

We have seen the early church overcome the Jewish cultural prejudices. The church was learning that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to be the Savior of all who would come to Him by faith, both Jews and Gentiles. Jews were at first reluctant to accept that the Gentiles could be part of the church, but the gifts of the Spirit convinced them that it was so. Strangely, the prejudice was reversed in later times when Gentiles believers held a prejudice against the Jews. In some churches that prejudice remains, but for the most part, the Evangelical Church has embraced and even honored Messianic believers. This process of growth has gone on throughout church history. We keep learning that certain cultural norms are opposed to the Spirit of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God is very different from the ways of the world. In fact, it is almost upside down from that of the world. The world honors pride and power. God honors humility and submission to the Holy Spirit. The world's idea of success is numbers and dollars. Kingdom success is seen in every single conversion and trust in God's care for us (Luke 15:7; Matthew 6:25-26). Each of us needs the Spirit to point out to us where our souls are influenced by worldly ideas that do not conform to the Spirit of Jesus. We wonder how the Spirit filled early church could have been so blind to the love of God for all mankind, but we can be just as blind to our own prejudices. We must allow the Spirit to examine our hearts and change our thinking (Psalm 139:23-24).

The text starts by reminding us of the first exodus of believers from Jerusalem. *¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.* Acts 11:19 Here is one of many examples of what appeared to be a defeat actually turning out for the better. We face many of those situations in life because God is on the throne of heaven and works all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28). A leading deacon, Stephen, had been murdered and many of the disciples felt they had to flee for their lives from the Jews' religious leaders Jerusalem. That's a terrible tragedy. You could get downright discouraged at those events. But when you consider the fact that this was forcing the church to do what Jesus had asked (Acts 1:8), which is to go into all the world with the good news, it was actually the catalyst for the saving of many souls (Genesis 50:20).

We will find ourselves in similar discouraging situations. Some events in life are very painful, and like some of the laments in the psalms, we question why God would allow them (Psalm 89:49). That is alright. It is honest. Jesus understands our suffering. But then we must consider the great heart of God and His unchanging love for us and look beyond the immediate circumstances to try to see what God is doing through them. When we can't understand what God is doing, we must simply trust in His heart for us and His power to use any situation for our good and His glory.

The Jews who were scattered were preaching to their fellow Jews, people who shared their same expectations of a coming Messiah. They were comfortable reaching out to those like themselves. That is normal. At least they were reaching out to others with

Commented [PW1]: Luke 15:7 (ESV)

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Commented [PW2]: Matthew 6:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Commented [PW3]: Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Commented [PW4]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Commented [PW5]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW6]: Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Commented [PW7]: Psalm 89:49 (ESV)

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

the gospel. That is why the decision of the Jerusalem elders to take the gospel to Gentiles was a major turning point (Acts 11:18).

²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. Acts 11:20 Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire and was about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the Las Vegas of Rome, known for its immorality. What happened in Antioch didn't stay in Antioch. Their debauchery was a form of their worship of Daphne.

There were some believers who went to Antioch and got out of their comfort zones and spoke to the Gentiles of Antioch. "Hellenists" refers to Greek speaking Gentiles. What do you think would cause the believers to reach out to them? They may have heard about Peter and Cornelius and the conclusion reached by the elders in Jerusalem. But I believe there was even more to it. It must have also included the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus for the lost. **May the Lord help us to yield to those promptings that push us out of our comfort zone for the same reason.**

When we read "preaching the Lord Jesus" we should understand that this means proclaiming Jesus as our authority to whom we must give an account. Notice that the title "Christ" was not added. That is because it refers to the Messiah, and the Gentiles wouldn't understand that concept until they were taught.

²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Acts 11:21 The hand of the Lord is a reference to God's power. Those who shared the gospel were empowered by the Holy Spirit. That is an essential ingredient for successful witnessing. To proclaim Jesus out of duty is like obeying the law. There is no life-giving power behind it. But when we are directed by the Holy Spirit and yield to His life in us, the words we share are power packed and go to the heart of the listener. That produces fruit unto God (John 15:7-8). A great number believed and accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. This was how the church in Antioch began, and it was to play a pivotal role in the spread of the gospel. If we are to bear fruit, it will be because we yielded to the Holy Spirit and let Him work through us (John 15:4-5).

²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. Acts 11:22 We were introduced to Barnabas when he was given as an example of one who sold his property in Cyprus to support the training going on in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36-37). Then we saw him again introducing Saul to the church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). Apparently, they trusted him to communicate the Apostle's Doctrine to this new church in Antioch. In this we are reminded of the importance of sound Biblical instruction that stays true to Jesus' message. When there are new believers, we need those who are gifted in teaching to help them become grounded in the doctrines of the faith (Colossians 2:7). We should also take note that the evangelists that shared the gospel were not the ones entrusted to disciple these new believers. We all have different gifts, and each gift is important and rounds out the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). You each have a part in this local church body. We need one another and the exercise of our different gifts.

Commented [PW8]: Acts 11:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Commented [PW9]: John 15:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Commented [PW10]: John 15:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Commented [PW11]: Acts 4:36-37 (ESV)

³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Commented [PW12]: Acts 9:27 (ESV)

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

Commented [PW13]: Colossians 2:7 (ESV)

⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Commented [PW14]: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

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. Acts 11:23-24 Barnabas saw in these Hellenists the grace that brought them to salvation in Jesus. The word that had reached Jerusalem was a true account. Many had indeed trusted Jesus as Lord of their lives. Anyone full of the Holy Spirit and faith would be glad to observe the changes being wrought in them. The most joyful moments in my own life were those of watching people trust Jesus for their salvation. To see the relief on their faces and the burden of sin lifted from them expressed in their whole demeanor is a delight. You can almost sense the joy that is taking place in heaven. Jesus taught that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who is saved (Luke 15:10). We should certainly be filled with joy too, if we are full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

Upon observing that they had been recipients of God's grace, Barnabas exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord. God's second most frequently mentioned attribute is His faithfulness (Exodus 34:6). He is faithful even when we aren't (2 Timothy 2:13). The appropriate response to His faithfulness to us is to be faithful to Him. We should be faithful to pursue a deeper relationship with Him by reading the Word, spending time in prayer, and being obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

He also exhorted them to be steadfast in purpose. What is the purpose of a Christian? One confession tells us that **the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.**¹ We should all unwaveringly seek to glorify God in all we do (Isaiah 43:7), but also enjoy God forever. In His presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). The world will try to pull us away from this purpose or at the very least distract us so that it is not always the focus of our lives. But if we will keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and all He has done and is doing to make us His own, we can't help but be steadfast in purpose. This should be the focus of all discipleship. Information is important, but our focus is an issue of the heart. When He is first in our heart we remain steadfast in purpose.

I was watching a documentary on a cult in which a man used young girls in the name of Jesus. In the middle of the night I was praying for the girl that came forward to expose his crimes. I realized God never uses us like that man used them. He doesn't want people merely be objects that He manipulates for His purposes. He wants a fellowship of love through which He blesses us and works in us for our good and His glory. That is a huge difference. Don't desire to merely be an instrument. Desire fellowship with God and His life in you.

Notice that Barnabas' powerful teaching brought a great many more people to be added to the Lord. That's an interesting expression. Since the church is the body of Christ in the world, new believers are "added to the Lord." They become a part of us when they join us as the body of Christ. How we need to keep in mind that with all our differences and preferences, we are all a part of one body.

The fact that Barnabas was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith is part of the reason a great many were added to the Lord. Character that comes from the indwelling

Commented [PW15]: Luke 15:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Commented [PW16]: Exodus 34:6 (ESV)

⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

Commented [PW17]: 2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Commented [PW18]: Westminster Shorter Catechism

Commented [PW19]: Isaiah 43:7 (ESV)

⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Commented [PW20]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Holy Spirit mixed with faith made his teaching powerful. The same words might come from someone else and yet have little results when there isn't the same conviction behind the words. The people who proclaim the gospel must live the gospel if they are to see results.

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. Acts 11:25-26

The leadership in Jerusalem had sent Saul back to his hometown to witness to family and friends (Acts 9:30). But as Jesus taught, a prophet is without honor in his hometown (Matthew 13:57). Barnabas had seen the depth of insight God had given to Saul as well as the anointing to proclaim the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. Recognizing the need for teachers in Antioch, Barnabas traveled a hundred miles to the north to find Saul and ask for his help in teaching these new disciples. Barnabas recognized he couldn't do it all and also saw Saul's gifts. He was humble enough to ask for help. For an entire year they taught these new believers so they would be on a solid footing of faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Antioch was where the disciples were first labelled Christians. Most commentators believe this was meant to be a derogatory term. It would be like calling them Messianics. Of course, Gentiles did not understand the Jewish idea of an anointed one, so it was probably because they so often heard the disciples use the term "Christ." That is one sign that Saul and Barnabas did an excellent job of teaching them to spread the good news of Jesus, the Christ predicted in the Scriptures. The Jewish label for the movement was "The Way," but unbelieving Gentiles had begun calling them "Christians" (Acts 9:2). While the world may have meant it in mocking way, what an honor it is to be associated with Jesus! For Jews of that day to be associated with a crucified Messiah may have been meant as an insult. Again, we see the upside-down way of the Kingdom of God. What an honor to be associated with the incarnate Word of God (John 1:14)! By the grace of God, let us live up to that label!

I remember being challenged as a high school student to carry my Bible with my school books. I had dedicated my life to God and was now facing the fear of being identified as a Christian. I had to decide if I wanted to fit in or to take a stand for Jesus. Would I wear a T-shirt with a Christian message? In our culture, it is a bit intimidating; but if we are ashamed of Christ, He tells us He will be ashamed of us, and rightly so (Mark 8:38). If He would hang suffering on a cross for us, before everyone to see, how can we be ashamed of being identified with Him?

Now the text moves to a famine and how the church in Antioch assisted the mother church in Jerusalem. It is an example of the grace of God at work in this Gentile church.

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). Acts 11:27-28

According to Apostle Paul, prophecy is usually for upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3). Jesus did say that the Holy Spirit would show us

Commented [PW21]: Acts 9:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Commented [PW22]: Matthew 13:57 (ESV)

⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

Commented [PW23]: 1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW24]: Acts 9:2 (ESV)

² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Commented [PW25]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [PW26]: Mark 8:38 (ESV)

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Commented [PW27]: 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

things to come (John 16:13), but our emphasis is on the words of Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3). One of the prophets from Jerusalem, Agabus, predicted a famine which did come to pass during the days of the emperor Claudius. In the year 46 A.D. there were record grain prices because of that famine and the hoarding that followed.

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. Acts 11:29-30 Trusting the prophetic word to be true, they began to collect the funds for the church in Jerusalem's future needs. Remember, the church in Jerusalem was assisting widows and had to feed many poor believers (Acts 6:1). There are two important points here. The first is the care for fellow believers. The very morning I was working on the sermon, I heard a testimony on the radio of a woman who was going through a very difficult time in her life, and the church helped her financially through that period of an entire year. Recently I had an old acquaintance tell me he was saving his tithe to give to a church that actually assisted poor or disabled members as he believed it is Biblical to do so. Apostle Paul tells us to do good to everyone, but especially to the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

The second point is that all gave according to their ability. If you had an abundance you could give more. If you were poor, you might only be able to give a very small amount like the widow's mite. That is the principle of tithing. Ten percent is large amount from a wealthy person, but a small amount from the poor, yet each has given according to how God has blessed them financially and how God has prompted them (1 Corinthians 16:2). Then they sent it by the hand of their teachers to the elders in Jerusalem.

The establishing of a mostly Gentile church in the third largest Roman city was the next step in the gospel going into all the world. Luke is showing step by step how the church began to obey the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). We can see God's hand in it all, giving direction, orchestrating circumstances, and prompting the hearts of the disciples. We will see the last step in chapter 13, when the missionary movement is launched.

What we are reading is not just a history of the church, it is God reaching out to a lost world in love. It is God's desire to let the world know what He has done for us in sending Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God to die for our sins (John 1:29), so that we might enter into a relationship with Him. You live where you do for the same reason (Acts 17:26-27). There is someone in your life, a neighbor, a friend, a family member that needs to know what God has done for them in Jesus. Ask in prayer how the Lord might work through you to reach out to them. The more you get to know them, the more natural it is to share your story of the difference Jesus has made in your life.

Questions

- 1 How can we identify our prejudices?
- 2 How should we look at difficult circumstances?
- 3 Why did they witness to Gentiles?
- 4 Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch?
- 5 What did Barnabas exhort the new believers to do?
- 6 Why are believers "added to the Lord"?
- 7 Why was Barnabas effective?
- 8 Why did he go so far to recruit Saul's help?
- 9 Are you honored by the label "Christian"?
- 10 Why was this the next step for the church?

Commented [PW28]: John 16:13 (ESV)

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Commented [PW29]: Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Commented [PW30]: Acts 6:1 (ESV)

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

Commented [PW31]: Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Commented [PW32]: 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Commented [PW33]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Commented [PW34]: John 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Commented [PW35]: Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,
²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,