Acts 2024 Juan Seo (July 21, 2024)

**HOW TO DISCERN GOD’S CALLING?**

Acts 12:25-13:3

Key Verse 13:2

***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.”***

Today, we will learn about the church in Antioch, which listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obeyed God's will and calling while worshiping and fasting. Barnabas and Saul finished their mission and returned to Antioch from Jerusalem (12:25). Who did they bring with them? They brought John, also called Mark, from Jerusalem to Antioch. Who is Mark? As we know well, he is the author of the Gospel of Mark. He was the son of Mary, the owner of the house where early church members gathered. He was also Barnabas's cousin (Col 4:10). Mark accompanied Barnabas and Paul as their helper on the first missionary journey. He loved Jesus and had a strong desire to spread the gospel of Jesus. Although there is no specific record of Mark's age at that time, it is estimated that he was a young man in his early thirties. It is truly grateful to see young people who follow Jesus and actively serve in spreading the gospel. Our missionaries here met Jesus while they were in college and dedicated their lives to Jesus from a young age. I respect them and thank God for them. Additionally, our community has many young people who love Jesus and serve in the gospel ministry. They gather weekly to study the Bible, have fellowship, and learn about Jesus in two Young Adult Fellowships led by Joseph Han Jr. and Sam Choi. They are planning to hold a Young Adult meeting on August 17 to invite friends and share the gospel. I pray that God blesses our young adults so that they can grow as disciples of Jesus and participate actively in God’s mission. I am praying for God's guidance to hold a Young Adults Discipleship meeting. I ask you to join me in prayer for this.

Acts 13:1 lists the leaders of the Antioch church: ***“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.”*** The roles of these five leaders were prophets and teachers. In the Early Church, the prophets predicted and transmitted visions from God. Teachers, on the other hand, interpreted and taught the word of God. Barnabas and Saul primarily served the Antioch church as teachers.

Among the leaders of the Antioch church mentioned in Acts 13:1, there is Simeon called Niger. The word ‘Niger’ means ‘black’ in Latin, which refers to Simeon’s complexion and ethnic background. He was likely from North Africa. Lucius of Cyrene was also from North Africa. Simeon and Lucius were probably refugees who left Jerusalem due to persecution and settled in Antioch. Another leader, Manaen, had a very unique background. He had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. This Herod was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. It seems that Manaen, being from Herod's household, likely had considerable power and wealth. It is remarkable that such a person became a disciple of Jesus and a spiritual leader in the Antioch church. The important point is that people from these different backgrounds came together to serve as leaders in the Antioch church. Their leadership was multi-ethnic, showing that the Antioch church was the first multi-ethnic church in Christian history. Considering the context of New York, where we live, I believe it is God's will for our church to become a multi-ethnic church. I pray that we can grow into a genuine multi-ethnic church where people from various ethnic backgrounds come together to worship God as one in Jesus Christ.

Look at Acts 13:2: ***“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.’”*** What were they doing? They were worshiping the Lord and fasting. Here, "they" refers not only to the five leaders mentioned in verse 1 but to the entire congregation of the Antioch church. They were worshiping and fasting. What is worship? Worship is offering our lives to Jesus. Romans 12:1 says, ***“Therefore, 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.”*** If our daily lives are not offered in a way that pleases God, we are not giving Him true and proper worship. Additionally, worship is our response to God's revelation. If we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, God reveals Himself to us. At that time, we will worship and obey God. When we discover God's will and live in obedience, that is true worship. We can worship God individually or collectively every day. I believe it would be wonderful for our church to have a Praise & Worship Night in addition to our Sunday worship service. When our congregation gathers to praise and worship God, I believe we will richly experience God's grace. The time we gather for worship every Sunday is very special. During this time, we come before God together, repent of our sins, and are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. We praise, worship, and pray together, and we listen to God's Word to discover His will for us. God delights in our congregational worship and reveals His will to us during these times.

While the believers of the church at Antioch were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, saying, ***“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*** This was a direct revelation from the Holy Spirit to the church in Antioch. We do not know the exact method by which this revelation was communicated to the believers in Antioch. It might have been delivered through the prophets. The important point is that while they were fasting and worshiping God, the Holy Spirit revealed God's will to them. I believe that when we gather together to fast, pray, and worship God, God will reveal His will to us. Fasting is not easy. Before our Friday meetings, we enjoy snacks and fellowship together, and then we happily praise God. However, there are times when fasting is necessary. When we have very important prayer topics, we can fast and pray. There are times when our church needs to fast to discover and obey God's will.

What was the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the church in Antioch? It was to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which God had called them. The term "set apart" comes from the Greek word ἀφορίζω (aphorizō), which means ‘exclude,’ ‘separate,’ or ‘set aside for a particular function.’ The Holy Spirit chose Barnabas and Saul for His special plan and commanded that they be set apart for God’s purpose. God's plan was to use Barnabas and Saul to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. God's plan for Paul had already been manifested when Jesus called him. ***“This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel”*** (Acts 9:15). The Holy Spirit now called for Paul to be set apart to fulfill God's will for him.

It is indeed very important for us to discover and obey God’s calling both individually and as a community. God has called each of us with a special purpose, without exception, and He continues to call us today. First, God calls us to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. Then, He calls us to live for His glory. Furthermore, He calls us to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and serve God’s mission. What is God’s calling for you? The renowned Christian author Os Guinness, in his book *“The Call,”* speaks about God’s calling in terms of primary and secondary callings.[[1]](#footnote-0) He states that we are called to Someone (God), not to something. According to him, our primary calling as followers of Christ is by Him, to Him, and for Him. Our primary calling is to follow Jesus, learn from Him, and imitate Him so that our being can restore the original image of God that He created. We are all called to be disciples of Jesus. I understand this primary calling in relation to the first and second commandments that Jesus taught us. ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself”*** (Mt 22:37-39). We are called to love our God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We are also called to love our neighbor as ourselves. In other words, we are called to know the love of God, who sent His only Son, Jesus, who died for us and to practice that love in the world. This is our primary calling and the path of being a disciple of Jesus. Having been saved by the blood of Jesus and called to live as His disciples, we must live according to this primary calling.

Then, what is our secondary calling? According to Os Guinness, our secondary calling is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for Him. This secondary calling is the specific mission we have received to live for the glory of God. It includes sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others or people in a particular country. Also, it includes using the talents God has given us for His glory. This secondary calling is crucial for living a fruitful life for God's glory. It always goes hand in hand with our primary calling. Therefore, while living according to our essential primary calling, we must always seek and obey our secondary calling from God.

How can we specifically discover God's calling? I would like to propose three dimensions from a methodological perspective. First, there is the subjective dimension. This involves personal conviction through prayer and God's Word. When we pray and read the Bible, the Holy Spirit gives us assurance. This is the subjective aspect of discovering our calling. Second, there is the objective dimension. This means objectively verifying our subjective conviction. We must acknowledge that our subjective conviction might be wrong in discerning God's will and calling. Due to our weaknesses, we might fall into Satan's temptations or deceive ourselves by following our own desires. Therefore, we need to seek advice from spiritually mature and trustworthy people to objectively verify whether our subjective conviction aligns with God's will. Third, there is the communal dimension. This means we should seek our individual calling while remembering the calling of the community to which we belong. Os Guinness says, “The call of Jesus is personal but not purely individual; Jesus summons his followers not only to an individual calling but also to a corporate calling.” The corporate calling, in other words, the communal calling, refers to God’s calling for the church we belong to. The Church of Christ is the body of Christ, and we are each members of that body. Therefore, we can trust that there is a profound purpose and calling from God in leading us to our current church. We need to seek to understand God’s will and calling for us by remembering the calling of our community. Commitment to our communal calling means that we must honor the purpose and interests of the church of Christ in all our individual callings. The church in Antioch received a communal calling to send out missionaries. Therefore, the members of that church embraced this communal calling as their personal calling and actively participated in God’s mission. I believe that when we seek God's calling while considering the subjective, objective, and communal dimensions, we can draw closer to understanding God’s calling for us.

So, how can our community discover and obey God's will together? While the believers of the Antioch church were worshiping the Lord and fasting, they heard the Spirit’s voice and discovered God's calling for their community. God's calling to set apart Barnabas and Saul for Gentile missions was revealed not just to those two or to the five leaders of the Antioch church but to the entire church community. The Antioch church believers then prayed and obeyed together. Verse 3 says, ***“So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*** It would not have been easy for them to send off top leaders like Barnabas and Saul for world missions. However, they united in prayer and obedience to God's calling. They actively participated in God's mission to the Gentiles through Barnabas and Saul. The Holy Spirit is the main agent of God’s mission. We are God’s co-workers who obey and participate in God’s mission.

If we do not worship, pray, and fast together, we cannot hear the Spirit’s calling for our community. I have shared the vision for our church with you in previous messages. I envision our church becoming a genuinely multicultural and multi-generational church. Additionally, I have shared the vision of our church becoming a campus mission-centered church. This vision comes from my conviction received through prayer, Bible reading, and theological study before God. I have also published an article on the multicultural ministry and engaged in conversations with various UBF leaders for verification. Do you remember the inaugural speech of Pastor Ron Ward, the General Director of UBF? He presented the prayer topic for the UBF ministry to become a multicultural and multi-generational church. I recognize the need to have more conversations with the leaders and members of New York UBF to objectively verify this vision.

I believe that the vision to be a campus mission-centered church aligns with the communal calling of the UBF community. Last Friday evening, we had a workshop on Campus Evangelism & Discipleship. During the workshop, I shared that campus ministry is in our church's DNA and presented the vision and prayer topic of becoming a campus mission-centered church. As the first step toward this, I proposed forming a Campus Ministry Team. After the workshop, I received very positive and constructive feedback. I am deeply thankful to God, especially because many young adults expressed their desire to actively participate in campus ministry. I am also grateful to God that our Fellowship leaders and many members want to participate in various ways in campus ministry. However, I realize that I did not provide enough explanation about the campus ministry team, and some people did not fully understand my proposal. I apologize for this and will prepare a detailed document to provide more information.

Through the church in Antioch, we learned how to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and discover God's calling. I pray that all the members of our church can come together with one heart to worship and pray so that we can discover God's calling together. I pray that we continue to grow as a Spirit-filled community that follows the Spirit’s leading. Amen.

1. Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)