



The 20/20 Vision

**BLESS THE
CITY**

ACTS 11:1-30

VISION

By the year 2020 we envision God using us to...

- Create a disciple-making culture of multiplication with at least 100 trained personal discipleship coaches,
- **Radically bless our city through acts of generosity & the mobilization of 80% of our small groups in local mission projects,**
- Strategically plant or revitalize five churches in North America, and
- Sacrificially send four long term missionaries from our congregation to the uttermost places of the world.

WORD

Acts 11:21-26 (ESV) - ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 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. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. ²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

WHAT**What does the Bible say?**

The city of Antioch was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. It was originally established by one of Alexander the Great's generals and by the first century it was the third largest city in the Roman empire with a population of half a million people. This may not seem large by today's standards but consider that most historians estimate that the first century population of the entire Roman Empire was about five million people. This would mean that ten percent of the empire's population resided in Antioch. Not only was the city important because of the number of people there but it had strategic and economical importance because of its location. It was located at the cusp between the Mediterranean societies and the Oriental societies of the near east. As such it was a hub of social and cultural importance. The city was also a center of idolatrous polytheistic practices.

Where some people might have looked at this and thought it impossible for the gospel to flourish in such a place, others looked and saw people in desperate need for a satisfying relationship with God. They saw people in need of grace, love and redemption. This seemingly unassailable fortress of pagan values was in fact ripe for the harvest. The population pressed together in stressful proximity with only unsatisfying false gods to rely on.

In these close quarters it only took a tiny spark for the gospel to spread like a wildfire. Then the formidable power of the gospel began a work of transformation that led to the gospel being spread throughout the empire. If

2 these men had tried to stay in rural areas where they could "lay low" and avoid notice from the same people who had

so recently stoned Stephen for his preaching of the gospel, then very likely much of what we know of early church history would have been radically different. Instead, a powerful, influential and transformational church was founded. This church became the catalyst for change throughout the Roman Empire. They became the sending church for the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. They even sent financial aid and support to Christians as far away as Judea to support them in their times of hardship.

The very nature of the city of Antioch made it the perfect place for the gospel message to take flight and for Christianity to begin spreading in powerful and transformative ways throughout the world. People of faith saw a need. They took a risk and "the hand of the Lord" multiplied their faith into a blessing for the whole world.

SO WHAT

What is the relevance to my life?

- What really stood out to you in today's message and lesson? What would you like to discuss further with the group?
- Throughout the New Testament we have stories of the gospel being spread in cities like Antioch, Corinth, Galatia, etc. Why does God choose "cities" to bring about such widespread conversion?
- In considering the examples of scripture what does this mean for us? Why should we invest ourselves so significantly in our city, Abilene? How is Abilene like some of the cities we see in the New Testament?

- What kind of impact can the Gospel have on our city in the area of personal relationships, social change, renewal and restoration?

NOW WHAT

How do I apply the word to my life?



How does this lesson change the way you think about our churches role in Abilene? Why did God choose this moment to bring this lesson to you?



What has God laid on your heart with this lesson? How does the story of the church in Antioch change the way you feel about your relationship with Jesus Christ and your role in his kingdom work?



What does God want you to do differently this week as a result of this lesson? What specific plan will you put in place to follow God's plan for blessing this city? How will you demonstrate your obedience to God?

How can we help you and hold you accountable? How can we pray for you? What can we do to show our love for you this week? Who do you know that needs to hear this lesson? Who can you share it with?

