, and we are called to do the same.

As we speak, we should always begin where they are. But ...

**b. As we speak, we should always up end with Jesus.**

That's exactly what Paul does every time. He eventually brings the conversation around to Jesus, not to an idea, or a principle, or a doctrine, or a philosophy, but to a person.

Eventually he introduces Jesus into the conversation, and then he invites his hearers to answer the most important spiritual question of all: what do you make of this Jesus?

In this Paul faithfully carries out the kingdom principle found in Colossians 1.28:

*He* is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Regardless of where his hearers start, this is where Paul always ends.

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And so now we've come full circle. Traveling with Paul and Barnabas on this trip, hopefully now the point of the story is just a bit clearer.

Here's the pattern God sets for us in our mission work as a church.

We say yes to Jesus  
– we surrender our lives to him.

We go out in the name of Jesus  
– we go out into this world as his representatives.

We pour out the love of Jesus  
– we give indiscriminately to others the love that we have undeservedly received.

And we point to Jesus  
– we make it all about him.

So as the worship team comes up, let's close by going in our imagination to Antioch and joining Paul and Barnabas and the rest of the church as they present themselves before their King in worship.

Let's join them, offering ourselves anew and saying yes to as he sends us  
to his world  
in his name  
with his love  
to fulfill his mission  
by lifting up his son

Would you sing your yes to God?

### **Closing song: Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated**

Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated Lord to Thee  
Take my hands and let them rule at the impulse of Thy love  
At the impulse of Thy love

Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee  
Take my voice and let me sing  
Always only for my King  
Always only for my King

Take my life take my life  
Take my life I give it once again