

DON'T DRIVE WITHOUT HIS LICENCE!

Today's Text: Acts 13: 1- 52

Extracts:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain *prophets and teachers*: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, *the Holy Spirit said*, “*Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, *they sent them away*. So, *being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus* [Acts 13: 1-4]

In April 2005, Cha Sa-soon, then 64 years old, needed a driver's licence for her vegetable-selling business that she had established at Jeonju, 210 kilometres (130 miles) south of Seoul, South Korea.¹ To pass the test, she had to score a minimum of 60 out of 100 points. She took it the first time and failed. She tried it again and again and again and failed. Then, on Wednesday, November 4, 2009, she finally passed the test at her 950th attempt!

Why did she persist? Cha Sa-soon needed a driver's licence from the state for her business. Until she passed the written test, she was not even considered for the road test. During the four-year period of repeating the test 950 times, she did not drive because she could not do so without a state-issued licence. Yet, when believers want to do God's work, they want to drive without His licence! As believers, God has called us to serve as labourers in His vineyard [Matt. 9: 35-38]. He wants us to “drive tractors and other vehicles” in that vineyard as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers [Eph. 4: 11]. That He has called us does not automatically mean that we can go ahead and “drive.” We need to obtain His licence to enable us to launch and run the ministry assigned to us. That licence can only be granted by the Holy Spirit because only those who are led by Him can be called the children of God [Rom. 8: 14]. In this week's Bible story, Saul (Paul) and Barnabas were about to embark on their first missionary journey. It was the Holy Spirit that asked the church at Antioch what to do and how to do it. Let us learn from that story how they prepared for the important assignment of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles and the results that they obtained.

¹ Based on “Woman passes driver's test on 950th try,” *The Associated Press*, Mon., Nov. 9, 2009; http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33802173/ns/world_news-weird_news/?GT1=43001

1. Introduction: The Holy Spirit sends out Saul

A traffic warden once stopped a Nigerian driver on a busy Lagos street for making a wrong turn for which he deserved to be penalized. When the driver got out of his car, he had a huge 'L' sign (for Learner) around his neck. When the police officer asked him why the sign was on him and not on the vehicle, he replied, "I am the learner, not my car!"

The story may be funny but the learner is quite correct. Sometimes, we fail to appreciate that there are two sides to a genuine coin- heads and tails. In like manner, when God calls us to do something for Him, there are two sides to it- the assignment and our cooperation. With particular reference to serving as labourers in the Lord's vineyard, we cannot run with our calling without first knowing what we are expected to contribute. To whom much is given, much is expected. ***There is usually a time lag between when God calls us and when He actually sends us to do it.*** For example, Jeremiah was not yet born when God called him to be a prophet but He did not send him on his first prophetic errand until he became a youth [Jer. 1: 4-6]. Before John the Baptist was conceived, God had told his father (through archangel Gabriel) that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb [Lk 1: 15] but the word of God (on baptism of repentance) did not come to John until he was thirty years old.² That suggests that there ***is a preparation time between being called and being sent.*** That you have received a prophetic word to become a pastor does not mean that you should immediately look for a hall and start recruiting members, as some believers are wont to do. Rather, it is to put you on notice that you have talents that God wants to tap for His purpose in due course at the appropriate time. That time is set by God Himself. ***But the preparation is yours through His guidance.***

In a sense, that guidance is like a driver's licence without which you should not drive even when you can drive. For example, when the children of Israel were on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, they were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Whenever the cloud or fire was taken up above the tabernacle, the people would go forward on their journey. But if the cloud (by day) or fire (by night) was not taken up, the people would wait, no matter for how long [Ex. 40: 34-38]. We now know that that cloud in the sky, the passage of the Red Sea and the rock that produced water for the children of Israel represent Christ who later opened our understanding of the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 10: 1-3; Jn 3: 3, 5]. On the day of His ascension to heaven, Jesus specifically commanded His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the "Promise of the Father," namely the baptism of the Holy Spirit [Acts 1: 4-5]. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told them, they would be able to become His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, "and to the end of the earth" [v. 8]. ***Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the driver's licence that God grants to***

² We know so because Jesus began His ministry at about the age of 30 [Lk 3: 23] and John's mother was six months pregnant before archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary [Lk 1: 24-26]. Pregnant Mary spent three months with Elizabeth, John's mother, and John was born soon after her departure [vv. 39-42, 56-57]

believers through Christ Jesus to become legitimate and effective drivers in His vineyard.

This week's Bible story shows us how the Holy Spirit sent out Paul and Barnabas to do God's work among the Gentiles. Although the story is about both of them, we shall concentrate on Paul since Barnabas was his travelling partner on this first missionary journey. Some background information is necessary to enable us to appreciate what is captured in the chapter we shall examine presently.

a) *Saul is called*

You may recall how Jesus Christ called Saul when he was on his way to Damascus to arrest believers and bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he approached Damascus, a bright light from heaven shone around him and he fell to the ground. A voice called him from heaven and asked why he was persecuting Him. On inquiring, Saul found out that it was Jesus of Nazareth [Acts 22: 8], the Man whose memory that he was striving to wipe out of Judea that was speaking to him [Acts 9: 1-5]. Through Ananias, one of the disciples in Damascus that Jesus sent to lay hands on Saul and restore his sight, Jesus said, "[Saul] is ***a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.***" After Ananias had laid hands on him, Paul received his sight back and became filled with the Holy Spirit. Soon after, he received water baptism [vv. 10-18]. In recognition of his calling, Paul introduced himself in his writings as "an apostle" [Rom. 1: 1], "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" [Gal. 1: 1]. That call only made him a "learner-driver."

b) *Saul prepares*

Saul (now better known as Paul) reports that, after God had revealed through His Son, Jesus, to "preach Him among the Gentiles, ***he did not immediately confer with human beings nor go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before him. Instead, he went to Arabia and returned to Damascus. It was after three years that he went to Jerusalem to see Peter*** and remained with him for fifteen days. He saw no other apostle except James, the Lord's brother [Gal. 1: 13-19]. He went back to Jerusalem fourteen years later, in the company of Barnabas and Titus "***by revelation*** and communicated to [the church leaders in Jerusalem] that gospel which [he preached] among the Gentiles" [Gal. 2: 1-2].

Clearly, Saul did not plunge into his ministry soon after his conversion or calling. His assignment, ***to take the gospel to the Gentiles, was new and there was nothing in the Scriptures of his days to adequately prepare him for his work. So, he spent a great deal of time alone, communing with God, to get specific instructions and clarifications.*** That was Paul's road test! It is, therefore, not surprising that it took him much more than any other apostle or disciple of Jesus Christ to make the Christian doctrine

easier for the world to understand. We learn from his experience that *you need to learn from the Master Himself what it will take and entail for you to follow your calling when God ultimately sends you to launch it.* Otherwise, you may wind up with man-made rules and get stifled and unproductive along the way.

c) *Saul is sent*

When God was satisfied that Saul had been adequately prepared for his calling (having passed the road test), He sent him on his first missionary journey into Gentile territory. He and Barnabas were among the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. As they worshipped and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “*Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” Having fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and sent them away [Acts 13: 1-3]. That suggests a time lag between when they were called and when they were sent. *At the point they were sent, they were ready- both spiritually and psychologically.* They had been granted God’s driver’s licences. Immediately, they set about the following tasks:

- In Cyprus: They sailed to Cyprus, an island on the Mediterranean Sea off modern Greece, on to the city of Salamis where they preached the word in Jewish synagogues. They went on to another city there called Paphos where they encountered a sorcerer, called Elymas, who tried to prevent the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, from accepting the true word of God. Paul cursed him and he became blind and had to be led away. Then the proconsul believed after he had seen the miracle [vv. 4-12].
- In Pamphylia: Paul and his party sailed on to the territory of Pamphylia now in modern Greece. In several cities there, they went into the synagogues on the Sabbath day and preached from the readings of the day about Jesus Christ. While some Jews resisted them, the Gentiles begged them to give them more Sabbath services anchored on “the grace of God.” In no time, “almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” As the Jews became envious of their success, they began to oppose Paul and his party. So, Paul and Barnabas got bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you [the Jews] first; but since you reject it... we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us” [vv. 13-47].

It is interesting that *Paul’s work became more productive the moment he and his party chose to go strictly to the Gentiles as the Lord had commanded them* for “the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region... and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” [vv. 48-52]. Blessing is always the reward for obedience. So, do you have a valid licence to do God’s work? Let us find out.

2. Measuring the status of your driver's licence

We know that *the Holy Spirit is the licensing authority* because nobody can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 3]. Unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, s(he) can neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God [Jn 3: 3, 5], which is not about eating and drinking but “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” [Rom. 14: 17]. Therefore, if you plan to drive in the Lord's vineyard, do not leave home without His valid driver's permit. But what is the true status of your driver's licence? It could be one of the following:

a) *The unlicensed driver*

Some people claim to know and serve God quite diligently and yet, they do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They believe that they can make heaven on the basis of their works. Also, there are some people who are very good church-goers and claim to believe in Jesus Christ. Yet, they have lingering doubts about His being the only way to the Father. Those two groups of people are like unlicensed drivers. ***As long as they do not believe in or have the Holy Spirit, they are like people who can drive quite well but they dare not take to the road on their own because they have not taken steps to regularize their driving status.*** They are like the sons of Sceva at Ephesus who tried to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus. The evil spirit replied, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” [Acts 19: 13-16]. Therefore, if you are driving without a licence from the Holy Spirit, get saved and be granted a valid one.

b) *The learner-driver*

See how many years it took Paul to move from the day Jesus called him to when the Holy Spirit sent him on his first missionary journey. The apostles and other disciples were with Jesus for three years. During the period, He sent them out in batches to learn how to disciple [Lk 9: 1-6; 10: 1-17]. But it was only after His ascension and the descent on them of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday that they could go out on their own. In like manner, ***some believers are still learner-drivers. They appreciate that they still have a great deal to learn before they can launch.*** God may have called them but He has not yet sent them. If you find yourself in that situation, you are on the right track. Do not be tempted by what you see of others on television or over the radio. Your time will come. Wait for it.

c) *The driver with an expired licence*

A driver's licence remains valid when it is renewed from time to time. For it to be renewed, the owner must not have committed any irredeemable offence that could make renewal impossible or have his/her licence suspended. In like manner, ***some believers started out quite well by demonstrating the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their ministries. However, along the way, they backslid by returning to a life of sin.*** The

love of money and sexual immorality have destroyed once powerful ministries and church leaders. Some have recovered by repenting and returning. But *some have sinned against the Holy Spirit and, therefore, cannot be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come* [Matt. 12: 31-32]. Therefore, be careful that you do not allow your Holy Spirit anointing to expire.

d) *The driver with a valid licence*

When you obey all traffic rules and drive carefully, your driver's licence can remain valid until you become too old to drive. In like manner, *when you remain faithful to your calling and fear and obey God in everything, your Holy Spirit anointing will remain with you until the day that God calls you home to eternal life with Him in heaven*. Thus, at old age, Paul was able to write to Timothy, "The time of my departure [death] is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" [2 Tim. 4: 6-8]. If you can say that of yourself, then your driver's licence is still valid!

3. Conclusion: Obedience is a choice!

Accidents will still come to all road users, no matter the status of their driver's licences. When they do, the cost of repairs will be lower for those with valid documents. Drivers without any documents could also be careful drivers but the majority of the most careful drivers are likely to be found among those with valid driver's licences. In like manner, those who drive their calling with the anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit are more likely to succeed than those who rely on flesh or ephemeral spirits for their success. Always remember: obedience is a choice! So, go for the real thing and keep it valid.

Don't ever drive without the Holy Spirit's licence!