

Acts 13

Right guys you are going to need your bibles today because I am going to be dancing all over Acts. You got fast fingers. Let me see your fast fingers.

Let's just take a recap of where Paul is. Turn with me to Acts 9.

In Acts chapter 9 Saul has his supernatural encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He is blinded and led by the hand into the city. There God appears in a vision to a man named Ananias and tells him to go and lay hands on Saul. He does so and Saul is healed and he immediately got up and was baptised. Acts chapter 9 verse 19.

In verse 20 it says he spent several days with the disciples in Damascus – probably through Ananias and then verse 20 “At once he began to preach in the synagogues v21 “all those who heard him were astonished” – verse 22 “Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus.”

So right away Saul shows us he is a preacher, he has the gift of the gab. So much so that by verse 25 he has his own followers.

But what happens in verse 23 we see that the Jews conspired to kill him. This was a man making waves. In fact his followers had to smuggle him out of the city to save his life.

So he leaves Damascus and heads to Jerusalem where he tried to join the disciples, no doubt expecting a warm welcome. Here is a highly educated young man from a powerful and prestigious Jewish family who had a miraculous encounter with Christ, was blighted and then healed, who started courageously teaching in synagogues only days later – being so bold as to endanger his own life and only be saved by being lowered in a basket through the city walls – surely he could expect a hero's welcome but no verse 26 - 28 tells a different story

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas vouched for him, Barnabas gave him credit, Barnabas got him into the club, got him in, Barnabas risked his own reputation - risked his neck for Saul. Barnabas risked the lives of all the brothers.

So how does it play out by the end of verse 28 Saul is off again speaking boldly

But what happens next. Chapter 9 verse 29 – he talked and debated with the Grecian Jews but they tried to kill him.

So a bold teacher, amazing and baffling, preaching fearlessly in the name of Jesus – but also receiving consistent death threats. And this time in Jerusalem in front of the brothers, the old school, the establishment ...hmm they thought ...what to do with this young and ferocious preacher - this bull in a china shop – what do the brothers do – they send him back to Tarsus - they send him home. Wow, that must have been a kick in the teeth for Saul, but he obviously went – so there is obedience there.

What happens now

The narrative swaps to Peter but when it comes back we see the believers persecuted and scattered – acts chapter 11 verse 19 to 21

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord

So there is discussion here about who they are talking to but I take it to mean gentiles because of the words HOWEVER and ALSO

only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also,

some say they were greek jews but one thing is for sure - Israelite Hebrews they were not.

So we have a great number of people turning to the Lord chapter 11 verse 21 and the brothers in Jerusalem had to send someone to help and to oversee – and they sent Barnabas. Barnabas described as a good man full of the holy spirit and of faith (verse 24). They are not sending a piddling minion here. They are sending one of their best. A man we first meet in chapter 4 verse 36- a believer from very early on sold his possessions and laid the money at the feet of the apostles.

So Barnabas is sent to this booming church in Syria where many non Hebrews are coming to know Jesus as their God and Messiah, there is Saturday outreach, there is messy church going on, the café rota is under staffed, they haven't got enough people for youth church and the street pastors haven't got a flip flop to rub together. Like any new and booming church there are going to be definite gaps in provision – who is feeding the widows? They needed some serious people for a serious situation and what does Barnabas do on arrival

He looks around, he assesses the situation and he thinks – I know just the man for the job. Where's Saul – you know that gobby ex Pharisee assassin – that's who we need

Barnabas had no idea if Saul was even still a believer after being sent home with his tail between his legs for being a loose cannon. Barnabas could have written for Saul, sent for him – but no, he went to get him - back in his home town in Tarsus in Cilicia (Turkey) and he brought him back. Verse 25 and 26 (we are still in chapter 11)

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 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. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul taught together for a year. Lived together, worked together Barnabas and Saul.

And then we skip over a bit more of Peter's story and finally we arrive at chapter 13.

arrive at chapter 13 - Phew – that was just the introduction – blimey my bums gone numb.

Three very important changes first thing happen in chapter 13. Changes that could quite easily slip by if you weren't looking for them. The first change happens at verse 9, the second at verse 42 and the third in verse 46.

Let's start with verse 9 – turn to your bibles – lets have it on the screen

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said

What is changing here?

Right – his name – now God has a long history of changing peoples names – his has history in this department – he changes people’s names for two reasons – one he gives them a name that better reflects who they are now – rather than the person they were in childhood, and secondly God sometimes changes people’s names as a prophetic prompt - to be the catalyst for them to change and mature into the person God has destined to them to be.

So let’s look at the names

Saul is a Hebrew name and it means ‘Asked for or prayed for’ it was a powerful name with authority and grandeur as it was the name of the first king of Israel. God’s appointed Kings were the most powerful humans on earth. Asked for – prayed for speaks of a beloved and treasured son – and we know that Paul was from a highly educated and wealthy family high up in the Jewish culture of Tarsus. In Acts 22 he tells us he was schooled in Jerusalem under the Rabbi Gamaliel.

What does Paul mean. Well Paul is a roman name – to start with – Paul was a Citizen of Rome we know that because this fact saves his life in Acts 22 and it becomes an important analogy in his teaching. Paul in latin means “small or humble”

This is a big change – from Hebrew Saul – asked for prayed for. To Roman; small humble.

Why this name change, what is God trying to do with this name change.

It is obvious from the beginning that Saul has a gift, Saul can talk, Saul has a silver tongue, Saul is a natural leader. How do we know that – because he has followers – if you ever want to know if you are a leader – is anyone following you!

back in Acts 9 he was only preaching a couple of days in Damascus and he amassed enough followers – followers who were willing to risk their lives to save him – by flouting the rules and smuggling him out of a city away from a murderous mob. Remember the first time we see him in acts 7 he has followers laying their garments at his feet so they can go off and do his bidding of stoning Stephen to death after giving false testimony in a court to condemn him to death.

Saul can speak, saul can manipulate others, saul is a gifted communicator. Saul has the gift of discernment – he can see right through people to the very heart of who they are – we see that in his immediate denouncement of Bar-Jesus in Acts 13 – he just had to look at him (verse 9) and he knew him.

He can’t help it. He was probably born with it. The gift of communication, of reading an audience, of knowing which buttons to press, seeing the strengths and weaknesses of others and using them – perhaps even sub-consciously – to get people to do what he wants them to do.

God gave him that gift – and the gifts of God are irrevocable Romans 11 verse 29 or as the Message puts it - God’s gifts and God’s call are under full warranty—never canceled, never rescinded.

Saul has been running around using his gift willy nilly, he’s been using it to persecute and kill Christians – well that had to stop – after his conversion he ran into the synagogues and started preaching – well what happened there – he nearly got killed by two different groups of people – so it got sent home.

He got sent home, he was a ticking time bomb, this gift – this call – scratching its way out of him – but he knew it – he knew it – Saul knew he had something special – he knew he could get men to follow him – when he was Saul his gift was partnered with arrogance with self-reliance.

His enthusiasm, great, his urgency, great, his courage great, but not in his strength – not in my strength but the lords. Zechariah4:6

This is an internal struggle in Paul that never really goes away – he lays it all out for you in the beginning of 2 Corinthians chapter 12

Maybe this is you – maybe God has given you a gift and you've been using it wrong all these years

STORY When I was 8 – dance show – watches – reading the person

I didn't know that was prophetic – because I had always been able to do it – read people. I thought it was just observation – that is why I read all of the Sherlock Holmes novels and Poirot before I was 10 because I could understand what they saw. I thought everyone could read people like that. When I realised that no – not everyone could do that - I pushed it down, I stopped using it because I thought it was not of God it was just of me. I thought it can't be a gift from God because I don't remember being given it. It's always been there.

But recently I had a mind blown moment. God is out with of time. He is not fixed in our chronological understanding of time. So from God' point of view whether he gave you that gift last Tuesday or whether he weaved it into your DNA in the womb – it is still his gift – from him – given unto to you for such a time as this – to use for his kingdom.

And Barnabas could see it - shining out of Saul like a laser beam. He could see the gift of God on this young man's life and he could clearly see the call of God on him.

And he went to Tarsus and he got him and he brought him back to Antioch and for a year they lived together. Saul living with this man – Barnabas - that we have already been told is a good man full of the holy spirit and of faith.

As I have talked about before we see this pattern of God.

CALLING

TRAINING

COMISSIONING

The gifts and call of God where already on Saul – even as he did great evil. They were still there as they exploded out of him in Damascus and Jerusalem, stirring up murderous threats and causing division. No body else saw those gifts, nobody but Barnabas

Barnabas saw them, Barnabas saved them so the Holy Spirit could sanctify them

And then the training – training sometimes feels like waiting. We see it with Abraham with Moses with Joseph, training feels like waiting. Saul got sent home and he waited – and there is great discipline in that – that is obedience – to know you have a destiny and yet to wait. And then Barnabas came and got him and for a year – trained him.

But Barnabas is clever – it probably never felt like training to Saul if we look at chapter 11:26

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.

To Saul it just felt like teaching and preaching together. But God knew otherwise because what was Barnabas, what did he have to teach Saul

Remember Barnabas was GOOD he was full of THE HOLY SPIRIT and of FAITH

And that is the change, that is the moment it all came together and we see it in Acts 13 verse 9

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said

BOOM at that moment the training was over, Saul becomes Paul, he walks into his destiny – why – why

Because Saul WITH the Holy Spirit is Paul.

You with the Holy Spirit – who are you called to be – who do you become – who did God plan for and provide for you to be – what gifts did he work into the very beginnings of you that he calls forth now and says WITH me child WITH me you can fly.

Ok lets turn to our second important change – verse 42

What happens for the first time in this verse?

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people urged them to continue this message on the next Sabbath.

It has become Paul and Barnabas not Barnabas and Paul. Previously Barnabas always came first verse 2, verse 7 but now something has changed. It becomes Paul and Barnabas verse 42, 43, 46 and 50.

Barnabas came first because he was the superior – so to speak – he was the longer standing believer, he was sent by the Brothers. In chapter 14 verse 12 when the duo are confused for Gods it is Barnabas who is Zeus and Paul who is the lowly messenger of the Gods Hermes.

But it has become Paul and Barnabus. The student has excelled the teacher.

And nowhere is it hinted at that this is a problem, nowhere do we see a power struggle, nowhere is it insinuated that Barnabas resents Pauls rise to popularity and influence.

Because that is any teacher's, sorry any good teacher's, greatest desire, that those under your tutelage excel – way beyond where you are.

Because Barnabas is an encourager – you see he also got renamed – his first name was Joseph but the Brothers renamed him Barnabas to reflect his character – it means Son of Encouragement (chapter 4:36)

It is sewn through everything he is. It is the first thing he does – when he arrived in Antioch what does he do chapter 11 verse 23

When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to abide in the Lord with all their hearts.

His whole story with Saul is one of encouragement, of optimism, of choosing to see the good in people not the bad, willing to back them, to trust them, sometimes with very little earthly evidence at all – but knowing it is the will of God.

Encouragement can save a life.

STORY Ruth McBean

Encouragement – giving someone the courage to carry on. To not lose hope, hope is the anchor. You know us humans can go a long way on just hope.

The last change I am going to speak to you about today is found in verse 46

Let's read from 45

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 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. "

This is it. This is the first time Paul mentions any kind of understanding of his own call. His call to preach to the gentiles.

We – the reader - know about it. We know about it because the writer of Acts (probably Luke) tells us what God said to Ananias back in chapter 9 verse 15

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

But if you keep reading Ananias doesn't pass that message onto Saul verse 17

When Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

Saul hasn't got a clue that he is specifically called to the gentiles. That's why he jumps ahead of God's plan. He goes teaching in synagogues in Damascus and Jerusalem and it all ends in threats and tears and banishment – because that wasn't part of God's plan. Preaching to Jews was not Paul's primary purpose.

So Saul is sat at home, back in Tarsus on mum and dad's couch, in his pants, eating stuffed vine leaves – rejected and despondent and all of a sudden Barnabas is at his door. This is the man who got him in with the disciples in Jerusalem and here he is saying come to Antioch.

You see Barnabas is a bridge. Barnabus is a bridge.

He was a bridge to get Saul in with the Brothers

He is a bridge that brings Saul to Antioch

Barnabus is a bridge to his commission – his destiny

Saul didn't go to the gentiles, Barnabus took him to the gentiles. For a year Saul served in the Church in Antioch – and that would have been the last place Saul imagined himself to be. Saul who trained under Gamaliel in Jerusalem, schooled in Jewish history and the Torah – the synagogue is where Saul took himself – but God had other plans.

Barnabus was a bridge. He took Saul to places he would never of gone alone and that was the place God had ordained Saul to go. You see sometimes our commission is shaped by our circumstance.

Who has God put into your life as a bridge to strange and crazy places, to weird and wonderful people that you would never have thought you would go?

Jan, prostitutes, my mum, trustee.

Look around at your friends and family. Who has God placed in your life as a bridge. Where will you end up if you decide to cross it.

We know that this commission becomes everything Paul is. Here in Acts 13 it is Paul AND barnabus that declare they are commanded by God to be a light to the gentiles but by the next book – The Book of Romans written by Paul himself it is this commission that defines him, it is how he introduces himself. Romans chapter 1 verse starting at verse 1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God... Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith

Because of Barnabas Paul found his destiny, his reason to be.

Barnabas saw the gifts God had placed in Saul

Barnabas believed in Saul – he risked it all on Saul, he got him into the club.

Barnabas saw a position for Saul and went and got him – he didn't give up on him

Barnabas gently taught and trained him until Saul became Paul

Barnabas took him to the gentiles

Barnabas was the bridge for Saul to find his destiny

Barnabas stepped aside and let his student fly

2 chapters later they part company. Paul goes to Syria with Silas and Barnabas goes to Cyprus with Mark – another rejected brother another lost cause – and so Barnabas starts again

Believing, risking, training, releasing.

Who is your Barnabas, who has God given you as a bridge to your destiny?

And who is your Mark, who are you to believe in, risk it all for, live with, love and then release.

Who are you to lay down before and say – walk over me to where God wants you to be.

no sound please <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHkr0ysHSeI>

start at 8 seconds in