

The hand of the Lord was with them

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[0:00] Well, before we look at Acts chapter 11, do have that open in front of you, that would be really helpful. Let's just say a prayer together. Let's pray.

Father God, thank you so much that you speak to us through your word. You speak to your church through your words in order to build your church up.

And Father, we pray that you do that for us this morning. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, the other week, talking about visiting a church, Becky and I went to a different church. We were staying on the Isle of Wight and we found a church to go to over in Wright. So what did we do? We got Google Maps out and we put that in the car and we were directed to the exact place we needed to be.

And this morning, we're going to visit a church in Antioch. Antioch. And as we go and visit, we need the map, don't we? And so I wonder, does anyone have the map of where to go?

[1:11] I think Gracie does. Come on, give me the map. Let's have a look. Do you want to hold the map up so everyone can see it? There we go. I wonder where that is. We're going to find out.

Now, let me go and stick this up on our... Thank you so much, Gracie. We now know the way. Let's get this map up. There we go.

So we can all see. That's the map. Okay. Very clear. Very clear. It's definitely a map. Where are we going?

Well, we're heading up to a church along with a lot of different people who found themselves persecuted in Jerusalem.

Christians who were sort of leaving the area because Stephen had been stoned. It was becoming dangerous. And so where we're going is Jerusalem all the way up to this place called Antioch.

[2:14] It's a 300-mile trip. Trip north. And I went on a 300-mile trip north on Monday from Brighton to Blackpool.

So that's the distance. Takes about six hours in the car. But in Acts 11 land, we don't have cars. We're walking there. So it's going to take a bit longer than six hours.

And where is Antioch, I hear you ask? Well, it was a city in ancient Greece. Which is now a city in Turkey. It's called, and I'm probably going to say this wrong, Atakia.

And actually, if you want to look at the map of that place, you can see it on the back later. So that's where we're going this morning. And as we're heading up there, we will see that the word of God is spreading.

Have a look at this in verse 19. Now those who have been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed. That was back in chapter 7 and 8.

[3:22] When Stephen was killed, traveled as far as Phoenicia. And the place we're going to this morning, Antioch. Spreading the word only among Jews.

So God's word was being spread. As people were traveling up on this map, God's word was being spread. And we had recently, looking at Acts, this picture of a dandelion.

Now what do you do when you have a dandelion? You pick it up and you blow it, and the seeds go everywhere. And that's sort of what this church is like. What these Christians are like.

They're seeds being scattered. And they're telling people all about Jesus. We see in verse 19 that they're spreading the word only among Jews.

But actually, as chapter 10 and 11, as we found out there from David last week, the gospel is not just for Jews. It's for all people. And so, verse 20, have a look.

[4:26] Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also. So, telling them the good news about Jesus.

So, lots of different people from all over, all over this area were being told the good news about Jesus. And as we get to Antioch, that's what we're seeing.

A city full of people hearing about Jesus for the first time. And, of course, this picture of the dandelion and people being scattered. That's still a picture of what we are doing today at church. We're gathering together and then we scatter out into the city, don't we? And we tell people. We head to our different homes, our different schools, our different workplaces.

And we have opportunities to tell people about Jesus. Tell people about what you did on Sunday. We gather and then we scatter out like dandelions.

[5:25] And we've arrived in Antioch. And what we're seeing in Antioch, as we've already read in verse 20, is we're seeing that the good news is shared.

Let's read verse 20 again. Have a look. 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 good news. The good news. The good news about Jesus was being shared with people. Now, when you have something good, you can do two things with it, I think.

You might be able to do more than two things. But you can either keep it or you can share it. Now, I don't know how I've gained a reputation for this, but I seem to have gained a reputation for chocolates in the church.

I've got some chocolates. Now, what I can do is I can keep them. Can't I? I can keep them all for myself. They're yummy. And that would be great.

[6:32] But it might not be very good for me if I kept them for myself, might it? I will enjoy them. But do you know what else I can do? I can take the lid off and I can share them.

And I can come and I can give them to you. Do take one. If you're dairy-free or sugar-free, don't eat them. There we go.

I'll share them. And let's continue. Just pass the chocolates around. Pass them around. There we go. Hopefully, they'll help you to listen rather than distract you from listening.

And as you're eating them, remind ourselves that that's something good and it's being shared. And that's what's happening in Acts 11.

The good news is being shared to people. The good news is being shared. If the good news about Jesus wasn't shared with you, then maybe you wouldn't be here this morning.

[7:33] Maybe Calvary Church Brighton wouldn't exist if the good news wasn't shared with people. Now, has anyone ever played Chinese whispers?

Not many, clearly. Oh, a few have. Okay, okay. You've realized what it is. It's chocolates distracting you. Chinese whispers, that game, if you don't know it, it's where someone's given a sentence to say.

And then you whisper it quietly into someone's ear. And then they whisper it into someone's ear.

And then you see what the message is at the end. Is it the same or is it changed?

Like you could have something silly like the banana was eaten for breakfast. And it could end with the banana was trodden on the floor at Christmas or something. Whispering isn't very effective, is it?

It's not a great way to send a message through. I found that out this week. On Monday, I woke up and I lost my voice. Three days at a conference with a lost voice is not a very good way to spend it.

[8:49] People say, what did you say? Yeah, I think. Yeah, sure. But I wonder if sometimes Christians think that we should just quietly whisper the gospel.

Quietly whisper the good news. As if it's something to be a bit embarrassed about. Some sort of embarrassing secret that we share with somebody. But here, clearly it's really spoken.

It's not just kept to a whisper or a secret. People are like, we've got good news. Jesus is risen from the dead. It's not something to whisper.

It's something to share. And churches are made up of believers in Jesus because people have shared, not chocolates, but the good news of Jesus with us.

So the church is here because the good news has been shared in Antioch. Now next, we discover a hand.

[9:58] Does anyone have a hand? We all have hands. But does anyone have a hand? They can... Samuel, I think you might have one. Come and bring it over.

There we go. Do you want to... You're a bit taller. We can get this up, can't we? There we go. We'll stick this hand up. There we are. Thank you so much, Samuel.

You can go and sit back down. Why have we got a hand up there? Well, we see next in this passage that the hand of the Lord is at work.

The hand of the Lord is at work. Have a look in verse 21. Have a look. The Lord's hand was with them.

And a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord's. It's not that God literally has a hand.

[10:54] But it's helping us to understand something true about God and his work. Think about your hands for a moment.

Maybe put your hands out in front of you. Just think about your hands for a moment. How useful are they? They are so useful. With my hands this week, I've typed this sermon.

I've done the washing up. Later, I can shake your hand as you leave church. Hands do lots of things. They do lots of work. But the one that we need working the most, the person we need to work the most in our lives, in our church's lives, is the hands of the Lord's.

Verse 21 again. The Lord's hand was with them. He is with his people. And a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord's.

You know what? You can go on the internet and you can find all sorts of resources that will tell you the secret of growing a church. But you know what?

[12:08] It's very simple. The Bible simply shows us how a church starts and grows. And it shows us here in this passage, verse 21, that the Lord was at work. His people, they were telling the good news.

They were sharing the good news with people. They were trusting that this is God's message. And if it's his message, then he will work through his. And it tells us here that he's working by his hand. And all the way through Acts, we see God's working through his people as they share the message of the gospel.

Here's what a Christian legend from the past, John Stott, said, The Lord is the source and he is the goal of mission. Without the Lord, we'd have no good news to share.

And without him, people would have no savior. See, the gospel, it's not all about us. It's not all about me and what I want.

[13:16] A church is not all about us and what I want. It's not all about singing our favorite song or hearing our favorite preacher or turning to our favorite bits of the Bible. No, it's all about God.

It's all about seeing his word proclaimed. His work going on through his people. We speak of this church.

We should be speaking only what God has revealed to us in this book. And we should lead people only to him. Don't want people to be led to me.

That would let you down. I want to be leading people to the savior. We'll see this a bit more in a moment. But someone else is going to join us on this visit to Antioch this morning.

Barnabas. We see that in verse 22. And look at what he sees when he arrives. Verse 23. When he arrived, he saw what the grace of God had done.

[14:17] And he was glad and encouraged them all. He looks around this church and he sees that God has been working by his grace. And how has God been working by his grace?

Well, verse 21, as it tells about the Lord's hand, it tells us a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. And verse 24. Have a look. A great number of people were brought to the Lord. And in this great number of people that Barnabas sees, he sees God's grace at work in them. How God's called them and saved them. This is a great number of people.

And as we meet together this morning, can look out on all of us gathered here and we can rejoice. We can be encouraged by God's grace.

God's grace at work in saving people in this room. God's grace at work in leading us through another week and all its difficulties. Can we rejoice this morning as we look around?

[15:25] See what God has been doing as he's kept us through another week. We're here. We're here. We're here this morning because the Lord's hand has been at work in our lives.

And that's all by his grace. So we're going to pause and we're going to sing together about God's grace. We're going to sing this old hymn. Come thou fount of every blessing.

Tune my heart to sing thy, your grace, God's grace. So let's stand and sing as the music begins. So this morning, so far, as we visited Antioch, as we've had the map, we've been shown the way.

We've seen that the good news is to be shared. And we've seen that the Lord's hand is at work.

Now, coming back to us. Does anyone have a photo of our church? Isaac conveniently does. Thank you, Isaac. Let's get this up here.

[16:43] Thank you so much, Isaac. That's brilliant. Anyone remember this photo being taken? A few people do. I mean, if you're in it, you should remember. But there we go.

You can come and have a look at it later. And actually, we've got it on the screen. How exciting. If someone was to look at who we are today, what words might they use to describe us?

Oh, gosh, I'm hearing all sorts of things. Bad? Bad? Maybe. Maybe. Mötley. Mötley Crüe. Yeah. Who are we?

Otis again? People. We are people. Absolutely. Anybody else got a thought? Samuel? Yes. We're church. Absolutely. We are church.

Who? Anybody? Any other answers? Who are we, Isabel? People of God. People of God. Interesting.

[17:50] Valerie? Calvary Church. Calvary Church. We are Calvary Church. That's all true. That is true of us. That's what you can describe us as.

Another word we could describe ourselves as is Christians. We're Christians. Christians. And coming back to Antioch, we see that people were first known as Christians at this church.

Have a look. Verse 26. End of verse 26. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. That's how we know.

That's where we see we are first called Christians. That's why people will call you a Christian. Because they were first known as Christians here in Antioch.

And who are Christians? Well, a little way to help us to understand it. They're people who identify as followers of Jesus. It means we're people who follow Christ.

[18:51] And it means we should be happy to be known as people who follow Christ. The fact that this was happening here was meaning that believers in Christ were displaying that they weren't some sort of Jewish sect.

But in fact, they were getting their own identity. They were followers of Christ. They were Christians. Christians. A question for us this morning. Do we happily call ourselves Christians?

Hopefully we do as we're here this morning. But are we happy to be known as Christians through the week? Are we happy to be known as people who follow Jesus where we are at school, at college, at uni, at work, at home?

The church in Antioch certainly were. And now as we continue our visit, what do these Christians do together?

Well, we see that they were provided with encouragement. Provided with encouragement. I mentioned earlier that Barnabas arrives at the church.

[19:57] Verse 22. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem. That was 300 miles south as we found out. And they sent Barnabas to Antioch. And Barnabas is a great person to be sent because he was known as son of encouragement.

That's what his name meant. And he was true to his name. He was an encourager. And what did he encourage people to do? Well, have a look in verse 23. When he arrived, he saw what the grace of God had done.

And he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He encouraged them to remain true to the Lord.

He encouraged them to keep following Jesus, guys. Keep following Jesus. Even though people are persecuting you, keep following him. Even when people say, no, you don't want to do that.

Keep following him, he was telling them. Even when people ignored them. Keep following him.

Even when people said, I don't want to be friends with you. Keep following him.

[21:11] He got to encourage them. He got to tell them all about Jesus. All about what he had done. What that means for them. How that helps them to live their lives here.

He encouraged them to keep following Jesus. Because knowing Jesus is good news. It's the best thing. We know one who has come down to live in our world full of mess.

We know one who's felt the struggles and temptations of life. But never sins. And Jesus is the one who's given his life up for you.

So keep following Jesus, he would say. We need encouragers, don't we? I know that so many of you have encouraged me to keep going in following Jesus.

We need each other. We need to be a church to help each other to keep going in following Jesus. See, church is a bit like a football team's team talk.

[22:22] Get to half time. And the team comes in and they've been struggling. It's hard. So the manager says, I know it's been difficult.

But guys, you can do it. You can do it. You can keep going. You can win this match. Work hard and it will be okay.

And coming to church is a bit like that. It's a bit like the team talk. To encourage us to keep going in following Jesus in this world.

We need to be here. As the book of Hebrews says, don't give up meeting together. In fact, do it all the more as you see the day approaching. We need to make being together a priority.

And Barnabas was keen to make sure they made the most of their times. And he was so encouraged, but also probably a bit overwhelmed by the great numbers.

[23:24] And he ended up asking for help. Verse 25. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And he found him and he brought him to Antioch. Barnabas couldn't do all this encouraging of all these people on his own.

He needed Saul to come and join him. Saul, who we know has just recently come to know the grace of God himself. And it reminds us that leaders in church, people who teach the Bible, we need others.

I need other elders. I need Phil and Jerome to minister alongside me as we seek to encourage you as the church here. We need elders, not just one.

And we see in verse 30, we'll get to it properly in a moment, but they send their gift to the elders.

That's the elders in Jerusalem, actually, by Barnabas and Paul.

Churches had elders. Churches had more than one, not just one. We also need one another, don't we? This is the church God has put together.

[24:30] And we need each one to encourage ourselves along as we follow the Lord Jesus in a world that's difficult to follow him. Two more things.

Two more things. Does anyone have some bad news? Otis has some bad news. Thank you so much. That's just what we need to hear this morning. Can I?

Well, if you put it there and then I'll do the peg. There we go. Thank you. Nice. Nice. There we go. We've got it. There we go.

Teamwork. We need each other. I think that will be fine, Otis. Thank you. Thank you so much.

That's brilliant. Brilliant, but it is bad news.

We've got some bad news. So where do we see bad news in this passage? Because it's all been quite encouraging so far, hasn't it? Where's the bad news? Well, verse 27. Have a look.

[25:27] 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 worlds.

This happened during the reign of Claudius. Some bad news. The church in Antioch hears that there's going to be a famine.

There's a famine on the way. Predicted to cover the entire Roman worlds. Just to check, we all know what a famine is. I mean, lack of food.

Lack of food supplies. And if you read through history, in around the year 46, there was a famine in Jerusalem, just as was prophesied here.

So bad news was predicted. But has anybody got any help? Anybody got any help? Bethany has.

[26:36] The last one. Thank you so much, Bethany. Let's get a peg ready. There we go. Thank you. Oh, can you reach? There we go. Just about.

Excellent. Oh, it's upside down. That's okay. There we go. Almost there. There we are. There we go. Help. Help is needed.

Antioch. The church in Antioch is going to provide help to the church in Jerusalem that needs their help. That's what we see.

Have a look. Verse 29. So the disciples, that is the people in the church, as each one were able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters.

Living in Judea. And this they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Paul. The church knew God's grace to them.

[27:36] They knew how rich they were in Christ. They knew how God had provided them with all sorts of blessings. And so they were happy to help where they could.

And so it says the disciples, as each one was able, some would have been able to give lots, others maybe just a few pennies. To help a church that was going to be in need of food.

And this is something we can learn from as a church as well. As a church, we're all ready. Every year we make sure money is sent from our church to other missionaries and people working to spread the gospel in this country and abroad.

We give to Matt working amongst Muslims. In London we give to people in Turkey and Sri Lanka and others as well. And this is a good thing for a church to do.

This is a good thing for Christians to do. To support people who are in need of help as they seek to minister the gospel. In this case, it's helping to provide food for a church that might go hungry.

[28:46] To help them as they continue to spread the good news, share the good news of the Lord Jesus. And we know how generous Jesus has been for us.

We do it because he's been so generous to us. He's laid down his life for us. He's given his all for us. So we can give a little bit to his work.

To help his people. And as a church, we ourselves have had help from other churches. Think of the Texans who come in the summer to help us with mission work in Brighton.

How they save up their pennies for flights and to come here. For some of them, it's a really, really costly thing. Taking a week off work to come and do that.

To come all this way. Taking a week of holiday where they could be on holiday in somewhere really nice. But they come here. It is nice in Brighton, but come here to work hard for a week.

[29:48] At the conference I was at this week, I heard of a big church in Lancaster. Who is going to keep paying one of their pastors as they move a hundred odd miles elsewhere to a town called Tamworth to plant a church there.

They're sending people from that church. And other churches are sending people to go and start a new church there where it needs a church. And so where we see needs, where we see people struggling, we can ask ourselves, well, what can we give?

How can we help? Even now some of you younger ones, maybe you get a little bit of pocket money. Maybe you think about putting a little bit aside each month for church or for some other Christian work.

It's a good thing to start learning today. So this is the church in Antioch. We've found the way. We've had help with the map. We've seen that the good news was being shared. Chocolates remind ourselves of that. We've seen the hand of the Lord at work.

[30:55] We've seen that the church has been encouraged by Barnabas and Saul and encouraged one another. We've seen that as bad news was predicted for another church and another place, they provided generous help.

This is the church in Antioch. And let's pray as we visited it this morning. Let's pray God would help us to learn these things and to put them into action here in Calvary Church's life.

Many of them we already are, but we need to grow. We need to learn and we need to grow, don't we? So let's ask for God's help as we seek to learn from this this morning.

Father, we thank you so much for speaking to us through your word. Thank you so much that your word is clear. Word is clear about what church is. Thank you for showing us this church in Antioch this morning.

And we pray, Father God, that you would help us to learn from their example. Help us to keep sharing the good news with those that we find ourselves with this week.

[32:09] Help those that go on the book table this week. Help them to share the good news with people in Brighton. Father, thank you that we've seen that the Lord's hand is at work in this church.

And we pray that we would continue to know your hand at work in the life of our church family.

Please grow us. Please change us. Please make us more like Jesus.

And please, in your mercy, would you add more to our number as they hear of the good news of Jesus. He's laid down his life for them. Thank you that we've seen they've been encouraged to keep going.

Thank you so much for those in our church family who encourage us to keep going, to keep following Jesus. Thank you so much for providing our church with leaders, with elders. And Father, we pray that you'd even grow that team and add more to that.

Father, we thank you for this church's example as they hear bad news about other churches which are going to suffer famine.

[33:15] But Father, thank you that they've been able to provide help. Because they know how generous you've been to them, they've been generous to others. Help us to learn to be generous with what you've given to us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing a final...