

Acts 13:42–14:7

Gospel, Mat 7:21–29

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:42–43)

Introduction

Leadership

Leadership is a big topic. Books on it abound and it's equally a hot topic in the church. Some years ago, I sat through a series of seminars by a church growth consultant. At the very beginning, he opined with great gravitas, "The problem in the church is that there aren't enough good leaders".

Do you think that's true? It depends on how you define the words. But if I take the consultant's words at face value, I disagree strongly. There are many leaders out there.

Joel Osteen is a good leader. His church averages 52,000 attendees per week. That's a huge organization! He is no slouch, when it comes to leadership. But he is a heretic. Kenneth Copeland knows how to lead, but he is not Trinitarian. Norman Vincent Peale knew how to lead, but his Guideposts Magazine to this day has no message of the atonement in it.

Of leaders in the church, there are plenty; and those leaders have plenty of followers, too. The real issue at hand is how we define leadership and leadership that is good.

Paul's Sermon

Acts 13:16–41 contains the essence of Paul's sermon in a synagogue in southwestern Turkey, which he and Barnabas visited on this, Paul's so-called "First Missionary Journey".

Verses 42–43, at which we will be looking this morning, speak of the

immediate aftermath of Paul's sermon:

- how the people responded to Paul and Barnabas, and,
- how Paul and Barnabas responded to the people, or more to the point, how Paul and Barnabas led the people.

I will do this under two headings:

1. Leaders lead
2. Leaders follow

Leaders Lead

It's very easy to see that Paul and Barnabas are leaders. Paul had spoken a compelling message, full of conviction, clearly expressed. It certainly had an impact on those who are hearing.

The people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. (Acts 13:42)

Looking at these events through the glasses of western culture and 2000 years later, I know that this moment doesn't have quite the same impact on us. Nevertheless, try to put yourselves in the shoes of Paul and those listening.

His hearers had grown up with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. Now, here before them, someone had convincingly connected the events of the distant past with the present, with *them*, in *their* time! No wonder the people were begging; "*please* let us hear more about what you have said".

They were so impressed by what they had heard that they spread the news by word of mouth.

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. (44)

Verse 43 says that the people followed Paul and Barnabas. They followed the two disciples out of the synagogue, but it was more than just a parade. They continued to engage Paul and Barnabas. They were speaking with each other continually, perhaps in a question and answer format.

Some might have tried to run away from this kind of acclamation. Paul and Barnabas could easily have suspected that the opposition about which Luke writes in verse 45 would soon be coming.

But they are leaders. And when leaders have followers, they are compelled to lead! So when the people continue to engage them after the worship service, they speak with them. And since the people had begged Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath and speak, they returned!

Leaders have followers, or they're not leaders. And leaders are compelled to lead.

This is nothing stunning or deep. Most of us are, in some fashion, leaders. Some of us are employers or bosses. I'm a pastor. Parents lead their children. Even children lead other children!

But what makes a good leader is determined by that one whom the leader follows.

Leaders are followers

Leadership in Culture

Leaders are necessarily followers. There is no such thing as a leader who does not follow someone or something. That thing can be as selfish as personal wealth, or as manipulative as narcissistic control over others, but leaders are always followers.

In western culture, there are two sorts of leaders.

Dale Carnegie, in "How to Win Friends and Influence People" promises 12 things that his book will do for the reader, among which are these:

- Increase your popularity.
- Help you to win people to your way of thinking.
- Increase your influence, your prestige, your ability to get things done.
- Make you a better speaker, a more entertaining conversationalist.
- Help you to arouse enthusiasm among your associates.

To be fair, Carnegie is not really quite as manipulative as he sounds. But his goal is primarily focussed on outcomes and results: influencing and winning.

Steven Covey, in his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"¹ was one

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_7_Habits_of_Highly_Effective_People.

of the first modern writers on leadership to recognize an important shift in the thinking about leadership.

In studying over 200 years of literature on the concept of "success," Covey identified a very important change in the way that humans have defined success.

[Before the 1920s], the foundation of success rested upon character ethic[s] (things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule). But starting around the 1920s, the way people viewed success shifted to ... [a] "personality ethic", where success is a function of personality, public image, attitudes, and behaviors.²

Before the 1920s, leadership had a lot to do with who I am fundamentally, internally. After the 1920s, leadership had more to do with how I am perceived, externally.

Leadership with Paul

This is not a lecture on leadership, of course; this is an explanation, interpretation, and application of God's word to our lives. Back to the text.

If we compare verse 43 with verse 45, we see two types of leadership in stark contrast.

In 45, the Pharisees are "filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul". The Pharisees were worried about how they appeared to others, not interested in the souls of their people. Paul's message—from the Scriptures in which the Pharisees said they believed—was a challenge to their prestige, respect, and preference. It didn't matter whether Paul and Barnabas had rightly or wrongly understood God's word. It only mattered that attention had been diverted *from* the Pharisees *to* something else.

Paul and Barnabas functioned very differently. They had the attention of the people, attention on which they could have capitalized in a big way!³ Instead,

² blog.hubspot.com/sales/habits-of-highly-effective-people-summary, last accessed 20180721.

³ They failed to capitalize on their advantage and I suspect that's why the people so quickly lost interest, as they appeared to do. By verse 50, "devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district".

they:

*... urged [the people] to continue in the grace of God.*⁴

Instead of cultivating their public image, Paul and Barnabas identified that one whom they followed as worthy of the people's attention. Instead of holding themselves up as leaders, they pointed to the one who is worthy of being followed.

This is a constant theme in Paul's ministry. For example, in the next chapter (14:11 ff.), Paul heals a crippled man.

*And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying ... "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ... And the priest of Zeus ... brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."*⁵

Paul is very careful to distinguish between Paul the man and Paul the follower of Christ, to whom Paul is pointing the finger. He told the Galatians:

*Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*⁶

To the Corinthians, he wrote:

*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.***⁷

Even Jesus did not lead in his own right. Instead, he pointed his finger of leadership to the Father, whom he himself followed.

⁴ Acts 13:43.

⁵ Acts 14:11–15.

⁶ Galatians 1:8.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1.

*I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.*⁸

Rick Warren, for whom I have learned a great of respect over the years, wrote an essay on leadership that begins this way.

*The real foundation of great leadership is character, not charisma. And one aspect of a leader's character is the convictions to which he is deeply committed. Great leaders have strongly held beliefs. An opinion is something you'd argue about; a conviction is something you'd die for. [One] must define the convictions for which they will endure every kind of hardship, and the only way to stand for those kinds of convictions is to live from a deep sense of God's calling.*⁹

The true measure of a good leader, as God defines good, is not how winsome, charming, commanding, decisive, or strategic they are. Those things can be helpful. But the true measure of good leadership is to know what leader the leader *follows*.

Applications and Conclusion

Discipleship

We have been talking about discipleship for some months now. Discipleship is essentially followership. Knowing the master, following the master, and leading others to follow the master: that's what changes the world around us, including in our own hearts and homes.

Evangelism

Think about how easy followership makes evangelism. This is no complex theory of leadership, or stirring up enthusiasm, or using debating tricks to win arguments. It's simply being the follower of our master, Jesus. "Let me tell you about him, not about me."

⁸ John 12:49.

⁹ "Great Leaders Live By Strong Convictions", www.pastors.com, 20170927, last accessed 20180721.

Our Leadership

Look closely at your own leadership, in whatever realm that might be, big or small. Why are you engaged in that leadership; what motivates you? Are you pointing people to the answer, or do you see yourself as the answer? Are you trying to make people perceive you in a better light, or the Lord? When you're challenged or criticized, are you offended because it was your person that was challenged, or because it was the person and work of Christ in you?

Our Followership

We can also learn something about followership. Christians can be among the most undiscerning people there are. They will eagerly follow abusive, self-centered leaders, as long as those leaders use the right words and "get things done".

But look at the works of those leaders. Do they have energized souls in their sphere, or dead bodies of their victims of their egos?

Conclusion

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.¹⁰

¹⁰ Matthew 5:13–16.