Acts Chapter 13 Verses 1 - 2a

* That’s an **important** phrase…, ***“They ministered TO the Lord.”*** I wrote that down, used the word *“important”* and then was a little grieved because *“important”* just doesn’t get it. That phrase is ***crucial***…it is ***decisive***…an ***imperative***…**it’s a healing phrase.** What am I talking about? There are many that are mindful to and have a great heart to minister **FOR** the Lord, but there are few…needle in a haystack type few…that are mindful to and have a heart and stomach to minister **TO** the Lord. And there is a distinct difference FOR SURE.
* Ezekiel 44:10-11 says, *“The Levites who went far from Me, who strayed away from Me after their idols,* ***they shall not come near to Me to minister to Me*** *but they shall minister to the people.”* Then in verse 15, *“But the priests who kept charge of my sanctuary when the people went astray from Me, they shall come near to minister to Me. They shall stand before Me; they shall enter My sanctuary;* ***they shall minister to Me;*** *they shall keep My charge.”*
* Those who desire to serve the Lord, (which should really be every Christian and certainly EVERY man or woman that is in some sort of formal ministry or church position), every believer who has been freed from sin by the **hugely high price** of Jesus’ blood, **remember** this lest you burn out, become frustrated and grieved, lest you hurt those that God has privileged you to tend, most importantly, remember this lest you blaspheme the name of Jesus by your **thick-headed** and **hard-hearted** carnality…remember…ministery TO God is the true work, not ministry to the people and certainly not ministry to yourself…
* Later in Ezekiel 44, for the priests that minister to God, I LOVE THIS, no wool garments…only linen, **no sweat**…literally…no clothing upon them that causes sweat. Hair well trimmed, **they look GOOD**! Solid marriages. And they know and teach the difference between holy and unholy…they rightfully judge and God Himself is their inheritance. He is theirs…He pours Himself upon and within them…
* This subtlety is ***crucial***…it is ***decisive***…it is an ***imperative***…**it’s healing** and yet I know so many that minister, even today and after today will continue to minister for the Lord and not to Him. ***You are so missing out.*** You remain unhealed. You will grow weary. You will burn out. You will certainly burn out on specific people…you will suffer and you will grieve as God resists the proud…even the proud that do His will…with lips that honor Him but a heart that is far from Him…why?
* I know why…because you *(have a problem with)* hate humility and you hate gentleness…oh not when it’s given to you…but when you are asked to give it. You hate positivity and kindness…and *going out of your way* service…love that is simply given…oh you don’t hate those things when they’re given to you…just when you’re asked to give them…and even now you’re growing more angry with me as I unsheathe this truth and argue in your heart towards what I’m saying, *“I don’t hate those things…”* My response to you is a call to reality…**prove it.** Show me with your past week, month, year, show me with your ministry that ***you love the things that God loves***…so few have a heart and stomach to minister TO the Lord but that is where you’re near to God…running and not growing weary…**setting folks free and setting an example**, a beacon of light, a bright lighthouse in the midst of the storm of their lives…that is where you are healed…
* I know you have good intentions…good intentions are always a component of folks ministering to other people…but I’m telling you today how to ***realize*** your intentions. Because I know you have good ones…(Amazon story)
* Many minister for the Lord but man ***leave behind the idols and minister to the Lord!*** That’s where it’s at…that is so much better! *What would He have you to do*, YES, BUT HOW would He have you to do it? What’s the focus and the goal? Why are you doing it? ***To do what’s right or to love the Lord!?*** These are the most important questions for the *joy filled, power filled, wonder filled* minister who ministers TO God rather than for Him. And all of a sudden, ministry *IS* the refresh…ministry *IS* the recharge…and through your ministry TO God you are growing in grace as you work!
* You know I was thinking about this…where in practical ministry is it always ministry **TO** the Lord…? And as I went through my mind…everything fell short. Everything could be ministry for Him…I thought of baptism and communion…but even in those ministries that are to honor the Lord, it’s easy to think that at least 1% of those things folks perhaps can do to *be seen* or to conform…but there is one ministry that is strictly ministry **to** the Lord and that’s in the giving of Tithes and Offerings.
* Here’s where perhaps those that desire to minister to Him…I can point you to this because the giving of your earthly treasure in ***this*** church is not *pass-a-plate* so that you make sure you have something to give so the person next to you thinks you’re a *real* Christian…that’s not how we do it here…it’s between you and the Lord when you give…no one else see’s and the Bible says in Matthew 6:21, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* So if you’re looking for a ministry to minister **to** the Lord in…that’s the one to start with. *From the heart flows all the issues of life* (Proverbs 4:23), so if you’re stumped at the giving of tithes and offerings…the giving of your treasure…then I would submit every other ministry leans towards **for** the Lord…rather than **to** Him…and in that is such a HUGE difference…a crucial difference…a personally decisive difference…an imperative difference…and ultimately a healing difference.

Acts Chapter 13 Verses 2 – 3

* A couple of things to note here. First, notice ***it is God who calls folks, not man.*** One does not *apply* for a position of ministry. God calls them and that call includes two things. **Separation and confirmation.**
* Notice it says here, *“Separate to Me.”* ***To separate to God one must separate from that which keeps them from God.*** And so you will see this *“thing”* about someone…this *character* about them begin to override and overrule within a person towards that calling…**if** it is God that has called them.
* Then there is recognition. A confirmation through prayer and fasting on the part of the church and especially the church overseers. Throughout this whole process we have a great guide, an excellent example, ***they are dependent on God***, *not rational…not need…not emotion*…simply the moving, the voice and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

Acts Chapter 13 Verses 4 – 9

* Here we have a **shift** from knowing him as *Saul* to knowing him as *Paul* **from here on out.** This is interesting. Saul’s name wasn’t exactly *changed.* He was *“also*” called Paul. The custom of **dual names** was common in those days. I kinda want to bring that back. I could be known as *Matt* but also known as *John Cena!* **HA!** Or *Brock*…I love that name!! **HA!** Paul was a Jew born in the Roman city of Tarsus and by all accounts, he identified with, was proud of, and went by his Jewish name Saul. But he also had a Roman name that was given to him at birth and that name was Paul.
* Here, in this scene, it’s as if *he leaves everything behind* and adopts entirely his, I’ll say *“lesser important”* name. From here on out, he will forever be known as and referred to as ***Paul***, why? We can only *investigate.* We can only really *speculate* because Paul never writes about it…maybe it’s just between him and the Lord…perhaps it’s part of Paul’s ministry to God…but even so…there are clues.
* Philippians 3, Paul writes his *long list of admirable Jewish credentials* and yet as he grows in grace, as he walks with the Lord, as he lays aside all of the idols he spent so many years *building, polishing and admiring*…even ***equipping and using***…as he lays all that down he describes himself three times in three ways.
* First, at the beginning, he calls himself the *“least of the apostles.”* 1 Corinthians 15:9. Later he refers to himself (after walking a bit more in the truth and in the grace of God) as *“less than the least of all God’s people.”* You find that in Ephesians 3:8. And then finally in 1 Timothy 1:15 he calls himself, *“the worst, or the chief among sinners.”*
* It says here that Paul was *“filled with the Holy Spirit.”* This is ultra interesting and important…at Saul’s conversion, Barnabas said that Paul would be filled with the Holy Spirit but after that, we don’t read of that filling having happened. I’m not saying it *didn’t* happen, I’m just suggesting and God is revealing an astounding and critical spiritual truth…***we don’t read of Paul being filled until he dropped the Saul…***
* This is essential and I believe this messaging is strong…this is the last time in the Bible this word for *filled* is even used! This one means, *“accomplished,”* or, *“fully furnished.”* There’s **finality** to it…and until he dropped his own greatness, until he departed his primary idol…**ministry to himself**…he wasn’t able to minister TO God…he wasn’t fully furnished…