

A Christ-Centered Community

Acts 13:1-3

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Sometimes, you hear people label churches as contemporary, traditional, purpose-driven; seeker sensitive; fellowship or service driven, charismatic and so forth. People label churches based on what they see happening in those communities. All these labels don't matter for a church if the community is not centered on Jesus. If you'd like to know what a Christ-centered church looks like, just take a look at the Antioch church in the first century.

Antioch during this time was the 3rd largest city of the Roman Empire with a population around 600 000. This city was known for its political power and commercial trade. Like most cities, it was radically diverse (Greeks, Syrians, Africans and Jews). This city was located in what we know today as Syria. Antioch was the place where the disciples of Jesus were given the name "**Christians**" **Acts 11:26**

This church was started by men from Cyprus and Cyrene who had gone to Antioch running away from the persecution in Jerusalem. (**Acts 11:20-30**). When the church in Jerusalem heard that the gospel had reached Antioch, they sent Barnabas to check it out and he stayed there; then he went to Tarsus to look for Paul. Barnabas and Paul became leaders of this church. This church was a Christ-centered community.

Acts 13:1-3

The first thing we learn in this chapter about the Antioch church is that it had prophets and teachers. Here are the names of these prophets and teachers.

Barnabas: his name used to be Joseph from Cyprus. He was part of the church in Jerusalem. (**Acts 4:36**) He was known for his generosity. He was the one who introduced Paul to the apostles. (**Acts 9:26-29**), and he brought Paul to Antioch. (**Acts 11:25**)

Simeon called "Niger" This word meant black in the first century. Simeon was a black man. He was probably from Nigeria. This is the only time we hear about him in the Bible.

Lucius of Cyrene: He was one of the Cyrenians who spoke the word to Greeks and came to Antioch due to persecution. (**Acts 11:19-20**). He is mentioned in **Rom.16:21** as evidence that he became a companion of Paul and was with Paul when he wrote the letter to the Romans.

Manaen: was brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. Some versions call him "a close friend of Herod", or "foster brother." This suggests that Manaen was educated and had royal and political connection.

Saul (Paul): used to persecute the church. His life changed when he met Jesus. He was trained under the strict sect of Judaism before he became a disciple of Jesus. He wrote most of the New Testament books (letters).

What is significant about this group? They were very diverse.

A Christ-centered community embraces diversity.

-There was diversity in background; racial diversity, socio-economic and political diversity. And yet they were all part of the same team. This was the first multi-ethnic church in the first

century. This diversity was reflected in the leadership. ***A Christ-centered community breaks walls of prejudice.*** They understood what it means to be one in Christ. Jesus' mission to his disciples is to reach all nations (all people groups no matter their background, race or economic positions. They all matter to God)

A Christ-center community constantly seeks God's presence. (v.2)

-While they were worshiping the Lord, and fasting. While they had come together to seek God in worship and fasting. Sometimes, we seek God when we are in trouble, not because we truly want to spend time with him. This was a brand-new church and even before they planned their next move; the leaders came together to seek God's direction. ***It is during this time of surrendered worship, prayer and fasting that you get to calibrate your focus.*** A lot of people want to hear from God, but they have not learned to discern God's voice in the midst of the noise; they don't spend enough time in God's presence. They get distracted easily because they have not learned to give God their undivided attention.

It was during this time that they were able to hear God's voice. They distinctively heard God's Spirit say, *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

A Christ-centered community constantly seeks God's presence through sincere worship, fasting and prayer. God had said that those who seek him will find him when they seek him with all their heart. ***A lot of times, churches do lots of things on their own; inspired by their own desire or agendas, but not by God's presence.***

It is by seeking God's presence that you'd know what he expects of you and you will know what to do on a given situation. ***There is no app for this.*** (Bible reading, study, prayer, worship and fasting)

These men heard God's voice in their midst in their meeting. While they were worshiping and fasting.

A Christ-centered community responds God's call to mission.

-It is mission-minded, missional.

God had a job to Barnabas and Saul which meant they would have to leave the group. God's mission was to send them to other places to preach the gospel.

This was the first church to send off missionaries to other places. (v.3) The church prayed for Barnabas and Saul, laid their hands on them and let them go. Antioch was happy to fulfill God's mission, even if God's mission involved splitting the group of leaders in the church. God's mission is beyond your church; God's mission is global and God expects the church to get aboard with it. A Christ-centered church responds to Christ's mission in the world-to reach those who don't know Jesus.

As followers of Jesus we are to be Christ-centered. Christ-centered people belong to a Christ-centered community. A community that embraces diversity in different areas of life; one that seeks God's presence through devoted worship, fasting and prayer.

Christ-centered communities respond God's call to missions. To seek and save the lost. They are not inwardly focused but outwardly. A community is only as good as the people who make it. If the community is Christ-centered is because its people are Christ-centered.