

Acts Series Part 34

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[0 : 0 0] Are we a missionary church? A reasonable response to that question could be, is there any other kind? Mission is the heartbeat of the church, and we all know what you call a body without a heartbeat. There is, for us here in this congregation, the permanent challenge of reaching effectively and meaningfully the very neighborhood where God has placed us here in Rosemount and in the city center of Aberdeen. Looking further afield, we are tentatively, it has to be said, but we are beginning to consider the challenge of church planting beyond the city center and, indeed, the city boundaries. And then, of course, there is the call not only to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth. How many overseas missionaries have we sent from Bonacord to other nations and continents? And there are those who have gone from among us, and we are grateful for such.

The church at Antioch has a lot to teach us. The passage before us in Acts chapter 13 that we're going to be considering, just the first few verses of the chapter from the beginning to verse 3, really, maybe just a passing reference to the following verses 4 and 5. But this passage describes for us the call and commissioning of two overseas missionaries of two men who would cross national borders and frontiers and go sent by the congregation they are a part of in representation of that congregation to go as missionaries abroad to use the language we would be familiar with. And just before we consider some characteristics of this church, let's just for a moment imagine a similar service of commissioning here in Bonacord in this very building. Would that not be a very exciting thing, that from this congregation from amongst us, one or more of you gathered here this evening, being sent by this congregation as missionaries of the cross?

What kind of church sends missionaries across the world? In what kind of church does God find men and women? He will call to missionary service in distant lands. Well, again, I say, let's learn from Antioch.

Before we do home in on the particulars of the congregation or of the church at Antioch, possibly more than one congregation, possibly a number of congregations who together constituted the church at Antioch. But before we home in on the particulars, let's just notice briefly the big picture, as it were, as we read through this great account of Luke that is the book of Acts.

What we have here described at the beginning of chapter 13 is of epical significance in the development of the nascent New Testament church. This is what we have described here, this call, this commissioning, this first missionary journey, is effectively the first organized overseas missionary project of any New Testament church, hence its great significance. Previous expansion that there had been, indeed Antioch itself, is the result of previous missionary expansion, but previous expansion had been the result of persecution. It was not the result of a conscious, deliberate decision on the part of, say, the church in Jerusalem. Well, we are Christians, we are a Christian church, and as such, we must send missionaries. So let's send missionaries to Antioch. That had not been the dynamic.

[4 : 35] Rather, there had been persecution, and the persecution had, as it were, forced the Christians to reach out. Here, for the first time, we have a church sitting down and determining to send missionaries overseas, abroad. And so I say, this is of great importance, not only for the congregation at Antioch, but for the New Testament church in its entirety. There is a sense, as we recognize that reality, that this particular missionary project is unique and unrepeatable. What you do for the first time, you can never do again for the first time. But though there are unique elements, there are also many features, and indeed, I would suggest the bulk of the features that we find here of this congregation are features that we can learn from and seek to emulate. Now, before we do just that, identify some features of this church at Antioch, a great commission church, a missionary church. Before we do that, just very briefly, it may be helpful to sketch the history, and it is a brief history of the Antioch congregation that, I think in a measure, helps to explain how they are as regards this missionary impulse that we find. The congregation at Antioch, as we've already commented in the passing, was the product of missionary efforts of Christians from Jerusalem escaping persecution. We read in Acts chapter 11 the account that describes the genesis of the church in Antioch. This missionary endeavor, these efforts of those who were escaping persecution in Jerusalem, was owned of God, and there was blessing.

Many were converted. Many were brought to faith in Jesus Christ. And the growth of this church in this Gentile city comes to the attention of the Christians in Jerusalem, and Barnabas is sent to see what is going on, not in any kind of inquisitorial spirit, but simply to come alongside and to help this nascent congregation in Antioch. Well, Barnabas does so, and he recognizes the scale of the task before him, and very wisely he heads to Tarsus to rope Saul or Paul into this work in the church in Antioch.

And this was a particularly blessed and privileged congregation from the very beginning to have men like Barnabas, who has been described for us already in the reading there in chapter 11 as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. They had Barnabas and they had Paul as their teachers, as their pastors. So, they were greatly privileged in that regard. We have also considered in recent weeks how when the prophet Agabus prophesied a forthcoming famine in the empire, and particularly it would seem concentrated in Judea, the Christians at Antioch gathered a collection. And that's significant simply in the sense that in God's providence, when Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem, their primary purpose it would seem to carry the collection, that visit also provides the opportunity for them to discuss with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem concerning the Gentile mission.

And a happy conclusion is arrived at that essentially involved a recognition that Peter would concentrate his missionary efforts among the Jews and Paul among the Gentiles. And this agreement is related for us in Paul's letter to the Galatians and the second chapter. Now, Paul and Barnabas, on their return to Antioch from that visit to Jerusalem, come and return at a very propitious moment. The scene is set for this overseas missionary project. As we consider that background, we discover that this wasn't some random thing. This wasn't as spontaneous as maybe it would appear in a simple reading of these first verses of chapter 13. The scene is being set. Providentially, God is ordering circumstances for this congregation at Antioch to send out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. Well, that is a little bit of the immediate background to the church at Antioch, particularly as it relates to this matter of their missionary heart and priority.

But what I want to do is notice some of the features of this church at Antioch, and really with the purpose of being challenged by what we discover, and this church serving as an example for us, that we would examine ourselves and see in what measure we are similar to, or not as the case may be, this missionary church, the church at Antioch, the kind of church from which missionaries are sent around the world, the kind of church where God finds men and women and calls them to missionary service. Let's notice some features then of this church. First of all, I would notice and highlight that this was a taught church. It's quite striking and instructive to note the emphasis on teaching at the very center of congregational life. In the passage that we read in Acts chapter 11, where the very beginning of the church at Antioch is described, we find that Paul and Barnabas, having set up their base as it were there in Antioch, were engaged in teaching this new congregation for a full year, and then subsequently for perhaps longer. But there a time scale is mentioned to us in verse 26 of chapter 11. I'm reading from verse 25 just to get the flow of what is being said.

[11 : 33] 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, and the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. So this congregation, though a church plant, as it were, though a very young congregation, though no doubt they had much to learn, nonetheless, in this relatively short time they had received a great deal of teaching, very particularly from Paul and Barnabas. But we also discover in chapter 13, which is our particular concern this evening, that the church was well served by a teaching team, which consisted of five men. Then in verse 1 of chapter 13, we read, in the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manahen, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

Of these five, of course, there are the two we've already mentioned, Paul and Barnabas. But in addition to Paul and Barnabas, we find mentioned here three other men who were also engaged in teaching this congregation at Antioch or the church at Antioch, which, as I say, quite possibly would have involved different preaching stations or groups across the city. Now, it's unclear, and I'm not going to enter into the discussion this evening. Our purpose this evening is a different one. It's unclear as to the description of these men that we find in verse 1 of chapter 13 as prophets and teachers is to be understood as telling us that of these five, some were prophets and some were teachers. If that is so, it's not specified who are who, who are the prophets and who are the teachers. It's also possible that all or some of them fulfilled both functions, were both teachers and prophets. We don't know, in summary, and as I say, for our purposes, it's not of great importance to come to a conclusion.

The activities are distinct activities, but whether one man can engage or be involved in both, that may be so, and it may have been so with regards to these men. But no matter. The point that really we are stressing is that this church at Antioch was a taught church. Teaching occupied a central part of church life. And it seems reasonable, an entirely reasonable conclusion, to arrive at that their missionary impetus, their engagement in overseas mission that is described for us here at the beginning of the chapter was in great measure the product of the teaching they received as a biblically taught congregation. The outcome could be none other than that they would be a missionary congregation. The teaching that they received from Paul and Barnabas and the other men mentioned concerning the prophetic insights in the Old Testament regarding God's missionary purposes, the teaching that they received as to what Jesus had taught and that is repeated for them by these men.

The missionary implications of the death and resurrection of our Lord. All of these things would have formed part of the diet of teaching that they received, and all prepare the congregation for the taking up of their missionary responsibilities. And I make this point because sometimes, for reasons that are difficult really to understand, a strange and artificial distinction is sometimes drawn between congregations with what is deemed to be a strong teaching ministry and those with a more evangelistic character. And so, somehow we're told that there are two kinds of congregation. And sometimes we hear that, oh, well, this church, they have a strong teaching ministry. And the implication seems to be, well, that's really all they do. They're not so good at evangelism. They're not so good at mission, but they're strong on teaching. Sometimes that is said of the free church. Whether it's true is another matter. And I speak of the positive side. Whether it's true that we are indeed as strong on teaching as we maybe like to think is another matter. Let's not go down that road. But the point being is that there is this distinction, well, this is a teaching congregation. Oh, and this congregation here, well, they're more into mission. And as I say, this is a very strange and artificial distinction.

The church at Antioch was a missionary church precisely because it was so well taught. The teaching that they received naturally led them to be what they were, a missionary church. It could be no other way. Notice also, almost in the passing, but I was reluctant to let it pass. Notice also the striking manner in which is described the original preaching diet that the first missionaries brought to Antioch, some of them unnamed. In chapter 11 and verse 20, we read, some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, anonymous heroes who are not named for us, they went to Antioch. And then we read, and began to speak to Greeks also. And then in the New International Version in the church Bible, we read, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

[17 : 15] Now, that's an entirely reasonable and accurate translation of the original, but the original is much more vivid in a sense in that all it really says is preaching the Lord Jesus. What did they do? They preached the Lord Jesus. What wonderful content. What a great subject matter for these unnamed missionary heroes escaping persecution. They arrive in Antioch. They're no theologians.

They're maybe not experienced preachers, but there's one thing they can do. They can preach the Lord Jesus. And that is what they do. And God owns and blesses that preaching and teaching of these men.

So, the church at Antioch was a taught church. What about us? And here, of course, the onus is on both those who have the responsibility to teach and, indeed, those who have the responsibility to be taught.

We're in this together. As it takes two to tango, so it also takes two for a meaningful teaching experience to occur. Well, Antioch then was a taught church, but it's also a witnessing church.

The missionary project, the beginning of which is described in the first verses of chapter 13, was not the first venture in mission of the church at Antioch. There is a very real significance to what we have described in Barnabas and Paul being formally called and commissioned and sent by the church to overseas mission. That is significant. However, we would be wrong to think that this was the first time the church had been engaged in mission. No, they had already been engaged and were already actively engaged in mission at home in the very city of Antioch. The church had begun as a result of men who were prepared to share the good news, and women no doubt also, as they came to the city and spoke and shared concerning Jesus. And they had continued to do so, and the church had grown, and many had been converted. Chapter 11 describes how great numbers of people became Christians.

[19 : 35] So this was already a congregation, a church, involved in mission, involved in evangelism, involved in sharing the good news of the gospel. Would God have called men from a church inactive in local missionary endeavor? If the believers in Antioch had simply been content to remain together, maybe the Christians who had had to leave Jerusalem and found refuge in Antioch, and perhaps a group of them would gather together and say, well, we'd long to be back in Jerusalem. We wish we were there.

That's really our home. But while we're here, we'll gather together, and we'll pray, and we'll sing praises to God, and we'll do what we do. And as to this pagan city, well, we'll seek to protect ourselves from its pernicious influence. Would God have called from among such a congregation men to serve as missionaries overseas? That seems highly unlikely. They were already engaged in evangelism, in witness, in mission on their doorstep. If we can put it in this way, from zero to Zanzibar, is an unlikely jump. If they had been doing nothing, it seems highly unlikely that God would have fixed His eyes on this church as a church that would send missionaries overseas. They had to cut their teeth, as it were, at home. But now they were ready for a bolder and more demanding mission.

And this is a simple but I think also important lesson. Both for individual Christians, as we would seek to serve God where He has placed us, but also as a congregation, we need to begin where we are.

In, as I've commented, tentative conversations that we've had concerning the possibility of church planting, a very reasonable and entirely healthy concern has been expressed. Well, here we are, talking about planting churches in another place. What about our success, or what about what we have done here where we are already? If we have been unable to reach out effectively where we are now, how can we aspire to go elsewhere? And that, I think, is an entirely reasonable concern and question to pose. I'm reminded also of a story that perhaps illustrates this somewhat anecdotally, and it relates to a group of young people in Moyabamba. And this is many, many years ago.

And they were young people not from the Presbyterian church that we were involved in, but another local evangelical congregation. And these teenagers, I think it was a group of maybe a dozen teenagers, they were very keen, they were very committed, and that is entirely commendable. And they wanted to do great things for God. They had been inspired by perhaps some who had come to visit them. And this group of teenagers decided that they were going to go to India. This was the vision that they'd had, this was the objective that they had, that they would go to India. They didn't think it necessary to share this plan with their parents, but they simply got together, got their things together, and they headed off. They made it about, well, 20 miles down the road, at which point the parents discovered that they were missing, and search parties were arranged, and they were discovered. Their journey didn't really get very far. The reason I make the point is, I wonder how many of these teenagers heading to India as missionaries had spoken to their friends at school about Jesus. Now, I don't know the answer to that question, but the point is well made, I hope. Yes, God is looking for men and women from this congregation,

[23 : 38] I'm sure, that He would call and send crossing frontiers as missionaries of the cross, but He is likely to call those who are already involved in serving and in witnessing for Him where they are, and indeed, those who serve in congregations already engaged in missionary service on their own doorstep. Well, what about us? How many of us here in Bon Accord are involved in any work of the congregation that involves face-to-face contact with those outside the congregation? And I suspect that perhaps very few of us are engaged in ministry of that kind. So, it's a taught church. It's a witnessing church. It's also, and perhaps this is of not pivotal importance, it's really just descriptive of what happened to be the case, in a sense, of Antioch, but worth mentioning in the passing. This was also a very diverse church, a diverse congregation. Now, though it's unwise and perhaps dangerous to arrive at dogmatic conclusions from the limited information provided by the names given to the teachers and prophets there described in verse 1 of chapter 13, it does at the very least suggest that the leadership, and it would seem reasonable to presume the congregation over which they presided, was a very diverse leadership, both ethnically and socially. We just quickly look through the names. Barnabas, well, he was from Cyprus. Simeon and Lucius are both very probably African, presumably from North Africa. Manahen was brought up, we're told, in Herod's palace. So, in terms of his social background, very much from the powerful or upper classes. And then we have Saul from Tarsus, a very diverse group in many senses. And of course, that diversity really just reflected the city in which they moved and witnessed. And this diversity, I imagine, and I'm perhaps not willing to go further than say I imagine, this diversity made them more open to the matter of crossing borders and continents. They already were such a diverse group. They came from many different countries and indeed continents. This was no ethnically homogeneous enclave busily trying to preserve its own identity. It's interesting to note also in the passing that this diversity and this background of the leaders, in turn, guided in a measure the first missionary journey. Notice where they first set sail to, Paul and Barnabas. Where did they first set sail to? You might imagine, well, the Holy Spirit has called them in such a vivid and dramatic way. Presumably, he told them where to go. Well, we're not actually told if he did specifically tell them where to go. But we do know where they did go. They went to

Cyprus. That was their first port of call. Now, is it a coincidence that Barnabas, one of the two missionaries, was from Cyprus? And so it's a perfectly reasonable first port of call. They know that they have to leave Antioch. They have to cross borders, in this case, get in a boat and go overseas.

Where do they go? Well, they go to Cyprus. Barnabas knows Cyprus. He presumably has connections in Cyprus. He has contacts in Cyprus. And so we don't need to get overly mystical and spiritual as regards the manner in which God directs them. The very diversity serves them as they would then proceed to missionary endeavor. So this church was a diverse church, and a church meaningfully engaged in local mission should in time certainly reflect the diversity of the community it is in. Now, here, some communities are more diverse than others. And so if we are located in a community that is not very diverse, then it's unreasonable to think that a church would be very diverse. But in our case, in Aberdeen, we do live in a very diverse city. And it ought to be the case that as we engage in mission and ministry, that should be reflected in the composition of our own congregation. And if that is not so,

I think it's reasonable that questions would need to be asked as to why that is so. A growing feature of the church scene in Britain are the ethnic or immigrant churches. And to some extent, these churches are the most vibrant sector within, certainly, evangelicalism in the United Kingdom. And yet I wonder, and I simply pose the question, I wonder what Paul would have made of Nigerian churches or Korean churches.

Now, of course, it's easy to point the finger at others, but what about us? What about the composition and identity of this congregation? Are we simply a highland church? Are we content to be just that and no more?

[28 : 57] Just to illustrate this rather humorously, on the last night of the emergency night shelter that we have been involved in over the winter, the lady from Bethany who was responsible and who had come on many occasions here to Bon Accord was a lady called Edna. Now, Edna is a resident here in Aberdeen, but originally from Africa. I'm not sure which country in Africa. And on the final evening, she discovered we had met just in the passing on one or two previous occasions, but on the final evening, she discovered that I was the minister. And I've discovered more and more that it's often the case that brethren from Africa have a very high view of the pastor or the minister. And she was quite mortified that she had met me previously, but hadn't known that I was the pastor. And so she approaches me very deferentially and says, oh, I didn't know you were the pastor. But the point really I'm getting to is she then asked me, she said, and are you from the Isle of Lewis?

And I goes, not guilty. And not that there's anything wrong, of course, from being from the Isle of Lewis. But it was interesting. This was her perception. To be part of this congregation, that's where you're from. That is the identity of this congregation as far as she could tell.

Now, I simply have to congratulate those who are from the Isle of Lewis who were helping at the night shelter, because obviously she had spoken to you and you had innocently told her where you were from. And of course, you have every right to do so. But the point is that's the conclusion she came to.

And it does rather beg the question, to what extent do we reflect the community where God has placed us? But moving on, and I simply want to briefly mention two other things concerning this church more briefly. This church at Antioch, this missionary church, this church that God saw fit to fix his eyes on as he would call men to serve overseas was a worshipping church. In verse 2, we're told that the congregation—and I think it reasonable to understand the reference there in verse 2 to they—is not a limited reference to the leaders who have just been mentioned, but rather to the congregation—while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said.

The congregation gathered to worship. But this is not what it appears. To describe the church at Antioch as a worshipping church, again, you might respond, well, is there any other kind? It's inconceivable to imagine a church that does not engage in worship. But I think the particular point that I think we can make here derives from the peculiar or unusual, uncommon perhaps would be a better word, verb used by Luke, translated for us there in verse 2 as worshipping, while they were worshipping. The Greek verb used by Luke is the verb *leiturgeo*, to serve or to minister, from which we get our English word liturgy. And it's a verb that is used only here in the New Testament in this sense of to worship, or in any case translated in this way, while they were worshipping the Lord. And it would seem to be that what is being suggested by the use of this verb is that Luke is recognizing that the Christians in Antioch were, as they gathered to pray, serving God, ministering. This verb, *leiturgeo*, would be found in the Subturgent, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, on many occasions describing the work of the priests. And so, as Luke uses the verb here, he would seem to be pointing very particularly to a ministry of prayer, where the New Testament is, as priests of the New Covenant gather to pray to God. It's asked that in the Old Testament had been largely the domain, though not exclusively, certainly, of the priests. Now all believers can minister, can serve, but in this particular way, in praying. And that the reference is particularly to prayer, and that what we have here described in verse 2 is not an ordinary church service, as we might imagine as we read they were worshipping. Rather, it was a specific occasion when the Christians had gathered to pray. That is reinforced by what is then said, while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting. For we know that fasting was not a regular activity in the sense of a program, weekly activity, but was something that would have been done for a particular purpose. And so, the congregation would determined to fast in order that they might pray, and that they might pray for something very particular.

[34 : 01] And is it not reasonable to suggest, at any rate, that they had gathered to fast and to pray over this particular matter of how they might engage in missionary service? You see, they've been taught that this is something they must do. Paul and Barnabas have just got back from Jerusalem, and they come back, and they inform the church. It's all agreed. The brothers in Jerusalem are in agreement that we will be involved in reaching the Gentiles. I, as Saul in particular, as Paul, and as part of this congregation, this is my particular ministry. And so, there's this sense of expectation. Well, how are we going to do this? And so, they say, well, what should we do? Well, let's seek God's face. Let's seek His direction. And so, they gather to pray and to fast that God would speak to them, that God would guide them, as to the manner in which they can be involved in this missionary service.

So, what might appear to be a seemingly random and unexpected appearance of the Holy Spirit on the scene, there as we read the first verses of chapter 13, giving directions is perhaps not as spontaneous as it might appear. Rather, God is responding to the believers as they gather, seeking His direction, seeking opportunity to serve Him in this way. And so, we conclude that God calls men from a congregation actively and intensely seeking His direction and expectant for the opportunity to engage in missionary service. And so, we ask the question, is this true of us? But then, finally, we can note that this church at Antioch was also an obedient church. God takes note of this congregation gathered to fast and pray and seek God's direction. He notices, He hears, He is pleased, I am sure, and He is not silent.

Direction is provided. If indeed, as we're suggesting, they were gathered for that very purpose, well, if that is so, it is certainly the case that the Lord responds and provides the direction requested. 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.

Now, it's unclear as to the manner in which the Holy Spirit directed His message. And again, that isn't our primary concern this evening. We read what is said, and we note it is in the first person, set apart for me those who I have called. This is undoubtedly a direct revelation from God, and yet it seems reasonable to conclude that this direct revelation is communicated by means of one of the prophets who we are already told was part of the congregation there in Antioch.

In any case, the congregation are clear that God has spoken, though interestingly, and I think revealingly, very sparse in terms of details. What we are told at any rate is simply God indicating that Barnabas and Saul are being set apart for this work. But where they are to go, how they are to be involved in this work, the details of it, there is no mention. And I wonder if it's not the case that this was something that they had to work out for themselves, as it were. God, of course, would direct them, but by more ordinary means for them to identify the route they were going to take and the cities they were going to visit, and so on and so forth. Well, that's not to deny that on other occasions God gave directly more specific directions to his missionaries. But God speaks. The people, the congregation, hear, and they obey. And this obedience is at the individual level of the very man mentioned, Barnabas and Saul. They are willing. They are up for it. It's possible that they had already been given some prior indication by God. Certainly, that was true of Saul, and the language used suggests that. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

[38 : 29] The suggestion being that perhaps they already were aware, but here now, in the context of the congregation that they are part of, this call is confirmed. So, Paul and Barnabas are willing.

They're willing to give of themselves unreservedly, and that is the demand. Set apart for me, says the Holy Spirit. Set apart for me unreservedly, fully. I don't want part of their time. I don't want some of their gifts. I want them in all that they are. Set apart for me, these men. They no longer are the owners of their own destiny. They belong to me. Set them apart for the work that I have for them.

So, the men themselves are obedient, but the congregation, too, must obey. In a spirit of self-sacrifice, they must hand over for missionary service their very best. You see, Barnabas and Saul were, in the measure that we can speak in these terms, these were the very best that they had.

They were the most able man, the most spiritual man, the most gifted man. And yet, these were precisely the men that the congregation at Antioch would have to say, well, we're willing for them to go. We're willing for them to leave us and go elsewhere. We would like to hold on to them.

We'll be sorry to see them go. We enjoy their teaching and their preaching, and they're wonderful men, but if God is calling them elsewhere, then we are willing, we are prepared for them to go. And so, there is an obedience at the level of the men themselves, but also of the congregation.

[40 : 01] What about us? Are we listening to God's voice as He speaks to us, as He does today through His Word? Will we, and are we willing to send our best men and women to this task of the mission field?

Would we be prepared to lose those we consider to be at the core of the life and witness of the congregation, as they might be sent to plant a congregation, a church elsewhere, or embark on missionary service, indeed, in other lands? Well, this church in Antioch was an obedient church.

They asked for God's direction. They heard His voice, and they obeyed the directions that He gave them. And unitedly, no dissenters, it would appear. They all concur in participating in this missionary project, a participation that finds visible and symbolic confirmation in what we read in verse 3.

So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. This, what we have here, not ordination of these men. Rather, the important would seem to be more in regard to those who are placing their hands. In this way, the congregation, or those who represent the congregation, are identifying with this men and saying, we go with you in a sense. You're going to go, and we're going to remain, but you go with our blessing. You go with our support. You go in the assurance that we will pray for you. And so, they place their hands and send them away on the mission that they have been called to. A church enthusiastic and united in sending out men and women to the mission field, that we too might be such a church.

But if we are to be such a church, if we are to be a congregation that sends out missionaries to start a new congregation, perhaps in the city or beyond the city boundaries, perhaps some to cross borders and oceans to preach the Lord Jesus, when might we have that thrilling opportunity to have here in Bonacorda a commissioning service for sending such, like the one described here in Antioch? Well, perhaps before answering that question, there are prior questions to be asked and answered. Are we a taught and teachable church? Are we already a witnessing church? Are we, as a result of being a witnessing church, a church that reflects the diversity of the community where God has placed us? Are we a worshiping, a praying church, actively seeking God's direction, and the opportunity and privilege of being and sending missionaries?

[42 : 58] Are we a listening and obedient church? Maybe these are the questions we first have to grapple with before considering the other questions posed. Well, may God help us to ask the questions and to answer them honestly. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the time of your prayer.