

How the Church Grows—Acts 11:19-24—5/3/26
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Today as we continue in Acts, we're going to study the example of Gospel expansion in Acts 11 & learn from how the church grew.

We see principles of healthy church life in Acts 11 that are taught later in the NT letters to prove they are normative.

When we ask how the church grows, we want **God's** answers, **not man's** innovations or the latest gimmicks to draw a crowd.

We want promises & principles from **God's Word** & patterns of **His** ways like we find in Acts 11:19-30.

So if we want to see people saved in Roanoke where many have heard of Jesus but have no relationship with Him, we should pay attention.

And if we want Christ to be **honored** & **not** misrepresented or mocked or ignored, we need to learn from the church in Acts.

If we want our church to be healthy & growing & reproducing here & around the world, we need to take heed to what's modeled in Acts 11.

And we should want Christ's church to grow, not merely so we can fill the expanded sanctuary we will soon have.

We want the joy of being useful to our Master to lead others to Him.

We want Jesus to be worshipped as He is worthy of.

And we want the blessings that overflow **into** & **through** the lives of more who come to know Christ that abound our shared eternal joy.

With that in mind, let's read Acts 11:19-30 to begin. [READ]

Today we're going to uncover **4 ingredients** that are present when the church grows—**4 ingredients found when the true church grows.**

This is **not** mere increase in numbers with no impact on lives.

It's **not** a gathering that barely resembles the Jesus who is only named.

This is undeniable Gospel expansion to the nations after the Holy Spirit had proven Gentile conversions in Acts 10.

This is the spread of the Gospel after the unity of Jewish & Gentile believers was demonstrated & defended in Acts 10-11.

We'll only get through verse 24 today as we outline **4 key ingredients of faithful followers of Jesus** that He used to build His church in new places.

Read verses 19-20 again to see the 1st of those ingredients. [READ]

Ingredient #1 found when the church grows is this—**#1, the church grows when God's people evangelize.**

That may seem obvious, but we need to say it—**1st, the church grows when God's people evangelize.**

Verse 19 says some were **speaking the Word** & verse 20 says others were **preaching the Good News of the Lord Jesus.**

That word at the end of verse 20 is the word for **evangelism**—**euangelizo**—to announce Good News, to proclaim a good report.

And that Good News is specifically **the Lord Jesus**—the man who proved to be the Lord & God, the Sovereign & the Savior.

Jesus **is Good News** because He was perfectly sinless in His life & He embodied love & taught wisdom & displayed power & showed mercy.

Then He died to pay sin's penalty & rose to prove His victory over sin & death & counts His own work for all who trust Him.

So He can be trusted as Good News in both His Person & His work.

And His goodness was not confined to Jews only.

Jesus opened the windows of heaven to bless **all nations**.

And we see His turn to **the nations** with His Jewish followers who were *dispersed* like Israel had been exiled before.

They **scattered** because the Jews had **killed Stephen** for testimony.

As **Acts 8:2** said on the day Stephen died, “*a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.*”

Acts 8 told of Philip who scattered & preached to Samaritans.

Then Acts 9 told how Jesus transformed His chief enemy Saul & Acts 10-11 told how Jesus proved His work among Gentiles.

After all that, Acts 11:19 returned to those scattered believers who traveled as far as Phoenicia along the Mediterranean coast north of Caesarea to cities like Tyre & Sidon.

They also went off the coast 60 miles to the island of Cyprus & even traveled 300 miles north to the Syrian city of Antioch.

Antioch was north of modern Lebanon into modern day Turkey & it had become the third largest city in the Roman Empire at the time.

Most of these scattered Jewish believers were speaking **only** to other Jews to tell them of Jesus as **their Christ**.

God had given the New Covenant to Israel as His chosen nation that He would revive & restore under their Messianic King.

So they were telling other Jews that their Christ had come.

Most who scattered had traveled to Jerusalem from elsewhere & had stayed after coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

So they were returning home to familiar Greek culture & territory like in Antioch where Jews were Roman citizens.

But verse 20 says **some** of them from the island of Cyprus & the city of Cyrene on the coast of Northern Africa.

That group **also** proclaimed the good Lord Jesus to **the Greeks**.

And the contrast between Jews & Hellenists—which is that term Greeks in verse 20—indicates that these were **not** Jews.

Although Luke had spoken of Hellenistic Jews in Acts 6 in the issue of widows, **these** were **non-Jewish Hellenistic** people.

That’s evident because Luke described them as **Greeks also** like Acts 10 had referred to **the Gentiles also**.

And verse 20 says they were preaching Jesus **the Lord**, the God Yahweh, **not** Jesus the **Christ**, the Jewish Messiah.

So Luke emphasized the continued advance of the name of Jesus as **Lord to the nations** as the church continued to grow.

And the church grew because **God’s people evangelized**.

The church grew when **nameless followers** of Jesus evangelized, when **normal** believers **preached the good news** of the Lord Jesus.

Nothing is said of the **Apostles or elders** in verses 19-20.

The Gospel went first to Jews only & then to the Greeks also as described also in Romans 1:16.

It went through the conversations of these believers who traveled with a message that could not be stopped or contained.

That's how the church grows—do you see the point?

And that's how whole societies & nations are changed by Jesus as the One true Lord who can save them.

So look—this is how Roanoke will be transformed.

You & I must tell people about Jesus the Lord—the Christ who came to save & the King who is coming to rule.

Sadly, the past century has tried to make evangelism a program or crusade or circus as if the Gospel is not the power we trust.

But the most powerful evangelistic plan is for all Christians to tell people the Gospel & live holy lives unlike the world.

Of course, some people are more gifted & of course we can do various outreaches & plan events & invite folks to whatever we may do.

But the method the Bible teaches is for all Christians to gladly & consistently proclaim the Good News of Jesus as Lord.

That's not complicated or expensive or confusing or elaborate.

If you know the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and most of you do—then this is merely a matter of awareness & obedience.

Yes, it's a matter of prayer & we can always prepare more, but we simply need to be straightforward & loving with people.

I thought of this—what if every time I lament sin in society, I recall that the way to change it is to evangelize & pray?

What if we turn every sigh or grumble or frustration into an earnest plea to God to save souls & to make us bold to share Christ?

I mean, if we know this then why don't we evangelize more?

Talking about the God who saved me & the Lord who loves me & the salvation that secures me should not be so difficult, should it?

It should be overflowing from us because it's so glorious & good as it was in Acts 11 so that it's uncontainable.

So if it's not or when it's not, then what is wrong?

What else is drowning it out?—What else are we feeding and treasuring and focusing on and consumed by?

Do you love Christ?—do you need to fuel that love somehow?

Do you love others?—do you need to meditate on the horrors of hell & the destructiveness of sin & God's grace to save you to cultivate concern for others to speak to them?

Are you scared of the inconveniences that may arise if someone responds and you have to disciple or counsel them?

Are you fearful of rejection or some earthly consequences that may come if people react against the truths you share?

At times, we need to recalibrate whom & what we fear, don't we?

We all need to examine what we value & are living for.

God promises heavenly reward as we serve Him & He uses the seed of His Word to produce glorious new life that is wondrous to watch.

Even as stimulation for your own worship of God, I can think of few things as thrilling & helpful as sharing the Gospel.

So let's make this an area of prayer & purposeful awareness.

And let's prepare even to reach out to folks who visit or are newcomers or who may appear lonely among us each week.

Sometimes those may be rich Gospel conversations that God uses.

I say that not because I want this local church to grow for our own glory or name, but because Jesus is so worthy of worship.

The Lord Jesus Christ is so good & faithful that we must speak of Him & He is precisely & only who everyone needs to meet & know.

So we long to lead others to Him out of love for Him & others.

And our responsibility is to speak & then leave the results to the Lord.

We preach Christ & await His work to save.

Read Acts 11:21 again to see how the Lord worked next. [READ]

The hand of the Lord is a reference to His power as it is used that way throughout the OT for either judgment or blessing.

The Lord likely refers to Jesus as God the Son, Yahweh equal with the Father, because He is the One turned to at the end of the verse.

His power was **with them**, meaning **for** & **through** them.

For a large number, He had granted repentance & faith in the Lord.

So clearly, that is how the church grows—God does the work.

Note ingredient #2 that is present when the church grows—**2ndly, the church grows when God's Spirit converts.**

The church grows when (1) God's people evangelize & (2) **God's Spirit converts.**

God did the work of turning hearts to trust Jesus as Lord because salvation is always initiated & accomplished by God.

God's Spirit changes people from the inside out, making them new, giving the gift of faith in Jesus & turning them from sin.

That's repentance and faith—two sides of the same turn.

That turning is what we do, but the Lord gets the credit.

This occurred for a large number of Greeks in Antioch & word traveled as we read next in verse 22. [READ]

Word was heard of them in the ears of the Jerusalem church.

And since the Apostles had already affirmed the same salvation & Spirit among Gentiles, they did not send an apostle this time.

Instead, they sent out a man fit for the task who was from the island of Cyprus & could minister well there.

Barnabas was known for his generosity as in Acts 4 & his peaceful introduction of Saul to the Jerusalem church in Acts 9.

He went as far as Antioch & then read verse 23. [READ]

Arriving and seeing the grace of the God, Barnabas rejoiced.

He did not reject them as unclean nor whine to God like Jonah.

Barnabas was not offended by Greeks receiving God's grace & he did not begrudge Antioch later becoming the hub for sending missionaries.

He saw evidence of God's grace & that was cause for praise.

So that's **another ingredient** we find when the church grows—the church grows—**point #3—when God's grace is celebrated.**

The church grows when (1) God's people evangelize, (2) God's Spirit converts, & (3) **God's grace is celebrated.**

Rejoicing in God's grace is a reflex when people understand that we are all sinners who do not deserve to be saved & blessed by God.

When our hearts are humbled under God, we know He is in charge to do as He wishes & He does not owe us anything.

When we see God's blessing on others, we can recognize it as grace & not something I deserved or others deserved, but fully as God's grace.

That orients our hearts upward to God rather than inward to ourselves or horizontally in comparison with others.

That Godward perspective prepares us to praise Him.

And that outlook keeps us praying dependently & obeying & ready to praise God & rejoice when we see His grace at work.

That's vital to recall because we know that Jesus is the One who builds His church as He promised in Matthew 16:18.

We want to keep that in mind so that we are not trusting ourselves or our methods to do what Jesus must do.

We must reject any sense of entitlement demanding that God work because we in any way deserve His blessings.

Even our obedience to His prescribed methods for church growth are not meritorious or good enough to force Him to act.

But with prayerful dependence on God to act by His grace, we can trust Him to work as He has designed & revealed.

And we don't have to guess or wonder about how He works or invent new strategies for Him to accomplish His work.

Rather, He has revealed what He uses to build His church & we can study & follow His methods by faith.

A passage like this reminds us of His ways & we need to know His methods so we can follow His path of blessing.

As I've said before, as individuals & as a church, we want to get under the faucet where God pours out His grace & blessings.

We want to get in the posture & patterns & places where God promises to send showers of blessing.

Then as we walk & wait there, we are ready when He chooses to turn on the faucet of grace, to pour out blessing at whatever level He wants.

He may turn it on at a drip some days & at full throttle gush on other days & sometimes it may seem like it's totally turned off.

But living by faith is putting ourselves under the shower of His promised blessing & praying for Him to pour it out.

Then we praise Him in whatever He blesses because none of us deserves His blessing because none of us are perfect.

That kind of walking by faith is necessary individually & it's necessary corporately for us together as a church.

It helps keep together these 1st three key ingredients for when the church grows—the need for God's people to evangelize, for God's Spirit to convert, & for God's grace to be celebrated.

And we need these reminders because we easily drift from trusting such basics & keeping them together—don't we?

We are constantly tempted to lose sight Christ & His ways.

That's why we need encouragement like Barnabas gave that the end of verse 23 highlights so read that again. [READ]

Barnabas rejoiced at seeing God's grace & then he realized how vulnerable these new believers were to attack.

So Luke reports that Barnabas was continually encouraging them, which means he was coming alongside them with exhortation & help.

In Acts 4:36, Barnabas was called the son of encouragement & that's what he was doing in Antioch.

He was urging strongly & instilling courage & pleading fervently.

And this was toward **all of them** with the goal that they **stay with the Lord** by the purpose & plan of their hearts.

He was charging & begging them all to remain with the Lord with all the resolve of their inner being of choices & thoughts & affections.

To state it negatively, he was warning them not to fall away, not to give up, not to lose heart, & not to forget their focus.

As Jesus taught, on one heart soil the seed is choked out by other desires & on another heart soil the seed is burned by life's pressures.

Barnabas did not want that fruitless failure to finish for them.

And read verse 24 to see why this was his concern. [READ]

Barnabas led & spoke like he did because he was by quality a good man, living by high standards to be useful & beneficial.

He was also full of the Holy Spirit & of faith like Stephen in Acts 6:5.

The Spirit controlled him by his faith in Christ & the Word.

Barnabas's leadership apparently led to even more being saved.

Verse 24 says a large crowd was added more than in verse 21.

So we can note a 4th key ingredient of church growth from Barnabas's example & ministry in verse 23-24.

The church grows, #4, when God's leaders encourage.

The church grows when (1) God's people evangelize, (2) God's Spirit converts, (3) God's grace is celebrated, **(4) God's leaders encourage.**

The faithfulness of church leaders never merits or deserves God's blessing—God always & only works by His grace.

A lack of growth in a church does **not** mean leaders are **not** faithful because prophets like Jeremiah did not gather big crowds.

But God has revealed His design for faithful leaders to be actively **encouraging** in all the senses of that term.

This was like Barnabas & Paul later telling believers in **Acts 13:43 & 14:22** to "**continue in the grace of God**" and "**continue in the faith.**"

Because false faith & falling away are real dangers—and because despair & discouragement are real temptations—we need to be encouraging one another like Barnabas did.

We find it in Paul's words in Romans 12:1: "**I urge** you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

In Romans 15:30 he said, "**I urge** you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,"

In Romans 16:17, he said again, "**I urge** you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

In 1st Corinthians 1:10 he said, "**I exhort** you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."

In 2nd Corinthians 6:1 he said, “we also **urge** you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

In Ephesians 4:1 he said, “I **implore** you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

And I could give other examples of comforting & pleading & encouraging & urging that Paul & other leaders did.

Barnabas was an example of that faithful leadership that was a key ingredient of large numbers being brought to the Lord.

So we need to value that kind of encouragement—both giving it & receiving it—and not assume it’s optional or non-essential.

Since eternity is real & truth is transcendently precious, we should be eager to encourage what is always most important.

We as leaders must not be passive in our marriages & homes & ministries & relationships when we know encouragement is essential.

We must not look for some other method.

And we should be zealous to be steadfast & want others to exhort **us** & warn **us** & strengthen **us** & correct **us** as part of encouraging us.

If we don’t want to prove false—we want to remain true to the Lord—then we will **ask** others to encourage us like this.

If we don’t like being challenged & exhorted, we need to ask why.

Are you trusting yourself & assuming you are ok without help?

Are you thinking you don’t need anyone to question or correct you?

When such temptations arise, let’s remember that we need encouragement in all its keeping & correcting wisdom.

We must not minimize input from others or stay at a surface level.

We must not avoid the church & expect to flourish spiritually.

We must confess our need for encouragement, both to think rightly & to be reminded regularly, both in person & in public.

If you think you can skip it, you are sinning in self-sufficiency.

When Peter & Paul wrote their dying letters that we call 2nd Peter & 2nd Timothy by Paul, they emphasized the need to keep reminding.

They left that emphasis for us because we need the reminders.

And that’s the value of closing with the ceremony of remembering that we have in the Lord’s Table of communion.

We turn our focus to remember Jesus becoming man to take our place in paying sin’s penalty so we could be forgiven.

We remember Jesus finished the work of redeeming His people & He rose again in victory & we await His majestic return.

If you know Jesus as Lord & Savior, we invite you to remember His work with us now as we close.

And if you don’t know Him, we urge you to watch & pray & ask Him to grant you repentance from your sins & faith in Jesus to save you.

The Lord Jesus is Good News & we’d love to pray for you & lead you to know Him if you ask for help after the service.

We want to be a church eager to evangelize & to celebrate God’s grace like we will this evening in baptism testimonies.

And now let’s pray & prepare to celebrate God’s grace to us through Jesus as He has said for our good—pray with me.