

Title: The Movement Grows

Text: Acts 11:19-30

Meditation: can people identify you as a Christian?

1. *A Church is Birthed - verse 19-21*

- **Acts 11:19–21 (NKJV): Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**
- Luke backtracks a bit and tells us what was going on after Stephen's death. He tells us that the believers were scattered and went all over the place. As they went the specifically shared with Jews still, but that was according to the plan, as the gospel was going to the Jew first.
- However they eventually made it up to Antioch, and that's where things changed. It is in Antioch where they began preaching to the Greeks. Hellenist was used for Greek speaking Jews earlier, but here it refers to speaking specifically to the gentile greeks, and they openly accepted the gospel!
- Antioch was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire, and the most important city in the region.
- It had a population of half a million, making it the third largest city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria. The main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. It was the only city in the ancient world at that time that had its streets lighted at night.
- Antioch really marks the point where the gospel moved from small countryside towns to large, urban ministry. Because it was such a giant city and had a massive port, it also was a melting pot of beliefs and practices, rivaling even Corinth it it's overall immoral practices.
- *"Antioch was to the Roman world what New York City is to ours," - James A. Kelso, archeologists.*
- Yet it was in this city where the gospel exploded, bringing many to salvation and becoming the most important church in the region. Antioch would go on and replace Jerusalem, as Jerusalem would fade away, Antioch would remain. It would go on to produce some of the greatest heroes, missionaries and pastors in the early church.
- We'll see in chapter 13 Paul and Barnabas were sent out to missions from there, years later the early church father Ignatius would pastor there. 300 years later, that church would still be there and it would be the church where John Chrysostom, another of the early church fathers, would be. It was also the home city of Nicolas, one of the 7 deacons chosen in Acts 6. Antioch is a wonderful example of a healthy church, and we'll learn more about that later on.
- So it was in this pagan city, that a powerful church would be birthed and would lead the effort to take the gospel to the world. *Antioch would be the place where Jew and gentile would truly unite under one roof, and the effects of that would have an effect not just in their city, not even their region, but their whole empire.*

2. *A Church is Inspected - verse 22-24*

- **Acts 11:22–24 (NKJV): Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.**
- News always seemed to travel really quick to Jerusalem. When news got to them of the work in Antioch, they did good in sending someone trustworthy to verify it. This wasn't a negative thing. The apostles and leaders were responsible to ensure the right doctrine was been taught and that it wasn't something that was not of the Lord.
- They sent a great man for the job, Barnabas. Barnabas was known for his generosity, his encouragement, and for been the person who advocated for accepting Saul when he came to Jerusalem.
- Barnabas went and seeing the work of God's grace, gave his approval, and began to help them to continue to grow. It's significant that Barnabas got there and he could see the grace of God at work in people's lives. When you go into a church, there should be evidence of God's grace.
- You can see it in people worshipping, you can see it as people talk. People who have been saved and are living in God's grace will have a natural outflow to them that is noticeable. We should pray that our church be one where the grace of God can be recognized and seen.
- ***"In whatever gathering of Christians we associate ourselves with, it is important that others be able to see the grace of God among us. They should not see an emphasis on self, on man-made rules, on human performance – but on the glorious grace of God. It will make them glad."* - David Guzik**
- Now verse 24 gives us a character profile of Barnabas. This is why the ministry in Antioch further explodes, because of the type of leader Barnabas was. He was known as a good man, which means he was seen as someone who lived a godly life, full of kindness and grace.

- He was full of the Holy Spirit, which is the source of his effective ministry and why he was so powerfully used, and he was full of faith, showing he trusted God and lived a life that reflected it. If you ever want an example to hold up of how we should act as believers, Barnabas is definitely high up the list. He was the ideal person for the job at hand.
- He focused on worship and encouragement, motivating the disciples to grow deeper in their relationship and stay close to the Lord. *Because he as the leader equipped the church, the church then went out and impacted the city, and that's why "many people were added to the Lord"*.
- ***"This is the plan for church growth spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-16. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it causes growth of the body."* - David Guzik**

3. A Church is Strengthened - verse 25-26

- **Acts 11:25–26 (NKJV): Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**
- Because of the growing boom of disciples, Barnabas realized he needed help. It's wonderful that Barnabas was not a one pastor show, in fact we'll see later there were 5 pastors at Antioch. ***Barnabas understood that there were other people with other gifts and abilities that could help empower and teach the church, and that such a work was better in a team.***
- Barnabas knew exactly who was the man for the job, and he went out to Tarsus to bring Saul with him to Antioch. Barnabas knew Saul was the person he wanted to pastor the church with him, and he put in the effort to show it. That word "seek" has the idea of "hunting for". He had to go on an expedition looking and asking and seeking till he found him. But because Barnabas put in that effort and sacrifice, the church was so much better for it.
- Saul was perfect because he had a great education and knowledge, but also lots of experience dealing with gentiles because he had lived so long in a gentile city. In fact Saul had been in Tarsus for 12 years since we last saw him in chapter 9.
- Barnabas and Saul became a dynamic duo, and for one whole year, they taught and strengthened the congregation. Because of this, more leaders were raised up, the church grew, and they impacted their whole region.
- ***Their impact was so great, that the movement received a new name, Christians.*** Now I've heard that originally it was suppose to be an insult, however as I studied, there isn't much evidence to support that. The actual idea is that they were identified as the "Jesus people". In Latin, the ending *ian* meant "the party of." A *Christ-ian* was "of the party of Jesus." Roman soldiers would often adopt the names of their generals, identifying as "Caesarians", meaning of the party of Caesar, for example. So them been called Christians was the world realizing they were "the Jesus People". It identified their allegiance to Jesus.
- That's why the name stuck later on, because it described them well. This is important because it also marks the moment when they stopped been a sect of Judaism, and became their own movement. The Church had such a n impact, that they moved from under the shadow of the Jewish religion, and had been identified as it's own.
- Quick question for us to think about...***Do we readily identify as "Jesus People" in our world?***...When you're at your job or with your friends, could they identify you as someone who follows Jesus? Do you live a life of such impact, that when they ask about you, the first thing that comes to mind is "Christian"? Someone once asked "If you were arrested for been a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"
- Eusebius, the famous early church historian, described a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he only replied, "I am a Christian." "What nation do you belong to?" He answered, "I am a Christian." "What city do you live in?" "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: "Are you a slave or a free man?" "I am a Christian" was his only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he only answered, "I am a Christian." This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words "I am a Christian" on his lips.
- ***The impact of this church under these men, as they were Spirit led, was so powerful, it made everyone recognize the movement as something far greater than just a small sect of Jewish believers.***

4. A Church Responds - verse 27-30

- **Acts 11:27–30 (NKJV): And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.**
- As Antioch grew and the movement kept expanding, prophets came to them to warn them of a coming famine. The New Testament Prophet is different from the Old Testament one. They don't write new revelations, they mainly proclaim the word of God. However sometimes God will give them a word about the future. Later on Paul would give guidelines for this.
- At this moment, Agabus, who will be mentioned again and was recognized in the Church, told them a famine would come across the empire. We have recorded history that around this time when Claudius ruled, there were multiple regional famines across the empire, affecting many areas.

- The main focus here is that these believers quickly assembled together, and as they were led and could, gave to send relief work to the believers in Jerusalem. It reminds me of the hurricane and how so many other churches gladly gave in relief support to us. That's a beautiful picture of how the body looks out for each other in a bigger level.
- Notice a few things about their giving.
 - *They gave according to their ability:* It was proportional giving. Those who had more, gave more, those who had less gave less. But they all gave. They were cheerful givers like the Bible says. They didn't give aimlessly or carelessly, they looked and said "I can give this much" and they gave willingly to help support their fellow Christians.
 - *They also determined to send relief:* They made a conscious decision to give. You won't be a giver unless you choose to be so. God won't force you to, but He does expect you to. It's completely up to you if you're gonna be a giver, but those of you who choose to be givers, you will be blessed, you'll receive the joy of been generous and God will reward you in heaven for that.
- Last thing I'll point out and we'll close, they sent Saul and Barnabas as their representatives on a missions trip back to the founding church to bring relief. Notice that it says "elders" not apostles. It seems that by this time, the apostles had moved out of Jerusalem and were fulfilling the great commission, and leadership had now moved to elders who had been raised up.
- This is wonderful to see. God was still working in the church beyond just the apostles. It also shows that the idea of one single pastor was not how the church operated back then. *There was a plurality of elders, multiple pastors leading and guiding, each fulfilling a different role as they worked as a team to further the Word of God and the work of God.*
- Antioch is a wonderful church, and we'll see more about it soon. But I want to remind you of one thing tonight as we close out in worship. What example are you giving to those around you? Can you be identified as a Christian? Are we impacting our community how Antioch impacted there's? Let's pray that the Spirit of God would fill us so that we would go out and truly make known that we are "Jesus People" because of the positive impact we have on society!
-