

# On Mission 2020

*Topic Focus: Mobilization*

## **Matthew Ellison - Sixteen:Fifteen Mobilizing the Local Church**

Greetings! I'm Matthew Ellison and I'm the President of Sixteen:Fifteen and I also serve the organization as a Church Missions Coach.

Now here's a stunning thought if you are a Christian, you are so because of a prayer meeting that happened in Antioch of Syria over 2,000 years ago. Every Christian alive today is a product of a long and sacred missions history, folks that begin in Antioch. From this prayer meeting, we know that the world missions movement would begin in earnest. In fact, it's one of the greatest missionary breakthroughs in the history of the world. The Holy Spirit would speak in the context of a worship and prayer meeting setting apart Paul and Barnabas for the work of taking the gospel to the nations. We know that Paul and Barnabas would take the gospel in Asia Minor.

Paul would then take the gospel into Europe. And from these locations the gospel would spread world over. Alexander White called the church in Antioch the true Mother Church of Evangelical Christianity. Now the church in Jerusalem was certainly the hub of the early church and has some lessons to teach us. But like many churches today, the church in Jerusalem was reticent and slow to make sense of the global cross-cultural dimensions of the Great Commission. They focused on people primarily like themselves. But this would all change in Antioch. This was an audacious church and they lead the way and they changed the world forever.

So I want to look at five keys that God used to not only unlock the missions potential in Antioch, but He is using these keys to unlock the missions potential of churches today. Antioch was God-passionate. How do we know this? Well, it says while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, giving them their global instructions. So they had a holy ambition I believe, to see the nations glorify God for His mercy. It's profound, it was in the context of a worship session, and a prayer meeting that God spoke to them about their global mission. So for churches to effectively engage in missions, they need sound strategies that are in touch with global realities, you know that. They need to partner better. They need to understand the complexities of working cross-culturally. In short, churches need an abundance of missions skill and knowledge to do missions well. And make no mistake, the absence of that skill and knowledge will hinder their missions work. But if they're not God-passionate, they're not going to have much zeal to tell the nations about Him because what is missions if not a summons and invitation to the nations to come and worship Jesus with me. So it's entirely fitting that as their waiting their global instructions to call the nations to worship, that they themselves were

worshipping Him. If we have little zeal for worship, we're going to have little zeal for missions. So mobilized churches have ambition -holy ambition- to see the nations glorify God for His mercy.

Another thing we noticed, the second key here, is that Antioch's leaders were activated. It says there were in the church in Antioch - Verse One - prophets and teachers and then it lists them out. These were the church's leaders who were in the season of worship and prayer, seeking God's face. Mobilized churches have leaders who champion their missions vision. So I've been doing this quite some time and I got to tell you I've learned that unless you're dealing with leaders of the church, it's very difficult to mobilize the whole congregation. I'm not saying members can be a catalyst for missions envisioning. But until leaders have embraced a global vision, they're not really going to be a mobilized church. George Murray says it best. He says, "When it comes to missions in the church, the pastor either holds the key to the front door or holds the padlock." So the leaders at Antioch were activated.

Third thing, Antioch had a biblical definition of missions. Mobilized churches understand that the Great Commission mandate is not just about making disciples, it is that, it is about making disciples of all the nations. So once again, in verse three, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart Paul and Barnabas for the work to which I've appointed them." And then later on in this chapter that work is made explicit. It is the work of taking the gospel to the nations. To the Gentiles. Again, in Jerusalem, they were parochial, but in Antioch, they became missional. They spread out. So missions for the church in Antioch wasn't just about reaching their neighbors, people culturally like them, it was about taking the gospel to the nations. Making steady headway in reaching more nations. I think one of the most important questions a church that has today is this, "What is the missions work God has appointed to His church and why does it even matter? Because there's this prevailing philosophy today that says everything done in Jesus name is missions and everyone is a missionary.

But I challenge whether that's a biblical idea, whether it's helpful, and whether it leads to more missions work being accomplished or less. It's a well-intentioned philosophy but I think the nations get overlooked. The cross-cultural dimensions of the Great Commission get obscured. So for Antioch, understand, it was about making disciples of neighbors, yes. But also, nations.

Fourth key here - Antioch was intentional. So I'm going to draw this out of the passage here. Notice they set aside time to seek God - that's intentional. As a result of that, they had this Spirit-birthed plan. They didn't send everybody and anybody. They didn't believe everyone is a missionary. There was certain individuals that had this calling. There was specific people that were sent. They went to specific peoples. Now, I doubt they adopted a -adopted unreached-people-group approach to missions. I don't think they did, but no longer was missions just about winning as many people to Jesus. They had an intentional plan to see the gospel go to the ethnic cost, the nations. They did specific work. Just read Acts 13 and beyond. They primarily proclaimed the gospel and planted churches and as a result of this, they had specific stories to tell the church that had sent them. In Acts 14, they gathered the church together after the first missionary journey and they testify about this specific work and how the door of faith had been opened.

Next key is - Antioch's missions engagement was church-wide. And I've already hit on this, but again, they called the church together in Acts 14:27 after they had been sent out. This was their first journey home and they testify to the church, they rehearsed the work of the Spirit and how the door of faith had been opened. Now, what a service that must have been. Read Acts 13:1 to 14:27 a lot had happened. And they're rehearsing these stories. Why gather the whole church together for this special meeting? Here's why, I believe it was an all-hands-on-deck effort. Some went. Some sent. But all were a part of this epic story of reaching the nation. So they gathered the entire church together and we know most folks will not leave home permanently to minister on the mission field. They must be mobilized in a powered -in the context of where they live in their local church. And I think Antioch is a good example of that. And then the last key - Antioch prayerfully embraced risk. Just read 13 and beyond and we see that they had to go through this decision-making, are we gonna count The cost and take these risks? And they did. They prayerfully embraced the Christ-exalting risks necessary to take the gospel to the nations. There was intense opposition that ensued the preaching of the gospel. Many were suffering. Many were martyred. And we know that continues to happen today. Because loving Jesus, especially when you follow Him to the ends of the Earth is becoming more and more dangerous and it's because the vast majority of least-reached and unreached peoples live in places and under regimes that are hostile to Christianity. So we -like Antioch- must prayerfully embrace the risks associated with taking the gospel to the ends of the Earth.

So there's more to talk about but I think these five keys are really important. So we've been mobilizing churches for 15 years as an organization and here's what we've discovered: the very traits that marked Antioch unleashed them, unlocked their potential to reach the nations are the very same keys and traits that distinguish churches that God is using today to take the gospel to the ends of the Earth. So I wonder, are there people groups right now beyond the gospel's reach who will not remain so for long because of ancient prayers that were prayed at Antioch that are still being answered today. Will your church, which is a product of this long missions history that began in Antioch continue to extend and expand the work that began in this audacious church. God bless the work of your churches' saints.