

The Holy Spirit

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This past couple of weeks across America, including our own Wichita, Kansas, that experienced several deaths on Labor Day, has left many fearful, angry and without words. We are left with only tears of sorrow.

Whether it is the assassination of Charlie Kirk in Utah, the senseless shootings at a Catholic school in Minneapolis and a high school in Colorado, and a stabbing in Charlotte, North Carolina of a Ukrainian refugee, all our hearts break for those whose loved ones have died.

The problem of the heart is the heart of the problem.

To make sense of the darkness in this world, we have to remember that we live between the garden of Eden in Genesis and we are going to the garden of eternity – New Jerusalem in Revelation.

One of the consequences of turning away from God is violence. You don't have to look far in the Bible to see how violent the first death was.

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4-NIV)

As a sweet momma who is in church this weekend shared in a text, Pastor it is because of what happened Wed night that has caused me to realize we are in a spiritual warfare. And somehow, we must transcend politics and turn to God who has the answer.

Tragically, a social media driven culture has reinforced some of humanity's darkest evils. Sins.

Again, the problem of the heart is the heart of the problem. As God's end time clock ticks down, evil increases in the form of hostility because of disagreement.

We see it in the middle east, in the Midwest and beyond, and even in our middle schools.

So, what is the way forward? You have never looked into the eyes of a person that Jesus Christ did not die for. The problem is not political, not guns, not mental illness, it is a problem of the heart.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.

Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9-NIV)

Regardless of people's beliefs and views, we simply cannot try to silence others with violence. God hates violence and the shedding of blood. Our world must discover that only Jesus Christ can radicalize the human heart and make it a loving heart, instead of a judgmental heart.

Whether I agree or disagree with someone, God tells me I am to love them as my brother and sister and show them respect.

As followers of Christ let's pray diligently for God's intervention, be the first to extend a hand of unconditional love to those around us and look for Holy Spirit opportunities to declare Jesus is the answer!

Let's pray.

Father,

Our children and young people are framing the way they see the world through the lens of social media. Messages of evil and hostility are darkening their sweethearts. I beg You; Lord do not let them become the embittered soldiers of evil that adults model. Grant them a spirit of peace making. Raise up a generation of peacemaking children and youth that are disgusted and dissatisfied with the status quo.

We pray for those families struck down by violence and we pray for safety in our schools, government buildings, and churches. We long for the day you rescue us from a world so polluted by sin, violence and perversion.

Until you return, grant us the God-given mission as salt and light to be faithful. We offer this prayer in the name that has defeated evil at the cross of Jesus and will one day put our broken world together in accordance with Jesus' eternal plan.

In Jesus Name, Amen!

The Holy Spirit

Testimony turned in from a prayer card: Prayer for the leaders of Bethel Life Center. This sermon series on the book of Acts has been amazing!

Growing up Mennonite and Baptist, I never knew the Holy Spirit was alive and living in us. Never before have used the words, "Holy Spirit," so freely and often. I even use the word Holy Spirit in my workplace!

This past week in the study of the book of Acts, the good doctor Luke moved permanently from Jerusalem to Antioch. In Antioch, this gentile-based faith community is about to become the bridge by which the message of Jesus Christ death on the cross would **leave the Holy Land and travel to every land**.

The gospel message and gospel machine we call the church has moved out of Jerusalem and extended the message to Antioch.

The church of Jerusalem is the mother church. The church at Antioch is the mission church. (*Acts 13:1*)

Oh, we will return from time to time to Jerusalem, but our new home is the city of Antioch. Today we start our study in Antioch, Syria and end our study in Antioch, Turkey. Like Kansas that has a Minneapolis, Kansas there is also a Minneapolis, Minnesota. There are two Antioch's in Acts 13.

Look at the map and see this with me. This is the journey of the apostle Paul's first missionary adventure taking him from Antioch, Syria to Antioch, Turkey.

The Antioch church is an amazing God designed mixture of people from all sorts of religious, racial, economic and social stratus who gather around the cross of Jesus Christ. In worship and teaching!

A new class structure. A new class of people not governed by race. A new class of people not governed by law. Moses. The temple. A religious sacrifice of animals.

The first eternal glimpse of a class of heaven's future. Who did the Holy Spirit call on to lead such a church? Luke gives us the names of 5 leaders that served (governed yes, served more) the church of Antioch.

¹ 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. (Acts 13-NIV)

Give the church of Antioch and Bethel Life Center a gold medal! Churches committed to reaching the lost.

Welcoming new Jewish and Gentile believers and being patient with their swearing, addictions, sexual habits and pace of growth. Hurray for churches that Jesus Christ can say as he did in *Revelation 2:3 (NIV)*, *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

A plague could hang in the hallway of Bethel as it did in Ephesus reminding us of this Rev 2:3 mission. Let's meet the leadership team of the church at Antioch:

Barnabas, a generous giver full of the Holy Spirit.

Simeon called Niger, a black African whose dark skin welcome all to Jesus at Antioch.

Lucius of Cyrene, a Greek convert to Jesus from the North African coastal town of Cyrene. Modern day Libya.

Manaen, an aristocrat, Hellenistic Jew who grew up with Herod Antipas (the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist). Reminds us of how important one decision can be.

Saul a Jew whose name is changed in Acts 13:13, to Paul. He was also a Roman citizen; this gave him common ground with Jews and Gentiles.

A diverse and unified team of leaders in Antioch fasted, prayed and listened for the Holy Spirit's instructions. (Acts 13:2-4)

This diverse and yet unified group of leaders did what all church leaders are called to do, (1) they ministered to the Lord, and they (2) fasted. (3) They heard from God and (4) made provision for God's clear mission.

God's mandate and mission was specific. Who to send out. And where to go-to the ends of the earth. Let's read about it.

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." (Acts 13-NIV)

Notice that Barnabas is first in the list of two, later in the chapter Saul, who becomes Paul will be listed before Barnabas (Acts 13:42) Do you realize Jesus follower, God wants you to minister to him.

Like the priests in OT, they ministered before the Lord. Peter tells us we are a Royal priesthood. God wants your worship. God wants your presence with no distractions. God wants your surrendered life in a humble posture of worship to the king.

The **Holy Spirit said**, set apart for me the Barnabas and Saul.... How did that happen? A word of prophecy? You, see in verse 1 we are reminded the gifts at Antioch were those of Teacher and Prophet. More forth-teller (now) than foreteller (future).

Those who were fasting looked at each other, do you have something from God? Is God speaking to you? What makes our faith so personal? We have a God who wants to talk to you. Speak to you. Give you a voice you can trust.

What would your life look like if it were directed daily by divine whispers and a Voice you could trust?

You can't have a relationship with God if you can't hear God. It is almost impossible to hear from God when you are given to fear. Anxiety. Depression. Anger. I could go on and on, you get the point.

I love this verse; it gives you confidence that God will speak to you. *He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. (Psalm 107:29-NIV)*

Why Does God Use a Whisper?

Elijah hears a whisper from God. (1 Kings 19:10-13)

¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. (1 Kings 19:12-NIV)

When you listen to a whisper, you have to focus.

When you listen to a whisper, you have to get close.

When you listen to a whisper, you have to lower all surrounding noise.

Ok, back to the church at Antioch.

³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (Acts 13-NIV)

Like Abraham of old, Barnabas and Saul would not know the task, just the direction. Head to the Mediterranean. To do what? I will show you.

The church laid hands on them, releasing power, authority and endorsement to carry on the mission, on behalf of the Antioch church.

Barnabas and Saul are not going out to do their mission, they are going as an extension of church at Antioch. Antioch gave financially. Antioch gave prayerfully. Antioch gave human resources and team members.

Who did Antioch send? The author of the gospel of Mark. The one who would desert later when the enemies attack would get too intense. The team traveled from one end of the island to the next. They encouraged the believers in Jesus and preaching in the synagogues.

Barnabas and Saul are in the county seat. In that city we meet one of the leaders in government who was open to faith in Jesus Christ. We also met one of his employees who practiced sorcery. Leader in government on the island of Cypress and his associate who practices dark magic.

While the work of God will face opposition, it will never be overcome. Never be stopped.
(Acts 13:5-12)

Barnabas and Saul have gone where no man has gone before. After leaving the seacoast town of Seleucia, they sail 65 miles to the Island of Cyprus, their first missionary stop.

It was the first 65 miles of a ministry itinerary that would consume the rest of Paul's life and take him to more than 17,000 around the world. Paul would travel more than halfway around the world, preaching and teaching about Jesus and his death, burial and resurrection.

The island of Cyprus was Roman province famous for mining copper and shipbuilding. Their last stop on the island was at the pagan city of Paphos. A city notorious for immorality.

When the city leader Sergius Paulus got wind of what Barnabas and Saul were teaching, he wanted to hear more. But his interest in Jesus Christ was blocked, halted and opposed by his employee Bar-Jesus Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer.

He pulled every trick in the book to keep his boss from faith in Jesus. It was common for government officials to employ sorcerers, fortune tellers, wizards as advisors.

The boss on the verge of becoming a follower of Jesus, Elymas saw his source of power and income slipping through his greedy little fingers.

God is not the author of evil, but He is the author of a redemptive story that includes evil.

Let's just read the story and will remind us, it is not like we have forgotten that we live in a world that is broken, and evil is attempting to stop and halt God's plans for his creation.

⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰ "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. (Acts 13-NIV)

There is an unwelcome and insidious presence that exists around every believer's life. And he will be around us on this earth until the end.

The evil one works against everything we do for the glory of God.

The enemy cloaks himself in light and darkness. He is the dark adversary who knows the moves you are making. He appears on the landscape and timeline of humanity as a snake, dragon, devil, Judas, anti-Christ, Hamon, Nazi, totalitarianism, Columbine and mass shootings in Vegas. Shot fired in Utah. Knives thrust into sweet Ukrainians. Those shot in the streets of Wichita as they lie gasping for air.

The evil one has an abundance of evil servants who work to undermine all that God is attempting and unleashes atrocities of oppression, political anarchy, genocide, abortion, sex slavery and many other evil events on all of humanity.

Everything on this planet is impacted by darkness. In this fallen state good people become butchers of evil. And the idolatrous love themselves over loving God.

The evil one has made a study of us, long before we knew he existed.

How did it get here? There are two sources-Satan fell from Heaven: Adam and Eve fell from the Garden. Both occasions emboldened the evil one. The good news, the evil one has been defeated on Calvary and the Holy Spirit dwells in you protecting you from his encroachment.

¹⁴ Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2-NIV)

The message of Jesus atoning death has gone around the world.

If Jesus does not pay for your sins, you will.

Don't leave today without full assurance of faith in Jesus.

Paul would travel the world and record in Scripture the life-giving message of Jesus: all who sin can be forgiven because of God's grace.

THESE TWO VERSES AND THE FINAL PRAYER
ARE ON THE HANDOUT
BUT NOT IN YOUR NOTES ABOVE

²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. (Acts 13-NIV)

³⁸ Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. (Acts 13-NIV)

*Father,
Bethel Life Center is asking You, the God of all provision, to reverse this season of financial leanness. We are asking You, God, to put into the hearts of Your people a willingness to be generous and sacrificial in giving to the Kingdom work at Bethel. Father, we humble ourselves with prayer and fasting and ask You to hear our prayers.*

*Hear our cries. Hear our petitions. Hear our intercession.
As we wait and watch for Your intervention, we rest in confidence that YOU will once again provide for the needs of God's people and Your church.*

In Jesus' Name, Amen.