

September 26, 2021 by Steve Brandon



The Fathers of Christian Missions

Acts 13:1-3

1. Expect Great Things (verses 1-2).

2. Attempt Great Things (verse 3).

William Carey is known as the “Father of Modern Missions.” Do you know his story?

He was born in 1761 in the small, rural village in the middle of England named Paulerspury. His family lived “a poor and simple life.”^[1] As a young boy, he loved botany and wanted to make a living as a gardener, but his skin was too sensitive to the sun. So, at the age of 14, his father connected him with a shoemaker, where he began as an apprentice to learn the trade.

While learning the art of making shoes, William Carey learned far more. One of his fellow apprentices was a Bible-believing young man who had a genuine relationship with the risen Christ. His name was John Warr. This young man had a huge influence upon William Carey, who was a lukewarm Anglican at the time. During their days in the shoe shop, as they talked, one of their topics was religion. John Warr would use the Bible to point William Carey to the truth about Jesus and his sacrifice upon the cross for our sins, and his call to us to repent and believe in Christ. William Carey would argue that the church of England was correct in its practices. However, the Lord was working on his heart.

In 1778, when Carey was 17 years old, England called a national day of prayer. The war with the rebellious American colonies was turning bad and the nation knew that they needed to turn to the Lord. And so, William Carey attended a Congregational worship service on that day and heard a man preach from Hebrews 13:13, Hebrews 13:13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. Carey would later write of this day, “I concluded that the Church of England, as established by law, was the camp in which all were protected from the scandal of the cross, and that I ought to bear the reproach of Christ among dissenters.”^[2] His life was forever changed, as he left the church of England, and began to attend a Congregationalist church.

Carey had always loved reading and learning, even if he had minimal formal education. But now, with a new-found vibrant faith in Jesus, the Lord gave him a love for the Bible. He began reading it and reading it over and over. He even began learning Greek, so that he could read the New Testament in the original language. The Lord was working on his life, to conform him to the image of Christ. When he was 22, he was baptized and joined up with the Particular Baptists. Two years later (in 1785), Carey was invited to become the preacher of a small, dying Baptist church. For the next several years, he ministered to the people of that small church, while still making shoes to supply his income.

Apart from the Bible, one of his greatest areas of interest was geography. He read much about the nations of the world, even creating a world map that he hung up in his shoe-making shop. He learned about the populations of other nations. He learned about the religions of the world. He learned about what was going in the world through books and the international sections of newspapers. He had a great heart for the people of the world.

He began to preach and teach about our responsibility to carry out the command that was given to the apostles, “Go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). He began to preach and teach that it was our duty to carry this out. This wasn’t simply a command given to the apostles. But it is applicable to us as well. He began to promote the idea that we should send people to those nations where Christ had not yet been proclaimed! To us today, this seems right and appropriate and natural. But not so in Carey’s day.

One story tells of how he was resisted. After preaching on the themes of missions and how God calls us today to “make disciples of all the nations,” by sending out missionaries to the nations. a fellow minister rebuked him saying, “Young man, sit down, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he’ll do it without consulting you or me.” (Whether the story is true or not, that was the sentiment among his Baptist friends. They had an unfounded passivism when it came to missionary endeavors).

But William Carey’s persistence in pushing this issue began to sway the day. At an annual Baptist minister’s meeting in 1791, several sermons were preached which supported his position of sending out missionaries to go to foreign lands were preached. Yet, at that meeting, Carey’s proposal to organize a missionary society was denied.

Before the same meeting the next year, William Carey wrote a book entitled, “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.”^[3] It wasn’t a long book. Some have even called it a “pamphlet.” It was some 87 small pages, You can read it online out loud in less than 3 hours. Though the book was a small book, Yet, it was an influential book.

The book has five sections. The first section was an exposition of Matthew 28:19, “Go and teach all nations.” Carey argues that this command was not merely for the apostles, as some were saying. Rather, it is a command biding upon us today. The second section was a history of missionary activity, starting with Jesus, focusing heavily on the book of Acts, but including some history examples of missionary activity in the church since apostolic times. The third section was a data dump of the countries of the world, along with their populations and dominant religions. The fourth section was devoted to answering objections to those who think that people ought not to travel to other nations with the gospel, including the distance one must travel, and the danger of being harmed along the way, and difficulty of obtaining their

language, and the funds it would take to take on such an effort. The fifth and final section of the book, was a practical section, explaining how such missionary activity could take place, by forming a society of those who were interested in promoting such an endeavor.

The publication of the book coincided with the annual Baptist ministers' meeting in the spring of 1792. At that meeting, William Carey was giving the opportunity to preach. He preached a sermon based on Isaiah 54:2-3, "Enlarge the place of your tent. And let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out. Do not hold back; Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities." A text that is a prayer for God's work to be expanded, even to the nations. We don't have a manuscript of his message. But we know that he summed up his message with his two-fold expression: "Expect great things!" and "Attempt great things." That is, "Expect great things from God" and "Attempt great things for God."

Five months after this meeting, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in the home of Mrs. Beeby Wallis, in Kettering, England, on October 2, 1792. That society promoted the evangelization of all countries in the world by raising funds, and by sending missionaries. While this organization seems common-place today, it was ground-breaking in Carey's day. In fact, we can trace the plethora of missions organizations today to the Baptist Missionary Society in one way or another. This is why Carey is often called, "The Father of Modern Missions."

Soon after the missionary society was formed, they heard of a man named John Thomas. He was a former surgeon, who had recently lived in India, working for the East India Company. While there, he ministered to those in Bengal. He was the perfect candidate to send, as he had some familiarity to with the ways of those in India. The society was willing to send him, and a suitable companion. They asked William Carey if he was willing to go with John Thomas to India. And according to the minutes of the meeting of the Missionary Society, "[Carey] readily answered in the affirmative."^[4]

And so, in April of 1793, John Thomas and William Carey departed for India. It was not easy. It was not easy at all. In facing the difficulties, John Thomas quickly abandoned William Carey and re-established his surgery practice. To make a long, long story very, very short, William Carey went to India and never came home. He spent over 40 years in faithful labor for the Lord. He started schools for children and eventually for theological studies. He translated the Bible into seven different languages. Through his ministry in India, some 700 Indians were converted. While that may not seem like many in a nation of millions and millions of people. The foundation was strong, and God used these 700 men to multiply Carey's ministry in India. His legacy is still felt today.

As one man said, "[Carey] saw India not as a foreign country to be exploited, but as his heavenly Father's land to be loved and saved."^[5] That's why William Carey is called, "The Father of Modern Missions." That's why he was instrumental in establishing The Baptist Missionary Society. He loved the heathen people of the world and had a heart to see them come to know the Lord.

My point in telling you about William Carey this morning isn't to focus upon his difficult ministry in India. Rather, it's to point out the efforts that he went through to go out to reach the heathen in the first place. We see a similar heart in our text this morning: Acts 13:1-3.

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 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." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

The title of my message this morning is this: "The Fathers of Christian Missions." Those leaders in the church in Antioch played the same role as William Carey did. When the church was content to stay at home, and let the gospel naturally spread out, we see the leaders in Antioch seeking something different. They were intentional about fulfilling the great commission. They sent out their leaders to go and evangelize the unreached peoples of the world. Indeed, we see here the birth of Christian Missions.

Just as William Carey helped to found "The Baptist Missionary Society" in 1792, so also did these men formed a society. They formed "The Biblical Missions Society." Although they didn't really see themselves as a society, nevertheless, they gathered together and sent out their best men to preach the gospel to the heathen, the very thing that aligned with the heart of William Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society. The heart of these men in Acts 13 for the heathen to be saved transformed the entire direction of the early church. It gave a missionary focus to all the New Testament. In verses 1-2, we see our first point,

1. Expect Great Things (verses 1-2).

I trust that you can recognize the verbiage of my point, which comes from the famous sermon that William Carey preached on Isaiah 54:2-3, "Enlarge the place of your tent." compelling his ministerial friends to seek the Lord in expectation of what he will do. That's exactly what we see happening in verse 2. We see them ...

Acts 13:2

... worshiping the Lord and fasting,

The New American Standard Bible here says that they were "serving the Lord." The 1995 New American Standard Bible says that they were "ministering to the Lord." It's translated this way because the translators are wrestling with the word used here. It's a priestly word, describing the priestly activities, of bringing a bringing an animal to the Lord, laying hands on the bull or goat, praying for the Lord to accept the sacrifice. cutting its throat, and laying it bare upon the altar, and burning it up as a fragrant offering. That's "serving" the Lord. That's "ministering" to the Lord.

Obviously, those in Antioch weren't offering animal sacrifice. The word here, is used metaphorically of worship. That's why the ESV rightly translates it, "worshiping the Lord." But it's a bit more than simply "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16), which we often think of as "worshiping the Lord." Certainly, it included their praying as well. If anything, the idea here includes their sacrificial

service and willingness to follow the Lord at all costs. It means that they were whole-heartedly engaged in the worship of the Lord.

We see their by the second activity mentioned in verse 2: “fasting.” That is, abstaining from food. which means that their worship was more than simply an hour on Sunday morning. there was more too it. Perhaps it was an all-day prayer meeting. Perhaps it was over several days, meeting each evening for worship and prayer and Scripture. Perhaps this went on for several weeks. Whatever form their “worship” took, it was intense. They were seeking the Lord, They were “expecting great things” from the Lord.

You say, “Who was expecting great things?” Their names are mentioned there in verse 1.

Acts 13:1

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

We see two titles mentioned: prophets and teachers. We see five names given: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul.

We know quite a bit about two of these men: Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas was sent from the church in Jerusalem to help the church in Antioch (Acts 11:22). Barnabas, having surveyed the situation in Antioch, traveled to Tarsus and find Saul to return with him to help the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). And they both were appointed to deliver a financial gift to Jerusalem to help those in the hurting church make it through the famine. And now they have returned from Jerusalem (Acts 12:25) to Antioch. As we continue to work our way through the book of Acts, these two men, Barnabas and Saul will prove to be crucial in the task of beginning the evangelization of the world.

We know less about the other three men, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen. We know Simeon’s nickname. He was called Niger. That is, “Black.” He was called “The Black Man.” That wasn’t a racial slur in any way, it was merely a depiction of his complexion. From this, we can derive that he was from Northern Africa. That’s about all that we know about this man. Some have speculated that this is the same Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus’ cross (Matthew 27:32). But that’s all it is: speculation.

Of Lucian, we simply know that he was from Cyrene, that is, Northern Africa. Perhaps he was one of those described in Acts 11:20. Acts 11:20 but there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus

Of Manaen, we read that he was “a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch.” However, it was probably more than a child-hood friend. He was a foster brother of Herod Antipas. That’s why the New American Standard translates this phrase, “Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.” This “Herod” is not to be confused with Herod Agrippa of chapter 12 who died of worms. Herod Antipas reigned in Galilee during the days of Jesus (Acts 4:27; Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 3:1). Now as a foster brother of Herod, this man had many political connections.

All that to say, that these five men mentioned in verse 1 are high-power men, leading the church, leading the charge for Biblical missions to begin.

Now, I’m not sure that they had gathered to seek the Lord fervently to confirm their desire to send people out, as did the Baptist Missionary Society in William Carey’s day. I believe that they were much more open, to seeking what the Lord wanted with them. They were simply “expecting great things” from the Lord as they served him and fasted for direction in their lives and in the life of the church. And God came through.

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.”

Unmistakable direction was given to these men from the Lord. The Holy Spirit spoke to them. The Holy Spirit identified two of these five men as called out for a specific task. Now, there is some difficulty in knowing exactly how the Holy Spirit communicated this to the men. But I take it as straight-forward as the text puts out. The Holy Spirit spoke audibly. In other words, if you were in that room at that time, you would have heard a voice from heaven saying, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

This is far different from what most people mean when they say, “God told me that I should go to this place” or “God told me that I should take this job” or “God told me that I should marry this girl” or “God told me that I should talk with this person. What people mean by that is that they have felt stirred in their inner being to do these things, as what feels right to them to walk in obedience to the Lord. But this is different than what we see here in verse 2. In verse 2, we read of the audible voice of the Holy Spirit directing these men what to do. This could be expected in the days of the Bible, when you had prophets (as mentioned in verses 1), who received direct revelation from the Lord, to speak clearly of his will. You could expect the Holy Spirit to speak audibly to them.

Now, in verse 3, we get some clarity regarding exactly what the Holy Spirit meant. He meant that Barnabas and Saul should go out to the nations and tell others of Jesus.

Acts 13:3

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

They fasted some more. They prayed some more. Then, they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, as a sign of their affirmation for the work of evangelism among the nations. This is my second point.

2. Attempt Great Things (verse 3).

Our first point, taken from William Carey's sermon was "Expect Great Things (verses 1-2)." My second point is "Attempt Great Things (verse 3)." Now, it's important here that you see the order of these two points. You don't "attempt great things" for God first and then "expect great things" from God afterwards. No. You "expect great things" and then, and only then, do you "attempt great things."

That's what we see here in Acts 13. These people were together and praying and fasting and seeking the Lord expecting that he would do great things. And then, and only then, do they attempt great things for God.

This is in line with the famous quote often attributed to John Bunyan: "You can do more than pray after you have prayed but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." In other words, prayer must come first. You must seek the Lord first. And then, after seeking the Lord, you are prepared to go forth do his will. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). That's why it is so important to connect first with the Lord, praying and expecting great things from him. And then, and only then, you go out in his power, attempting great things from him. The other way around doesn't work. It's not that we try, and then ask for God's blessing. No, we seek the Lord first, We seek his blessing. We seek his grace. We seek his power. We seek him to be with us. And then, we go out.

The purpose statement of our church gets the order right. "Enjoying His Grace; Extending His Glory." We first, "Enjoy the Grace of God" in our lives. And then, and only then to do we go out to "Extend the Glory of God."

One tangible way that I seek to do this takes place every Monday evening. As most all of you know, Monday is my pool night. It's my opportunity to go out and mix with those who don't know Christ. And every time that I drive to the pool hall, I'm praying up a storm. I'm praying for gospel opportunities. I'm praying out loud, "God, I'm coming here tonight to play pool. But I pray your hand of blessing upon my interactions. I pray for opportunities to speak forth your gospel."

Well this past Monday, I happened to meet someone new to me. I had never met him before. Well, we were playing some games together. At one point, my new friend was racking the balls. Then, another guy, who sort of knows me, was walking by and said, "You had better be careful what you say, he's a priest." At that point, the guy I was playing with seemed a bit startled as he remembered some of his language that he just used. He looked up at me and said, "Is that true?" I said, "No. I'm not a priest. But I am a pastor. I pastor a church in town." Then, as the guy who was spreading the rumor was now across the room at another table, I shouted out to him, "Hey, to be clear, I am not a priest! I'm a pastor. A priest brings people to God. A pastor points people to God. And those who call themselves priests today can't really bring you to God. But a pastor can point you to God." I was able to shout that out to all around playing pool. And there was some healthy banter back and forth.

Later, this man who I was playing with, used the name of the Lord in vain, and quickly apologized to me. I said, "You don't need to apologize to me. You need to apologize to the Lord. But know that Jesus offers forgiveness." I'm praying that as I see him over the next few weeks, that the Lord will soften his heart."

But that's what we do. We go out with the gospel. That's what we see here in chapter 13. We see the apostles going out with the gospel. Next week, we will look at the following verses:

Acts 13:4-5

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

Next week, we will look at where they went and what they did. (You can see their journeys in the book of maps at the end of your Bible). But the point this week is simple: they went out!

By the way, this is a turn in the book of Acts. Do you remember the purpose statement in the book of Acts? It comes in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In chapters 1-7 of Acts, we saw the church in Jerusalem, living in the power of the Holy Spirit. In chapters 8-12 of Acts, we saw the church begin to spread out to Judea and Samaria. But now, in chapter 13, we will see the spread of the gospel "to the end of the earth."

The rest of the book of Acts will be devoted to telling us about the various missionary journeys taken by the apostle Paul. The first journey is in chapters 13 and 14. The second missionary journey begins in chapter 15 and ends in chapter 18. The third missionary journey begins in chapter 18 and takes us through the end of the book of Acts.

And this marks a big change in the plan of God. Israel was a "come and see" religion. Come and see our God. Come to our temple, where we worship. See the building. See the priests. See the sacrifices. See the curtain that keeps us from our holy God. "Queen of Sheba, come and see the glories of Solomon!" (1 Kings 10).

But that's not the New Testament church. The New Testament church is a "Go and Tell" religion. We are called to go. We are called to go out. We are called to be in the world, not of the world, certainly. But we are called to be lights to the world. We are called to shine forth the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Do you want to be a light in the world? Then don't complain. Many people in the world complain. They find something wrong in the world and seek to point it out to everyone by complaining. But Paul explains that if we don't complain, we will shine forth as different than the world, as lights in the world, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14-15).

They went out. We are called to go out. Are you going out? Where are you going out? Are you praying? Are you pleading? Are you expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God?

For most of us, going out means across the street. But for some, it may mean leaving our country to help those overseas. This was William

Carey's heart, "The Father of Modern Missions." This was the heart of those leaders in Antioch, "The Fathers of Christian Missions"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 26, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Galli, Mark. "*The Man Who Wouldn't Give Up*." Christian History, Issue 36 (Volume XI, No. 4), 1992. Much of the information that I researched about William Carey comes from this excellent magazine.

[2] Galli, Mark. "*William Carey Converts*." Christian History, Issue 36 (Volume XI, No. 4), 1992.

[3] You can find the text of William Carey's book in many places on the internet. Here is one place:
<https://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>.

[4] Galli, Mark. "*The Man Who Wouldn't Give Up*."

[5] Vishal Mangalwadi as quoted in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Carey_\(missionary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Carey_(missionary)).