

Jesus' mission of good news to the world

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Date: 06 February 2023

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[0:00] God. Please have seats. So if you turn with me and you're my host, I have to ask chapter 11.

I'm going to think about another lesson from the life of Barnabas. We're going to see Jesus' good news mission, which is unstoppable. Chapter 11 is going to remind us that the true God is a missionary God.

In the year 2023, the year in which we live, here is the statistic, 360 million believers in the Lord Jesus will face intense persecution and discrimination.

So that's one in seven of every follower of Jesus will face some form of discrimination as governments, as other religions, as communities look to stamp out the message of Jesus.

But wonderfully, what we're seeing at the same time is that Christianity continues to grow and often is growing most quickly in places where there is the greatest opposition.

[1:13] This year also, here's another statistic, 47% of all Christians in the world are now living in countries that would be described as non-Christian majority.

So about 100 years ago, 95% of the world that was Christian lived in what we would call Christian countries. That's changing because the church of Jesus is spreading and the good news is spreading.

People are more likely than ever before to meet someone in their lifetime who is a Christian. So there's more opportunities for people to hear the good news.

Now, why is that? We can think about global trends and phenomena, but we need to understand that behind all that lies God's desire to reach the lost, God's desire that men and women and boys and girls be reconciled to Him.

What we're seeing in chapter 11, and especially when you think about the life of Barnabas and these early Christians in Antioch, is that Jesus' mission is going to keep on growing, and that this is profoundly good news for us and for our world.

[2:26] Because Jesus is on a mission to rescue and to restore, to pour out the love of God, to bring grace that would heal great divisions in society.

So there's two things that we're going to think about today. One that's going to take up the majority of our time, and it's this. Jesus is good news for the world. Okay, so before we get that to there, we'll go back to the beginning of the book of Acts.

Acts chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus says to His disciples, just before going back to heaven, you will be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And then the story of Acts, as Luke tells it, is the story of that mission of Jesus being accomplished.

And you can trace out chapters 1 to 7, the message of Jesus spreads through the region of Judea. Then we get to chapter 7, and Stephen is the first martyr, the first follower of Jesus who's killed for his faith.

That leads to persecution in Judea. That leads to the church spreading. Chapters 8 and 9, persecution spreads good news to Samaria.

[3:38] And then chapters 10 and 11, persecution spreads good news to the Greeks, to the Gentiles, to the non-Jewish world. First, as Peter is led to the house of Cornelius.

And then, from verse 19 onwards in chapter 11, we discover what happens in Antioch. So Antioch is in modern-day Turkey. So three things to notice from verses 19 to 21 that we've just read.

The first is to notice Jesus' growing mission. Verse 19, those who'd been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.

Some of them, however, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. So some things to notice. First of all, notice that the killing of Stephen doesn't stop the church from spreading and from spreading good news.

Fear doesn't stop them. Notice as well that the slowness of some of the Jewish believers doesn't stop the message of Jesus from spreading.

[4 : 55] So there's obviously some Jewish Christians who are thinking, well, why would someone who's not from our country need to hear about Jesus? Isn't he just our Savior? But despite their slowness, it doesn't stop.

The church continues to spread. And notice that now it spreads to reach the Greeks. So now the good news from God through Jesus has crossed languages, has crossed cultures.

And it's come to this place called Antioch. So Antioch was a big city. Actually, it was probably about the same size as Edinburgh, about half a million people. It was the third city in the Roman Empire. So you had Rome, then you had Alexandria, and then you had Antioch. It was significant because it was a port city. So it was a very busy commercial center.

It was known for being very diverse. People from all nations setting up trade there, setting up home there, very cosmopolitan. It was also known for the worship of Roman gods, especially Diana.

[6 : 00] Her big temple shrine was just five miles away. And it was known in its day for being a very immoral city. So there's a little bit of background to remind us and to encourage us that the good news of Jesus is believed by many in that city and into that culture, that hearts were won over, that ways of worship, ways of life were being changed.

People were worshipping. Lots of people were worshipping pagan gods in Antioch. And to worship a pagan god, what were you doing? You were looking for someone who is the Lord, someone who would give you the good life.

And to get that good life, what you had to do was to offer sacrifices. So you had a whole system of religion that was based on this. But then the good news, the gospel of Jesus comes, and it's different.

Because these Christians will talk about the true Lord, who's not just Lord over some of the world, but over all the world. The good life that Jesus offers is eternal life.

It's the promise of knowing life with God. And it's not on the basis of a sacrifice that a worshiper would make. Life with God comes because of the sacrifice Jesus, the Son of God, makes.

[7 : 26] And so the message found a good hearing, because Jesus is what every heart is longing for. However, they didn't know it, but when they heard about Jesus, then they understood.

He's the one that we need. He's the one we should worship. So Jesus' growing mission. The second thing to notice is that Jesus is the goal of mission.

I'm going to see this in verse 20 and 21. And I think it's important for us to notice this, because there could be a negative view of world mission today. Sometimes you'll hear people negatively speaking about the spread of Christianity.

They'll have this false idea that it's a Western religion. So how can the West impose their religion or impose their cultural values? Let's not spread the Christian message, because isn't it true that religion just causes war and it divides?

We'll set against that. There's a very positive view of mission in these verses, because the mission is focused entirely on the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 34] Let's see that together. Verse 20 and 21. They began to tell them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

You see how central the Lord is there? He's the source of their mission. When it talks about the Lord's hand was with them, that means that it's the Lord Jesus who's giving power for mission. He's motivating their mission, and he gives the success. He's also the content of the mission. Who do they go and talk about? They go and talk about the good news that Jesus, the Son of God, has come to be the Savior.

They're not saying convert to a set of practices, to a set of cultural values. People are being invited to know their Lord, their Maker, their Savior.

And notice, too, that Jesus is the goal of the mission. Success comes, end of verse 21, when people turn to the Lord.

[9 : 41] So instead of turning to an idol, instead of turning to a statue or some created thing, now they're giving their heart, they're giving their loyalty and love and worship to the Lord Jesus.

And as this happens, one of the great barriers of the ancient world is being broken down. The barrier between Jewish people and Gentile people is torn down by Jesus.

Because we are all one in Christ Jesus. It's a message of good news for all people. Why is it that the people in Antioch are willing to believe?

Why are they willing to leave behind their old way of life, their old religious practices? Why are they willing to count the cost to become a follower of Jesus, knowing it will likely mean opposition, exclusion, hostility?

It's because they hear the call of Jesus and God gives them the gift of faith. They see the glory of Jesus and they understand that Jesus is better.

[10 : 59] So Jesus is the goal of mission. Another thing we need to see is that Jesus is the good news of mission.

So he's the content and that content is good news. And good news is meant to be shared. So before we get to our text, boys and girls especially, let me just talk to you for a moment.

We got a new puppy this week. Some of us know that. It was a big surprise. Actually, it was a bit of a surprise. But it was a surprise to our boys. So we got Teddy.

He's a little labradoodle. And we had, we knew on Monday that we were going to get him, but we didn't tell the boys until Tuesday afternoon. That was so difficult for me because I was with them all morning and I desperately wanted to share that good news because I knew it would make them really happy.

And we all are. But you know, my question since then has been, why don't I always feel like that when it comes to sharing the far, far better good news about Jesus?

[12 : 09] I wonder if you can relate to that. We gladly, readily share good news, but sometimes we struggle to share the good news of Jesus. Think about what's happening in chapter 11.

Sometimes it's because the fear of opposition. Maybe we're not sure how the other person's going to respond. Sometimes, perhaps, it's because we're slow to see that everybody needs Jesus.

By and large, we live perhaps surrounded by people who have plenty money. They seem pretty content. Maybe we can find it hard to see beyond that to see people's spiritual need.

But sometimes, I think perhaps it's because maybe in our busyness, we lose focus, even as believers, on the goodness of the gospel.

On how good Jesus is. On the cost that he was willing to pay for our rescue. On the wonderful treasure that we have for now and for eternity.

[13 : 10] But that wasn't the case, was it, for these unnamed Christians who boldly, courageously shared in Antioch. So they've come to discover Jesus was on a search and rescue mission for the whole world to bring people to God.

He knew Jesus was Savior for all people in all nations. They knew the story of Cornelius. So they know this is too good to keep quiet. So what we're going to do is we're going to use Acts chapter 11 as a window for us to remind us or to show us that Jesus is really good news for us, really good news for our world.

Whoever we are today, Jesus is good news for us. One aspect of the good news that we need to recognize is that in Jesus, God saves.

This was actually the message that Cornelius received. So in chapter 11, verse 14, he was told that Peter would come, follower of Jesus, and he will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.

So if you're new to Christianity, maybe you wonder, why do Christians talk about being saved and salvation? To make sense of it, I think it's helpful for us to go back and to consider the big story of the human race, maybe especially to think back to how our Bible begins, Genesis 1 to 3.

[14 : 40] We discover there in the early chapters of the book of Genesis that God made the first two people, Adam and Eve, they were made in His image, and they were made to know God.

Indeed, the first people were made to enjoy perfect relationships with one another, with the world that God had made, and with their God.

When we read about life in the beginning, we can understand it's the world we all long for, a world of perfect peace and life and love.

But then, something went wrong. In Genesis chapter 3, we discover Adam and Eve, these first people turning their backs on God. And that explains to us what we need to be saved from. To understand salvation, we need to understand what's the danger, what do we need to be saved from? We need to be saved from sin. Sin, as we see it from Adam and Eve and in our own hearts, is whenever we break one of God's commands.

[15 : 45] Sin is whenever we believe the false promises of sin. This says, rejecting God is good, following our own way is better.

Sin is rejecting the rule of God to choose to live for, to find our happiness, to base our identity and purpose in life on something other, someone other, than the one true God.

And we need to be saved from sin because the effect of sin is separation. So in the story of Adam and Eve, as soon as they sin, we find them hiding.

We find their shame. We were made for life with God. But our sin and our guilt cuts us off from our God.

We were made to know God living within us, but now because of sin, we only have self at the center. And that's bad news because it tends to make us selfish.

[17 : 01] We need our God, but by ourselves, we cannot get back into the garden. We cannot get our way back to life with God. So sin separates.

And sin and separation, in the end, leads to spiritual death. Adam and Eve were told that if you sin, you'll die.

The Bible says the wages of sin is death. Because of sin, physical death comes, but so too does spiritual judgment, spiritual death, the reality of hell.

And this is not the way it's supposed to be. We were made for life. We were made for eternal life, made for life with God. But we have turned our back on that, and that's what we need to be saved from.

We need to be saved from the power of sin. Sin functions like a drug addiction. It kills us, and it has a hold on us, and we cannot break free from it.

[18 : 08] Or it's like a snake bite, and its poison is in our system, and in the end, it will destroy us. And so as we understand what the Bible says about what do we need to be saved from, the question then becomes, well, how can anyone be saved?

How can I be saved? Where does freedom come from? What's the cure? Where's the good news? And in Genesis 3, we discover there's good news. There's a promise that Adam and Eve, in their sin, God promised one from their family, a seed who would defeat their enemy, who would crush the head of the serpent, who would bring good news.

And that promise is fulfilled. Jesus, he's the Savior. And it's this good news that comes to Antioch. These Christians can say, listen, you cannot save yourself.

Your idols cannot save, and they cannot give you lasting happiness, but Jesus can. That problem of sin that we all have, the answer is found in Jesus.

Jesus, the substitute. So Jesus comes, the Son of God becomes truly human. And in his life, he always obeys his Father.

[19 : 25] He always pleases his Father. He fulfills the demands of the law, the law that we break, and he does that on our behalf. And then Jesus, the substitute, not only does he live for us, he also dies for us.

He dies as a sacrifice, and as he dies on the cross, he is carrying your sin and my sin. The Bible says he is crushed for our sin.

And in his sacrificial death, he completely covers over our sin so that we can be declared righteous. The problem of separation from our God, the answer is found in Jesus.

One thing we discover as Jesus dies on the cross, as he has been abandoned by his friends, as he's been whipped and beaten, as a crown of thorns has been pulled onto his head, as he's been nailed to the cross, the greatest pain for Jesus is that sense of feeling forsaken or abandoned by his Father.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why does Jesus go to that dark place? Jesus feels abandoned so that you and I might be welcomed as we trust in Jesus.

[20 : 57] And then Jesus sends from heaven the Holy Spirit. So now we're not separate from God, rather God comes to live in our hearts.

That God is here right now by his Spirit. And the problem of spiritual death, that's also answered through Jesus, through his death and his resurrection.

As Jesus goes under the judgment of God, he experiences hell on earth for us so that we can enjoy heaven by trusting in him and his work.

He defeated death. And having defeated death, he gives the gift of eternal life and he promises an eternal home with him, with our God and King in the new world he will bring in.

In Jesus, God saves. That's good news for the world. And in Jesus, secondly, God blesses.

[22 : 07] So there's this really interesting discussion back in chapter 11 verses 15 to 17 between Peter and some people who are wondering how could you go to Gentiles and speak to them about Jesus?

And he says to them, listen, they have the same Holy Spirit as we do. God has given the same gift. They share the same Savior. The church is one.

And again, if we step back to the beginning of the Bible, we discover, just as in Genesis chapter 3, there was a promise, here is a seed to be sent and he'll save. In Genesis 12, a promise comes to Abraham that is a seed, there's someone from your family who will bless the nations of the world. And this is the good news that Antioch hears. Jesus isn't just for people over there. He's not just for some kind of, he's for all people. Jesus is God's way to extend blessing and peace and life to all nations and all kinds of people.

That's still the good news today. It's good news for us. Whatever nation we are from, whatever country we come from, whatever region we're from, Jesus would be good news for us today.

[23 : 22] There is one gift, the Holy Spirit for Jew and for Gentile. So any believer knows life from God and knows life with God. The power of God, the love of God, the friendship of God, we have it through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

And again, this blessing that extends to all nations, again, it means that Jesus is tearing down those dividing lines that we often set up. The lines that divide different people and different cultures.

When the message of Christianity is truly understood and practiced, it doesn't create war. It doesn't bring division. Rather, it brings peace and it brings healing because Jesus forgives and Jesus reconciles.

And so we see this wonderful promise being fulfilled that Jesus will bless the nations. And we can look ahead, Revelation chapter 7, we have this promise of what it will look like when it's fulfilled.

In heaven, there's this image of Jesus on his throne and he's being worshipped by people from every language and every nation and every people group. We're all one in Christ Jesus.

[24 : 36] And when we understand that, we understand why these first Christians were so excited to share good news. This is why we call the message of the Christian faith good news because it answers the deepest human need of our heart, our sin, and our guilt, and our need to be right with God.

We call it good news because it's the way into God's blessing. God has sent Jesus in order to fix what is broken, to give us entry into the relationship and the life that we were made for.

We call Jesus good news because his forgiveness, his peace, promises a better way than division and hostility in the Savior who reconciles and brings peace.

And it's good news because to receive it, we don't say, well, you have to become a certain type of person or you don't have to act a certain kind of way. You don't need to make great sacrifices or go on some special journey.

No, you must believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. We must put our faith in the Lord Jesus. We must turn away from whatever we trusted in before in order to trust in him as our Lord, to receive him as God's wonderful gift.

[26 : 08] So that's our first point. Jesus is good news to the world. Our second point, super, super brief, but it's also really important is that Jesus continues his mission through his church.

So we've emphasized that vital truth that it's Jesus who gives the power for mission. It's Jesus who is the content of mission. Jesus is the goal of mission.

So truly and really, it is all about Jesus, but we also need this other vital truth. Jesus uses his people, his church, to achieve his purposes to carry out his mission.

So our response as the people of God is not to sit back and say, well, Jesus has got this, so I don't need to do anything.

It's also not to stress out and say, I need to save the world. Our response is to serve our Savior, Lord, and Master with his help motivated by his love and grace.

[27 : 11] We've already seen it as these unnamed believers continue the mission of Jesus in Antioch. It's not just apostles who bring the good news, who begin to cause the church to grow.

Christianity grows as these unnamed believers boldly share. And what happens next, this is in verse 22 to 24, the Jerusalem church hears what's going on.

Verse 22, news of this reached the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. So they want to validate, find out what's going on and they send the perfect guy for the job.

So we know that Barnabas' real name is Joseph, but this is his nickname, Son of Encouragement. So we've been thinking about how Barnabas is an encouragement and we're going to see it again here.

Three very brief points to notice and some questions to ask about how Barnabas helps to continue the mission of Jesus. First, verse 23, Barnabas encourages new believers.

[28 : 12] So look with me at verse 23. When Barnabas arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord.

He was glad. Here is the power of encouragement. Again, boys and girls, I'm going to stick with the puppy theme for a moment.

if you've ever had to help to train a puppy, you will know that what you need to do is to encourage and praise and reward good behavior when and if you see it, which with a puppy doesn't always come that often.

But the power of encouragement is what helps a puppy be trained towards obedience. But you probably also know, and all of us, I think, know, the power and the beauty of encouragement in our lives.

Someone who's got our backs, someone who says, you can do this, someone who says, I can see that you're making progress. The power of encouragement is real.

[29 : 19] Think about what Barnabas does for these new Christians in Antioch, far away from the center in Jerusalem. He says to them, I can see that Jesus has really changed you.

I can see that God has worked powerfully in you. I can say that you belong to Jesus, you belong to his church. I can see and I'm glad that you're living with faith and obedience.

Now imagine the difference that that's going to make to these new believers, to be encouraged by an encourager. So my question, my challenge, my invitation to myself and to all of us is this, who can you and I encourage spiritually this week?

Who can you say, I'm so glad to see your faith and obedience at work? How can you and I do that so that we would follow Barnabas in encouraging believers in the mission of God?

Second thing, Barnabas encourages perseverance. Again, verse 23, he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

[30 : 31] Faith, as has often been said, is a marathon and not a sprint. It's not how we begin that matters, it's how we run the race, it's how we finish. Barnabas encourages them to persevere.

Keep going when trials come. Persevere by being wholehearted in your commitment to Jesus.

Show your loyalty to him and not to those idols that you used to trust in.

You may have seen on the news, you may actually have seen on the streets that there is all kinds of road cycling world championships happening. Perth, Stirling, Edinburgh, Glasgow, those big long distance races.

I don't know if they need water stations, but they definitely have water stations at a marathon. Think of a marathon, think of those water stations, tired runners come for a break, think of those water bottle passers.

How refreshing for that exhausting journey to get a drink of water. Who can you and I refresh this week in faith to encourage someone to persevere, to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, to focus on the eternal prize.

[31 : 59] The last way that Jesus continues his mission through Barnabas, verse 24, Barnabas encourages faith by his witness. Listen to this wonderful testimony from Luke as to the character of Barnabas.

I imagine for all of us this is something that we would love people to say of us. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

So here's this wonderful thing, so Barnabas is living out his faith day by day in Antioch. He's speaking and he's sharing and he's encouraging and the impact is there's more followers of Jesus. Let's never underestimate the power of lifestyle evangelism. Let's not underestimate the power of every day resolving to live for Jesus in our family, our workplace.

We go back to school to work hard and to work well, to be good neighbors, to be kind, to be honest, and to be ready to speak about Jesus when we get a chance.

[33 : 07] Robert Murray McShane, who was ministering St. Peter's in Dundee in the 19th century, said this, he said, a Christian, love this definition, a Christian is a person who makes it easy for others to believe in God.

A Christian is a person who makes it easy for others to believe in God. In that, Barnabas is a wonderful ambassador, isn't he? Is that what people would say of us as a church? That this church makes it easy for others to believe in God and that he's good news?

Is that what people would say of our lives? Let's ask the Spirit to be convicting us, to be showing us, if there are areas where perhaps we make it difficult for others to believe in God.

That's because we'd want others to be seeing the goodness of Jesus. Acts 11 is a wonderful lesson that our God is a missionary God, that Jesus continues his mission in the world, and he does that through people and through churches like us.

Through Christians sharing the good news of Jesus the Savior. As the grace of God transforms lives and works itself into cultures, as the words and lives of everyday Christians like us can be used by God to accomplish Jesus' goal.

[34 : 23] Because wonderfully, our God is a missionary God. Let's pray to our God briefly now. Lord God, we thank you that we have good news. We have good news from you of Jesus, the Savior for the world.

Lord.