

The church at Antioch

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Preacher: David Skull

[0 : 00] Welcome this morning to another pre-recorded meeting for Calvary Evangelical Church in Brighton.

! This will be for the 28th of June 2020. Lockdown is just decreasing but we're still not able to meet together so another pre-recorded service meeting broadcast. Just to introduce ourselves we are a church of people who live in the area of Brighton, south coast of the UK, Sussex, and we are believers in Jesus Christ. We are normally a church of about 80 or so people meeting together on Sunday mornings in normal times. We're just ordinary people from different nations, different backgrounds, and we believe that God has brought us together to know his love, to serve him, and we're going to do our best to express that in this time together. Well a particular welcome to you if you've just dropped in, maybe looking for some spiritual comfort and guidance in this time of the virus, and I hope you'll find it helpful. My name is Philip Wells, I'm one of the team of elders here at Calvary, and I'm not really not doing very much, I'm just introducing today, and other notices will be available.

I'm only introducing because our guest speaker this morning is Pastor David Skull, who spoke for us last week. He's from Grace Church in Guildford. He studied civil engineering at university and, so I read, worked in the water industry. But he left that line of work to serve in an organization which supports Christian groups in universities across the UK. It's called UCCF, which stands for Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. And currently he's being sent as a missionary to Brighton, to put it in simple language. So it's really good to have his input, even though he's still in Guildford at the moment, and to hear from him again today as we did last week.

So even though we're prevented from meeting together, we will do the things that Christians do when they meet together as best we can. We will sing and pray and read from the Bible and have a talk from the Bible as it applies to us, and that's what David's going to do a little bit later. So let me offer a simple prayer as we begin. Lord in heaven, we come to you. We come as sinners confessing our sin.

Please forgive us through the blood of Jesus Christ. We come as needy people. We can't live and work in this world without you. So we come to ask that as we reach out our hands, we might find our hands are caught in the almighty hand of the almighty God. We come to you this morning asking that as we seek to draw near to you, you will draw near to us. May we know your purposes and know what part you want us to play in them. May those who are not yet your people be stirred to come to Jesus Christ and see him for who he truly is. And may those of us who are already Christians be freshly encouraged and motivated with joy and gladness to serve you with all the strength and energy that we have. So please bless us in this time together we pray. Amen. We're going to sing a song. It's number 196 in the praise book.

[4 : 12] Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation.

O my soul, the King of creation. O my soul, praise Him for He is your health and salvation.

Come all who hear, brothers and sisters draw near, praise Him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, the King of creation. Praise to the Lord, above all things so mightily reigning, keeping us safe at His side and so gently sustaining. Have you not seen all you may see, all you have needed, but by His gracious ordaining. Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our world and defend us.

Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our world and defend us. Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.

[6 : 18] Ponder anew, who shall prosper our world and defend us. Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do, who with His love will befriend us.

He calls us now to follow Him. To bring our lives as a daily offering.
[14 : 05] To cruel nails surrender.

This is our God, the servant King. He calls us now to follow Him.
To bring our lives as a daily offering. Of worship to the servant King.
For it is Christ we're serving. So let us learn how to serve. And in our lives as a daily offering. And in our lives enthroned Him.
Each other's needs to prefer. For it is Christ we're serving. For it is Christ we're serving.
[15 : 34] This is our God, the servant King. This is our God, the servant King. The servant King. He calls us now to follow Him.

To bring our lives as a daily offering. To bring our lives as a daily offering. Of worship to the servant King.
And I'm going to say no more than thank you to David for putting himself out to prepare this address for us.
And in a moment we'll see him standing in his church in Guildford. And his church building in Guildford. And bringing greetings to us. So let me pray and then over to him.
Lord help us to hear what you are saying to us. Give us discernment and hearts that are open to your call. Or whatever it may be.

[16 : 45] So help us as hearers even as we've prayed that you would help David as speaker. And we pray in Jesus name. Amen. So it's over to David now. Well good morning Calvary.

It's David here speaking from Grace Church in Guildford. Thank you so much for inviting me back to share with you this morning. As part of your online morning service. Bringing great greetings from the church here in Guildford.

We'll be meeting online as you are. And we're longing for the day when as the restrictions begin to be lifted. We can start to think about gathering again.

May the Lord sustain us and lead us and work in us during this time. Just before we begin by reading God's word. I just want to encourage you with a book that has encouraged me recently. Here it is. It's called Encouragement Adrenaline for the Soul. Encouragement Adrenaline for the Soul. It's by Mark Chansky. It's an American book published by Reformation Heritage Books.

[17 : 47] Adrenaline for the Soul. Encouragement is the title. Just to say why I think this is a great book to delve into over the summer. It will do you some good.

Here's the blurb from the back. It says the author makes the case that encouragement is able to do emotionally and psychologically for the soul what adrenaline does for the body.

While Christians are sometimes reluctant to offer encouragement, we must do so in order to love our neighbors as ourselves. Now building on the foundation of the gospel as the ultimate encouragement from God, the author uses quotations, historical references, illustrations, and examples to set forth the Christian's obligation to offer encouragement.

It then shows us how we can be encouraging in our families and our churches and in the world. Let me commend it to you. Encouragement Adrenaline for the Soul by Mark Chansky.

If we can take some of the encouragements in here and apply them into our relationships, particularly our life of the church when we gather again, I believe our churches will flourish. You're welcome to borrow my copy if you want to or order your own.

[19 : 01] But encouragement Adrenaline for the Soul. Now let's turn to the word of God, shall we? Let's read that together. We're in the book of Acts. It's a very encouraging passage for local churches, and that's why I want to share it with you this morning.

Acts chapter 11, two readings, verses 19 to 30, and then we'll move into chapter 13 as well. So Acts chapter 11, verses 19 to 30.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling 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. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

[20 : 07] When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. During this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

One of them named Agabus stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. This happened during the reign of Claudius.

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

[21 : 13] And let's move over to chapter 13 and carry on the story. Acts 13. In the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.

John was with them as their helper. They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elemas, the sorcerer, for that is what his name means, opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

[22 : 33] Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elemas and said, You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right.

You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.

Immediately mist and darkness came over him and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Let's pray together before we consider the meaning and the application of this passage for us today. Father, we thank you so much for your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death upon the cross for the sins of his people, his glorious resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

We thank you, Father, so much that he is active in the world today, even through this extraordinarily difficult time, strange time with the pandemic. Thank you that he is working through local churches to extend his kingdom and the good news of the gospel.

[23 : 58] We pray, Father, as we look at the encouragements from this passage, that you would strengthen us as the church to fulfill our role in your plans and purposes. I pray, help me, help Calvary, help others who are listening in, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Last week, if you were tuning in, we focused on the issue of personal discipleship.

We looked at Luke chapter 9 and we saw those challenging words that Jesus gave to those who are seemingly willing to follow him. Remember, he was teaching his disciples at the same time.

But we asked those questions, am I really willing to follow Jesus wherever? Is my life completely at his disposal? Is it Jesus first or are there but first?

You see, the Christian life is a personal call to follow Jesus Christ. That is a costly call, but it's also a joyful call because Christ has already done the work.

[24 : 58] He's already gone to the cross and therefore he calls us to lay our all at his feet, submit ourselves to him and follow Jesus as Lord. Well, if last week was about the call to personal discipleship, then this week we're looking at things from the perspective of the whole church.

You see, personal disciples are to be joined together in local churches that display the gospel to the watching world.

The local church is the great means by which the risen Lord Jesus chooses to accomplish his plans and purpose, his great commission of taking his name out to the world.

I wonder if you believe that in this sense in which we're scattered from each other in the life of the local church. It is a time where we're kind of hungering and thirsting to be gathered again. It's not enough just to be on your own, on your sofa, being nourished. That's partly what we need. But what we really need is each other gathered together.

[26 : 06] The local church where God is acting, where God is at work, and where God is moving us in his plans and his purposes. Well, we're looking at the church in Antioch this morning.

There's going to be an outline coming above me on the head. The church in Antioch, their story is really a great encouragement for us in local churches today. There's also something of a model for us going on here as well.

But ultimately, it's an encouragement to keep at it, being the local church in God's plans and purposes. We're going to see a bit of their story this morning. We all have stories in our churches. Our church here in Guildford has a story. We began in the early 1600s, and we began meeting in a barn. That's how we began. And we've had ups and downs through the years.

But the Lord has been at work, and he continues to be at work in us today as we seek to be faithful to him. You have a story, Calvary. It's been lovely to hear about that as we came to visit a few weeks ago.

[27 : 04] How you began as the railway mission and how the Lord has been at work in you over the years and knitting you together. So we all have stories as churches. We have a present, but also we have a future as the Lord leads us in his plans and purposes.

Well, as we look in Acts chapter 11 and Acts chapter 13, we're going to see Antioch's story, the story of the church there. How they began, how they grew, and how the Lord used them, not just in their city, but beyond as well.

And that gives us encouragement as we submit ourselves to Jesus, how he uses us as local churches. First of all, let's see how the church began. Look at chapter 11 from verse 19.

The church in Antioch began in a very unexpected way. Clearly the work of God. It didn't begin with the professionals, any kind of big strategy from the top down.

It didn't begin even with the great apostles, with Peter or Paul, or even the greatly gifted Barnabas. He comes later. No, the church began through ordinary believers on the move, speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 19] It began with ordinary believers on the move, speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ. You might know the background to this chapter, and why the ordinary believers are being pushed out of Jerusalem.

There was a great persecution in the city. There was a great turmoil there. And not out of their choice, but they were forced out because of the persecution. And so the believers were scattered out of the city.

But as they went, these ordinary believers carried the message of the risen Lord Jesus with them. Where they went, they shared it. Of course, there's no such thing really as an ordinary believer, is there?

Every believer has been given new life and is interwelt by the Holy Spirit. Yet these ordinary Christians, thrust out in an extraordinarily difficult time, were used by the Lord to extend the message of Jesus.

Now, we know in the early verses here that they began just by sharing the message of Jesus with Jews only. That was their background. But then something extraordinary happened in Antioch, according to these verses.

[29 : 30] Look at verse 20. It says that the men from Cyprus and Cyrene in Antioch began to share the good news of Jesus with the Greek-speaking Gentiles as well.

In other words, there was a significant moment where fresh ground was being taken for the gospel and barriers were being overcome.

So it's wonderful, isn't it, that although they hadn't planned to do this, and it was a terribly difficult time, the Lord was at work accomplishing his purposes so that the gospel will go to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

And this wasn't a top-down strategy from the church in Jerusalem. It was a grassroots work where the Lord Jesus, using the circumstances of persecution, was taking his message out.

Last week we had that personal challenge, didn't we? Are we, am I, willing personally to follow Jesus wherever, whatever? Would it be him first?

[30 : 41] Well, here is just an example of what the Lord does when we say yes to Jesus in that kind of way. He uses ordinary believers in his extraordinary work, even through very difficult circumstances.

So, ordinary believers. But the church also began because there was a great movement and work of the Lord Jesus himself. The Holy Spirit was at work. Look at verse 21.

It tells us that the hand of the Lord was with them as they began to speak about the good news of Jesus with those from a Gentile background. The hand of the Lord.

There's a great picture in it that the hand of the Lord, it kind of pictures the strength and the power of the Lord. Let's never forget that the risen Lord Jesus in heaven has all authority and power. And he is using it for the extension of his kingdom through his people. So, we understand that kind of language of power and the hand, that imagery.

[31 : 40] With your hand, you get things done. With your hand, you wield your strength. Let me give you a hand, we say, when you want to help someone. Well, these ordinary believers in this extraordinary situation find as they open their mouths to speak about Jesus crossing boundaries, they find that the risen Lord Jesus himself from heaven is saying, let me give you my hand.

Nothing can be more important, surely, than the hand of the Lord is with his people through great opportunities and through great challenges. That's why we pray and submit ourselves to the risen Jesus.

And look at what happened when the Lord extended his hands and helped them. It says that a great number of people at this point believed and turned to the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the way, the message that they were sharing in those days is just as relevant and important today. It might be that you're listening in and you're not yet a believer, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the great message that they shared, the good news of the Lord Jesus, is just as important and being shared just as much today. And the hand of the Lord is making it effective in the same kind of way.

[32 : 56] So if you're listening in and you think, well, what is this message? Let me just share it with you really clearly. The message begins with God who created the heavens and the earth.

The Bible says he created you and me. We live reliant upon his power, upon his rule over all things. The Bible says that we are all sinners, that we have all turned decided to turn our backs against God, our creator, and live as rebels in his world.

So we try and live as if he doesn't exist. The Bible says that that is called sin. It's a rebellion against God. It's seen in a lack of love for him, but also a mistreatment and a lack of love for others.

But the Bible says that God, our creator, out of great love for sinners like us, sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world. The Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfectly good life.

He never sinned. He never rebelled as we did. And yet he went to the cross where he paid the punishment of the sins of all of God's people.

[34 : 02] He died in our place so that we could be brought into the kingdom and into the family of God. And a Christian is someone who hears that great message that the Lord Jesus has made a way for us to be right with God.

He died. He rose again. He reigns. He is Lord overall. A Christian is someone who hears that message and God works in their heart and they say, this is true. I believe that I'm a sinner.

I'm going to turn from my sinful past. I'm going to put my trust in Jesus and follow him as Lord of my life. Well, that's the message that they shared in Antioch with Gentile people, people outside the Jewish world.

And it's the message that's being shared today, even through this message and through Calvary Church to others. If you're hearing this for the first time or you know that you believe this message, then you must speak to someone from the church at Calvary.

He will help you and explain to you the way forward. But the Lord is at work. His hand is being outstretched. People are being saved even today. Well, that's how the church in Antioch started.

[35 : 11] Ordinary believers speaking about Jesus. Crossing boundaries. But they accomplished extraordinary things because the hand of the Lord was with them. Calvary, I just want to encourage you to keep on doing the ordinary things of believing God's words.

Praying to him for his help and speaking out when you can. And it's through those ordinary means that God can do extraordinary things in the world today.

Keep doing it. Especially during this time, a bit like these scattered people in this section. We often find ourselves in unfolding circumstances that we can't control.

We have not been able to foresee or control what has happened during the pandemic recently. And like these believers, we can be swept along. But as we are swept along, we should be asking those questions.

Lord, what are you doing? What opportunities are there here for me and for us to speak about Jesus? Are there new people? Are there surprising people that you put across that path?

[36 : 15] Lord, what are you doing? We must always keep ourselves ready and available to the Lord Jesus Christ. Always praying, Lord, let your hand be with us. Let your hand be with us.

Well, that's how the church in Antioch began. But secondly, from verse 22, we see how the church in Antioch grew. Extraordinary, actually. It quickly grew.

So in verse 22, we see that the Jerusalem church picks up on what's going on. And they send out, one of their number, a man called Barnabas, to visit this unfolding work in Antioch.

I mean, how kind of them in Jerusalem to see, wow, there's something going on over there. We must send someone to check it out. What is God doing? Well, in verse 23, Barnabas arrives and he sees what is happening.

Now, I expect it was quite messy, to be honest. All these people who had no kind of Bible background were suddenly responding to the message about Jesus.

[37 : 22] And I expect it was quite a mess. So how do you interpret a mess and yet in a mess, God is at work? Well, what does Barnabas say when he sees what is happening?

Wonderfully, in these verses, we see that Barnabas sees evidence of the grace of God, verse 23. And Barnabas is glad.

So, as far as Barnabas was concerned, to see God at work, even though it wasn't all sorted in people's lives, was a wonderful thing. And he rejoiced. He was glad.

He saw the hand of the Lord at work. Just encouragement to you. What should an older Christian do when they see God at work in a younger person's life?

He doesn't have it all sorted, but is clearly responding to and coming to an understanding of the gospel of Jesus. Well, you should do what Barnabas does in verse 23.

[38 : 27] He rejoices and he encourages them. He encourages them. See, he encourages them to stick with Jesus and to remain true to the Lord with all of their hearts.

What a wonderful blessing this man was to this young, messy young church. I wonder if you have that same heart.

I know my tendency sometimes is to see what's wrong in a circumstance, but also to see, well, what is God doing? How can we encourage that? How can we strengthen what God is doing here in right ways?

Maybe you know someone who's recently become a Christian. How can you do a Barnabas? How can you encourage them to remain true to the Lord and keep going? Well, it's a truth there, isn't it? That churches, not just when they're young, but churches in general, grow as we give encouragement that's centered around the gospel, around the Bible, around Jesus.

[39 : 28] Churches grow through encouragement. Godly encouragement is like the spring sun shining on those baby flowers and those little shoots coming up.

As the sun shines, they open up and they receive the nourishment and they grow and they flourish. That's encouragement. Or you could say, maybe with all the heat that's coming at the moment, that encouragement is like the cool, refreshing rain that comes down upon the dry, dry grass.

As the rain comes, so the grass again is refreshed and has life on the roots up and it begins to grow. And Barnabas was the right man for the job here.

Look at verse 24. Let's see how he's described. He's described as a good man. He's described as full of the Holy Spirit in close walk with God. And he's described as a man full of faith, trusting Jesus, both for now and for the future.

So Barnabas was able to see what God was doing, even though I expected it was slightly messy. He was able to rejoice and to help build them up in that time. And you see in verse 24, the result of this is that the church continued to grow.

[40 : 46] People kept coming. Now that's to do with the hand of the Lord. But I'm sure the encouragement that was going on there was a great means by which others were coming and being built up.

Stepping back is as if the Lord is smiling from heaven. My hand is with you. Grow, grow, local church. Well, I want to encourage you to aim to be in an encouraging church.

Maybe it is a case of taking a book like this that takes the Bible's teaching on encouragement and saying, Lord, please help me to be an encourager of those around me and of my church family. Maybe even this week you can write a message to someone in the church to say, I see evidence of the grace of God in you because you need to be specific with that and seek to bring some encouragement to other.

And as everyone in the church does that for each other, the whole church is encouraged and built up in God's ways, aren't we? Encouragement can start in small ways. Well, that's the first way that the church grew.

[41 : 48] It grew through the encouragement of Barnabas and the Lord blessing that. But the second way that the church grew was through teaching. It needs to grow. Its roots needed to go down as well as to be found with encouragement.

So Barnabas knew that the church needed feeding and it was too much for one man. So if you look at verse 23, verse 25 rather, Barnabas knew exactly the man who had the gifts to help the church with their teaching.

Barnabas travels off and finds Saul in Tarsus. Saul who we later know is Paul. And together Barnabas and Saul spend a whole year with this young church in Antioch, teaching them all they need to know about the Christian faith.

So encouragement is needed, but encouragement must happen alongside deepening with teaching of the truths of God's word about Jesus, about the Christian life.

So there are two types of growth in this passage, aren't there? There's the numerical growth as the Lord adds to their number, but there's also the growth in maturity that's needed in a church.

[43 : 04] And that comes through encouragement and through teaching. Thank God for those who are gifted teachers in your church. How over the years they have continued to bring God's word to you, to disciple you publicly on Sundays, but also privately and personally as well.

See the result over the years as the church was taught, it then began to have an impact upon the city. So much that we're told that the city invented a name for this new work, the church in Antioch. They called them, verse 26, Christians. Such was the impact upon the city. Calvary, I just want to encourage you that this is the kind of church that the Lord was pleased to use.

And this is the kind of church that the Lord will use as you, as Calvary in Brighton. A church where people share the gospel in their everyday lives, even in challenging circumstances.

A church that is constantly being encouraged and taught as the Lord moves them forward. Thank God for all those blessings you have. Pray for more of them in the future as well.

[44 : 21] You see, you notice that having done this, the Lord then begins to use them, not just to have an influence upon the city. These are the Christians. But from verse 27, you see that the Lord begins to use them to help others, especially other churches.

How are they used by the Lord to help? The first thing in verse 27 to 30 is they're used by the Lord to help other churches in need.

Look at verse 27. Prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem. And one named Agabus, by the Holy Spirit, predicted that there was a tough time coming.

He predicted that there was a famine coming over the Roman world. It really did happen, as Luke says. But notice how the church, the young church in Antioch responded as they had been encouraged, as they had been taught.

Their response was, crumbs, let's not sort ourselves out. Their response was, what can we do to help our brothers back in Judea? They were filled with concern and compassion and generosity for other churches.

[45 : 36] Well, they decided to serve them with a gift of money. It was left down to the conscience of each member what to do, but people gave as they were able to. Again, it was grassroots rather than top down.

And they sent this money off with Barnabas and Saul to the elders in the Jerusalem church.

Friends, here is kind of more evidence of the grace of God at work, isn't it? As they're encouraged, as they're taught, God's grace has been poured into their lives.

They're being nourished. And as they do so, they're becoming more Christ-like, aren't they? More like the character of God, learning to become generous to others. Interesting that there was no

appeal for money from these prophets.

All they did was highlight the need. And then the church responded. That's a sign of a healthy church, isn't it? It's very easy for a church to become inward-looking, just concerned about ourselves.

But as the grace of God has more of an impact on the life of the church, so we become passionate and concerned about the needs of others, and generous from one church to another.

[46 : 41] That's the New Testament pattern. Well, will the Lord entrust that work of caring for other churches to local churches? There are so many needs in the world, even amongst Christians, aren't there?

We can't do everything for everyone. But the Lord does call churches to do some things for some others. What is it that the Lord is calling you to do in the years and months ahead?

There is a work for you to do as you submit yourself to Him. Look for ways to be a generous church to the needs of other churches around you and beyond you as well. Well, there's one other way that the Lord causes this church to help, and that's in chapter 13.

Because by the time you get to chapter 13, as they have already begun to be generous to other churches, we find that the Lord has another work for the church in Antioch to do as well. He says, you're reaching out to the city, you're having an impact, they're even giving your nickname, Christians.

You're responding generously to the needs of other churches as tough times come. Now you're ready, says the Lord in chapter 13. Now you're ready. What are they ready for?

[47 : 51] Well, just look at chapter 13, verses 1 to 3. You're ready to give away some of your best people. Wow! Look at chapter 13, verses 1 to 3.

Now in the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon, called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, who had been brought up with Herod the Tectarch and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Just notice here, first of all, the leadership of the church in Antioch that's been highlighted. They've been really taught, wow, over the past year, Saul and Barnabas have been key to that.

But notice in the leadership here, there was a combination of gifting. There was the prophetic gifting alongside the teaching gifting. And those two things balanced well to discern how the Lord was leading alongside the principles of the truths of Scripture.

Now we don't have prophets in the same way as the early church did, I believe. Neither do we have apostles in the same way as Saul became poor, was an apostle.

[49 : 03] But we do need the combination of those giftings in the leadership of the church. We need solid teaching from the word, principles in which we apply to the unveiling and unfolding circumstances we're in.

But alongside that, there's a prayerfulness, a dependence upon the Lord, a sensitivity to the Lord's leading in our specific context. Those two things go together in a healthy church, I believe.

But what were these leaders doing, this diverse group of leaders? Verse 2 tells us they weren't having strategy meetings, first of all. Verse 2, it tells us that they were worshipping the Lord and fasting.

So it seems like that they were already seeking the Lord's guidance and direction for the future of their church.

And pray for your elders who take the lead as they lead the congregation in making plans and decisions for the future. And pray that it will be very much centered on the worship of the Lord, sensitive to his leading, based on the teaching and principles of Scripture.

[50 : 09] It's clear that the whole church had a part to play in sending Saul and Barnabas for his work. But here, the focus is on the leaders who were worshipping the Lord and fasting together.

And as they did this, we're told that the Holy Spirit gave some particular direction. The Holy Spirit said, verse 2, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

I would love to know how the Holy Spirit did that. The truth is, we don't know. But the encouraging thing here is that the Holy Spirit, who has a bigger view of things, as the Lord Jesus is working out his plans, he puts his finger on these two men, Barnabas and Saul, in the context of their ministry in the church of Antioch, and calls them for a particular work.

Well, as the elders kind of recognize this, Verse 3 tells us that there was a further period of fasting and prayer. You know, they weren't rushing into it.

They were seeking the Lord, weighing up what had been said. Is this over you, Lord? How is this going to work out? And then we're told that they laid their hands on those two brothers, Barnabas and Saul.

[51 : 37] The Lord bless you. We're with you in this. And then Verse 3 tells us that they sent them off to accomplish the work that the Lord had called them to do. That word, sent them off in Verse 3, literally means to release them.

We release you from your leadership responsibilities here to accomplish the work the Holy Spirit has called you to do. Now you need to think about this.

This was a huge step for this young church. They had five leaders. And the two who were the main teachers who had built up the church over the past year, were the very ones that the Holy Spirit was saying, Now release them.

Humanly speaking, that didn't make sense. You had to hold on to the gifting, don't you? But here the Holy Spirit says, Release them. Well, in the same context, they'd been learning previously, hadn't they, that as the grace of God had come to them, they were to be generous to the needs of others, sending the gift of the church in Jerusalem.

And now the Holy Spirit asked them to be generous with their own number, for the sake of the gospel in other places. I was greatly shaken by this passage.

[52 : 54] I've known it, I've preached it in the past. And a couple of years ago, I was greatly challenged by this passage, because it kind of overturns what's the normal strategy in churches. And it's a good strategy, isn't it?

The gifted teachers kind of stay, they build up the church, and then they send out the younger guys. Well here, the Holy Spirit asked for something very different in this context. He asked the more experienced ones to go, and the younger ones to stay and to lead.

The Holy Spirit's plans and purposes are not always fitting in with human strategy. But the risen Lord Jesus is the great strategy of mission, isn't he?

And we can trust him, even when extraordinary things like this happen. While it was costly to the church, their leadership of five was now reduced to three.

But they had the joy and the privilege of playing their part in Paul's first missionary journey. How exciting is that? What about you, Calvary?

[53 : 58] What about you? Can I encourage you, as I seek to encourage our church here, to concentrate on being a church that the Lord delights to use?

That's not always about, I've got the plan sorted. It's more about a church that is focusing on encouraging, and being hungry to be taught the Word of God, that's looking for what the Lord is doing, looking for ways to be generous, even to churches or those beyond your own context. Can I encourage you to seek the Lord in these days, and to seek to be a church that the Lord delights to use? Pray for your leaders.

As the leaders go, so the church goes. Thank God for your faithful leaders. Along with them, be worshipful, prayerful, seeking to be discerning and obedient to the leading of God, according to the principles of Scripture.

Are you a church that is willing to say, yes, when the Holy Spirit says, go? He is a work for you to do.

[55 : 12] Play your part in it. Sometimes those things don't always make sense, but the Lord is at work. Well, may the Lord bless you and guide you as a church, as he will guide us here in Guildford.

It's an exciting and scary journey to be submitting yourself to him. But it's what we're called to do as local churches. The church in Antioch, I'm sure, had needs.

And it's a temptation for churches like ours, maybe even here in Guildford, to say, crumbs, we've got so much to do. We need so many resources to build up what's going on here. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit says to the church in Antioch, give over two of your best people for the work the Lord has called you to do.

And I believe the Holy Spirit, who loves and cares for his churches, cared for the church in Antioch, and they were blessed as they did so. Well, as the church released Barnabas and Saul and sent them off, as we saw in the rest of the reading, they began Paul's first missionary journey.

They begin to proclaim God's word. They go to Cyprus and have a great impact over the months and years ahead. And it was through the sacrificial sending of one church that many other churches were planted and many others were brought into the kingdom.

[56 : 32] And in chapter 14, when Paul now and Barnabas return to the church in Antioch and report all that the Lord has done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, what a joy it must have been as they thought crumbs.

We remember that moment when the Holy Spirit says send. Remember how he weighed that up and how challenging it was. But now we look back on those days and hear this report and say, boy, was it worth it as the Lord led us in this direction.

Well, Calvary, may the Lord give you grace to discern and obey him and know the joy of being part of his mission as well in Brighton.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you so much that this story of the church in Antioch is full of Holy Spirit encouragement to local churches.

Lord, we pray, Father, that you would please pour out your Spirit upon the brothers and sisters of Calvary as they go through this extraordinary time where so many things are up in the air and the pandemic is causing so many of us to be disturbed with our plans and purposes.

[57 : 44] Thank you, Lord, so much that your plans and purposes are never thwarted. And pray, Father, that you would do good things through your church at Calvary. Pray, Father, that the leaders of the church, the elders, would be full of your Holy Spirit, given over to prayer and to fasting.

And pray, Father, that the whole congregation will be united together in giving encouragement and standing together in the work of the gospel. Please lead them as you have led them in the past. Please lead them in these days and in the future with their plans and purposes that you have for them. We commit ourselves to you now. And we thank you so much for your love for us in Jesus Christ.

Amen. Thank you, David, for bringing that message to us. And we're going to close our time by singing or having sung to us over a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace.

One tongue, not enough, thousands of tongues. I don't know if it's a thousand tongues for one person or a thousand people with one tongue each, but a lot of voices to say how great the Saviour is.

[59 : 05] Let's sing the glories of my God and King, the glory of my God and King, the glory of my God and King.

The triumphs of His grace.

The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease.

Tis music in the sinner's ears, tis life and health and peace.

[60 : 29] He breaks the power of canceled sin. He sets the prisoner free.

He sets the prisoner free. His blood can make the foulness clean.

His blood available for me.

He speaks a little to His voice. You like the dead receive. You like the dead receive.

The mournful broken hearts rejoice. The humble poor believe.

[61 : 33] The humble poor believe. The humble poor believe. The humble poor believe.

Hear Him, ye death, His praise, ye down. Your loose and tongues employ. Ye blind behold, your Saviour come.

And leap ye lay for joy.

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim, assist me to proclaim.

To spread through all the earth abroad. The honours of Thy name. The honours of Thy name. The honours of Thy name.

[62 : 55] The honours of Thy name. The honours of Thy name. The honours of Thy name. The honours of Thy name.

Well in a moment we'll play out with some more music. Ruth's going to sing to us the splendour of the King, clothed in majesty. So we'll play out with that, but before we do so, let me close with a prayer.

Thank you for the things that we have heard this morning. Thank you for the work that you are doing through your son and the work that involves us.
And we pray that you would do great work here in the city of Brighton & Hove. And show us how we may play our part in that. But Lord help us every day to live for you.
To do what you want us to do. To be found in fellowship with you. To be found walking with you. So may we know your peace and your joy. And the power of your spirit at work in our lives.
[63 : 58] So now may grace and mercy and peace be with each one of us. From God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now and forevermore. Amen.

So we're going to sing out. Thank you Ruth for recording this for us. And it's goodbye from me for the time being. Bye bye. The splendor of the king.
Clothed in majesty. Clothed in majesty. Let all the earth rejoice. Let all the earth rejoice. Let all the earth rejoice. He wraps himself in light.
The darkness tries to hide. And trembles at his voice.
And trembles at his voice. How great is our God. Sing with me how great is our God.
[65 : 30] And all will see how great. How great is our God. Age to age he stands. And time is in his hands.

Beginning and the end. Beginning and the end. The Godhead three in one. Father, Spirit, Son. The Godhead three in one. Father, Spirit, Son. The Lion and the Lion. The Godhead three in one. The Lion and the Lion. desde desde desde desde desde desde desde desde desde! desde desde How great is our God, sing with me how great is our God, and all will see how great, how great is our God.
He is the name above all names, he is worthy of all praise, and our hearts will sing how great is our God.
He is the name above all names, you are worthy of all praise, and our hearts will sing how great is our God.
How great is our God, sing with me how great is our God, and all will see how great, how great is our God.
[67 : 53] How great is our God.