

# Acts 11:19–30

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Date: 25 February 2018

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] taken from the book of Acts chapter 11 verses 19 through 30. This can be found on page 1019 in the White Bibles. Again, our scripture text is Acts chapter 11 verses 19 through 30 on page 1019 in the White Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and he sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose for he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great number, great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And he did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. It's a joy to be together this morning. Thank you for those who volunteered at Ray School this past week in helping the school orchestrate their celebration of Black History Month. We received multiple emails of thanksgiving from those at the school saying they're just blessed by us being there. And we want to reiterate as a leadership team that thank you for committing to your community and loving them the way that you have been loved by Jesus. Just a brief prayer. I borrow this prayer from John Stott.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[ 3 : 1 3 ] The Oxford English Dictionary, arguably the standard for the English language, at the conclusion of each calendar year, each calendar year selects a word of the year. In some cases, the word of the year is a brand new word in the English language. For example, in 2009, the word of the year was unfriend, a verb to remove someone as a friend on a social networking site such as Facebook. The same year, there was a rival word known as hashtag.

A noun, a noun, a word or phrase preceded by a hashtag sign used on social media to find and identify messages on a specific topic. In 2013, the word was selfie. A noun, photograph taken of oneself, usually on a smartphone or a webcam and broadcast on social media. In 2016, post-truth. Last year's word, was youth quake. A noun, a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the influence of young people. The words crowned the title word of the year are meant to embody cultural shifts reflective of what is taking place in the English-speaking world. They are indicative of greater movements in culture and culture and society. I say this by way of introduction this morning because our text introduces to us not only the word of the year, but arguably the word of the last few millennia. It is found in verse 26. The word is Christian. Christian. If you've been with us, we've been making our way through the book of Acts. We've come upon a pivotal point in the book.

The landscape of both the Greco-Roman world and the first century Jewish world was changing. It was shifting. It was altering. And what was taking place was hard to encapsulate. The message was outstanding and unrivaled. God had anointed a man, namely Jesus of Nazareth, to usher in his kingdom, a kingdom of goodness, absence of oppression, and physical infirmities.

Though he was the anointed one of God, he was put to death via crucifixion. And then he was raised back to life. And then he was appointed by God to be judged over all humanity. Turns out, according to the book of Acts, he's humanity's only means of divine forgiveness and pardon. And this message has just generated steam and momentum, so much so that people, after Jesus had long departed or departed, people grabbed a hold of this and began a mission. That wherever these witnesses with this message settled, the kingdom of Jesus Christ would take hold. The kingdom of Jesus was displacing the kingdoms of this world. The accusation will be revealed in chapter 17, where the Christians are coming into a city and they are accused of turning the world upside down. Why? Because of the message they declared, that Jesus Christ, anointed, appointed, was crowned king. And by this king, God would throw the entire socio-cultural order into disarray in the first century. It was revolution not accomplished through military conquest, but brought by the conquering nature of this message. It was so culture-changing, so society-shifting, empire-altering, that a new word was required. Christian. It was no minor movement.

It was a cosmic explosion. It did not consist of a few, but many. It was not constrained geographically, but expanded globally. It was not a human movement or revolution, but it was divine in nature. The inception of Christianity was not private, but was public, a public truth. And the thrust of our passage this morning is Luke's desire to reiterate and assert the revolutionary nature of the Christian faith. You see that because of how he describes what is unfolding. The result is a great numeric following.

[ 8 : 13 ] You see it in verse 21, a great number who believed and turned to the Lord. Again in verse 24, and a great many people were added to the Lord. And as the church in Antioch gathers, Barnabas and Saul are teaching. They taught a great many people. A brand new church was starting in Antioch.

And I cannot overstate the importance of these verses enough, because we know a church has already emerged in Jerusalem, beginning in Acts 2. It comprised of Jewish believers. And it took hold in the region around Jerusalem. But this morning's text introduces us to the emergence of another church, beginning in Antioch, largely comprised of those who were not Jewish in descent. They were unlearned in the religious history of Israel. It's a Gentile church. It's like us today. How was it founded? What was it like?

What did it prioritize? Will it have traits that we desire to emulate? Will it have enviable characteristics? What is the church, we may ask? And this morning, my goal is to demonstrate the church is the people, is a people gathered by God and sent by Him. Gathered by God and sent by God.

Our time together will be anchored by two points this morning. Firstly, the conception of the church in Antioch. And you see that in verses 19 through 22.

The conception of the church in Antioch. And it will be followed by the character of the church in Antioch. I only have two points because I can only think of two alliterating characters. But the second point is the character of the church in Antioch.

[ 10 : 22 ] Verses 23 through 30. The conception of the church in Antioch. Antioch is of great significance in the book of Acts. And Luke needs to tell Theophilus, the commissioner of this historical document, how the church came to be in Antioch.

This section contains many geographical names. Seven, to be exact. Reminding the reader that what was unfolding in the early church was happening in multiple places during the days of the early church.

Yet in this section, in these verses, we find the mention of Antioch no less than six times. It's crucial for the rest of the book.

It's the departure point of the Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys. That when Paul goes out west to the rest of the Roman Empire, he always started in Antioch.

In some sense, Antioch will eclipse Jerusalem as the base of the gospel message. Verse 19 is a resumption from chapter 8, verse 1.

[ 11 : 33 ] Chapter 8, verse 1 reads, The early church was a persecuted people.

And as a result, they were geographically displaced. They sought refuge and harbor in areas that were not home. They were driven in all directions. And according to this text, they went as far as Phoenicia, which is north of the land of Israel, modern Lebanon.

They were driven to Cyprus, a large island about 100 miles off the coast of the Mediterranean. And they were driven all the way north into Antioch, a major metropolis, ranking third in the Roman

Empire, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, behind Rome and Alexandria. Population estimates put the number of inhabitants in Antioch at nearly half a million people. It was the Roman provincial capital of Syria, the region.

This is how Rome governed the east. On its coins, one writer records, Antioch called itself Antioch, metropolis, sacred and inviolable and autonomous and sovereign capital of the east.

[13:09] It was Rome's most powerful city in the east. And little do they know, a conquering king had just entered. Luke explains what happened.

Persecution arose and Jewish converts fled from Jerusalem. They fled under threat of life for the message that they had accepted. But what is astounding is that they were driven away for what they were professing and speaking.

But they continued to speak as they fled. In verse 19. It can safely be assumed what they were speaking of, or better yet, who they were speaking of, namely Jesus.

The fulfillment of the promises of Israel. They continued to speak despite their displacement. And this is the seizing power of true belief. An unrelenting willingness to speak of Jesus.

And Luke tells us that this Jerusalem diaspora that fled from Israel spoke only to other Jews. And we shouldn't necessarily see that as just a criticism.

[14:17] Rather, it's a statement. Similar to Peter, they may not have understood the expanse of the global gospel message. Perhaps those scattered had language constraints.

Maybe they could not speak to others. Or they could not speak to the Greeks because they knew no Greek. And it makes sense that they would only speak or communicate with other Jews.

We see that in society today. All over. It's a sociological phenomenon today in many immigrant communities. There are immigrant enclaves in this city where only the native language is required.

There are many places in California that I can attest to where only Mandarin is needed. And this may strike you as bizarre or surprising. But within these communities, there is vitality, solidarity, and even faith.

And I say it with a high degree of confidence. That it are these types of communities that were both essential to my wife and I's parents coming to faith.

[15:25] My parents immigrated from Taiwan for education. And there they studied at an American university but found other Chinese immigrants.

And it was there that they introduced my parents to Jesus of Nazareth. In the same way, my wife's family immigrated from South Korea.

They settled in Northern California. They found themselves in a community that was largely Korean speaking. To this day, I say very little to my mother-in-law because I have very little to say in Korean.

But it were these communities for sociological transition, assimilation reasons that were instrumental to my wife and I coming to faith.

And you see that in the text. And in verse 20, the scope of, as we move to verse 20, the scope of the spoken message broadens. Some of the diaspora began to speak with and preach Jesus to Hellenists.

[16:36] And the footnote in your Bible probably reads, or Greeks. That's Greek-speaking non-Jews. And Luke particularly mentions people from two locations. Cyprus, which is the island 100 miles off the coast in the Mediterranean.

And Cyrene, which is North Africa. Migrants from other regions begin to settle in Antioch. And began to share their faith in the Lord Jesus.

The Lord honors their witness. As His hand is with them. Simply meaning that it's another way of saying divine power was present. And as a result, a great number believe and turn to the Lord.

The work of the Lord is so great in Antioch. That Jerusalem catches wind of this. And what is happening. And so, the original 12, I'm assuming.

Or original 11 plus 1, Matthias. Dispatch Barnabas to go and confirm its authenticity. They send him, in verse 22, to Antioch.

[17:42] See, you and I may be tempted to think that this was all a coincidental collision of historic events. Persecution.

Diaspora. A religious culmination of sorts in history. But Luke, the writer, is incredibly intentional and cautious.

He wants us to be clear that what is transpiring in Antioch is no sociological, philosophical, or religious phenomenon spearheaded by zealous individuals.

This was not brought by human initiative. The church resulted from divine impetus.

It was first and foremost God's idea and God at work. If you read the text carefully, yes, the church enlarged.

[ 18 : 44 ] But so that we don't get overly conceited, the text before us reminds us that it is the Lord actually adding to the Lord. They preached the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them.

They believed and they turned to the Lord. Barnabas saw the grace of God, or I would say the grace of the Lord, among them and exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord.

A great many people were added, not to the church, which is a bizarre, which would make sense, but added to the Lord. See, you would be mistaken to think that this passage is about some cultic religious frenzy or brainwashing.

Luke's emphasis is that the church's growth and expansion did not happen apart from the Lord. It is not only by the Lord, but it was for the Lord. He is both subject and object, source and goal.

We must repent of all this self-centered, self-confident concepts of mission and church growth.

Theophilus, Luke is writing, this is how the church in Antioch was conceived.

[ 19 : 58 ] Secondly, the character of the church in Antioch. The character of the church in Antioch. As Barnabas settles into Antioch, he is filled with gladness and delight.

What he witnesses in Antioch was clearly an evidence of the grace of God. And being consistent with his namesake, which we've learned means son of encouragement, he exhorts or encourages the church to continue in what it had already been doing.

They were to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. Luke again says, numerically, the church began to grow. Conceivably, Barnabas is all of a sudden overwhelmed by this growth.

And realizes he can only do so much. He needs support and help. And you may think he would send someone to Jerusalem to go retrieve one of the original apostles.

But instead, he goes elsewhere. He goes north to Tarsus. And there he finds Saul of Tarsus.

Ironically, the person who was the cause of all this scattering of believers from Jerusalem is brought to Antioch in order to gather the believers together.

[ 21 : 16 ] It is so ironic. And we've seen how the church in Antioch emerged. But what was it like? What are her characteristics? We're aware of some of them.

A few verbs highlight them. You see it in verse 19. They are a speaking bunch. They are a preaching bunch in verse 20.

They are a testifying congregation. They are those who witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in speech. In verse 26, it gives us more of their characteristics. They were a congregation that gathered regularly, together, assembled similarly to what we're doing this morning.

And they sat under the apostolic teaching. They were faithful to the Lord. There was a fidelity about their devotion.

Historically, Antioch was understood to be a city of many gods. And it makes sense. It's situated in the east, where modern-day Turkey is.

[ 22 : 19 ] So you have the influence of the west and the Roman Empire and everything in the east. And they would collide. And they would all gather here in Antioch. It would be an empire to the east.

It was a hub to all the east. It was a melting pot. A vast array of material goods coming from east and west, north and south. The context would also offer a plethora of objects and gods to worship.

Yet the believers stood out among the rest. They would not be distinguished by ethnicity, for it comprised of both Jews and Greeks. They would not be distinguished by class, because it was comprised of both the wealthy and the poor.

They would not go by a worldly category. Instead, the Romans came up with a whole new word for them. They were altogether other.

They were Christian. Christian. It was as they did these things.

[ 23 : 20 ] They were given a new name. The title Christian was not self-designating. They never called themselves Christians. They called themselves disciples.

Followers of the way. Brothers. The term Christian was bestowed upon them. By the watching world.

You see, you see it other places in the Bible. Like somewhere there's a word like Herodian. Of Herod. Relatives. Supporters of Herod's court. Instead, these are Christians. And there was a clear evidence that they were about Christ.

Not Christ the idea, but Christ the king and the object of their allegiance. They're not simply followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the man. Or Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher. They were followers of the exalted Christ.

The Messiah. The anointed son of God. The appointed king of God. The term reflected this. People noticed this. These people are not, not only pledge allegiance to Jesus the man, but they pledge allegiance to Christ the king.

[ 24 : 24 ] And so, we call them Christian. So the term Christian is a scribe. The residents of Antioch knew what they were on about.

You can imagine the emergence of a new word. I mean, you think of, selfie didn't exist when I was growing up. Unfriend didn't exist. And all of a sudden, a new word emerges.

Hey, what are these people on about over there? Why are they doing that? Christ. Why are they so joyful? Christ. Why are they helping one another?

Christ. They spoke Christ. They preached Christ. They believed Christ. They turned to Christ. They were faithful to Christ. Their steadfast purpose was service to Christ.

They gathered under the banner of Christ. They sat under the teaching about Christ. They met regularly in Christ. And in Antioch, the disciples were called Christians.

[ 25 : 20 ] The church in Antioch was undoubtedly committed to Christ. And to prevent us from perceiving that faith is just in the head or in the heart and only confined there, Luke gives us a glimpse further into their character and demonstrates this church in action.

A prophet from Jerusalem, Agabus, stands up in their company. And we'll see this prophet come up again later in the book. And foretells a great famine, which history records for us somewhere between the window of 41 and 56 A.D.

Extra-biblical sources say there were famines and food crises in Egypt, Syria, Judea, Greece. Josephus himself says that Jerusalem had to buy grain from Egypt and dried figs from Cyprus. And in light of this impending famine, the church in Antioch decides to send relief to believers in Judea. The text conveys a wide participation.

It's not a single donor. It's not even a small group of donors. Rather, everyone, according to his or her ability, committed to the well-being of the church in Jerusalem. And you and I can't help but recall the previous descriptions of the early church in Jerusalem.

[ 26 : 41 ] So you have the church in Antioch. And what are they doing? Hey, our brothers in Jerusalem, they're about to face a crisis. Let's pull together our resources.

Let's give what we can give. Let's gather what we can gather. And send it their way. See, the generosity is akin to the earlier chapters.

Where people held things in common, distributing the proceeds of sales to give to those who had needs. So there was no lack among them. No one regarded their own property selfishly.

And these were descriptions found in the church of Jerusalem. And all of a sudden, you have the same generosity welling up in Antioch. Generosity and selflessness.

The template that was laid by the church in Jerusalem is now being followed by the church in Antioch. The generosity being replicated is a distinguishing mark of genuine Christian community.

[ 27 : 43 ] This would establish Antioch as a generous church. As the church there would send financial relief. But this church would send far more than that.

And the days ahead, from Antioch, the gospel would go. So, like I mentioned before, Paul's three missionary journeys would all start and originate in Antioch.

And I can't help but imagine, as Paul was about to jump on a ship. Or about to head north by foot. The church in Antioch just lavishing upon him generous gifts.

Bring these forth to future brothers and sisters. For gospel work. It would be from Antioch that the gospel message would be generously lavished upon the world.

Well, the gift is given to Barnabas and Saul. And they return back to Jerusalem.

[ 28 : 50 ] I can only imagine what this trip meant for Barnabas. Because this is the second occasion that Barnabas is bringing a heap of money to the leaders in the church of Jerusalem.

Do you remember that first occasion? In Acts chapter 4? Where he had a plot of land. And he said, well, I see my brother in need.

I have land I don't need. He sells it. Sets it at the feet of the apostles. So that gospel work and gospel mercy could be extended. And here again, Barnabas.

Hey guys, I'm back. With a whole bunch of money. For gospel witness. To care for those at the margins.

The church in Antioch would overshadow the church in Jerusalem from this point on. And you and I begin to see the character of the church in Antioch. We see the conception.

[ 29 : 52 ] The character. It would be entirely accurate to assert that the church in Antioch was conceived by Jesus. And her character reflected Jesus. It was not.

It is not far fetched to bring these qualities to our congregation nearly two millennia later. Later. And here is where we continue to bolster our understanding of what it means to be God's church.

The church is no building. We can do this anywhere. Granted, it may be colder outside. The church is no building.

It is a people. And as a church, we both meet and gather as well as send and scatter. Since there are so many in the sciences here, it would be appropriate to introduce you to...

Well, not introduce you, but for those of you who are not in the sciences, to introduce you to two concepts in physics. Centripetal and centrifugal forces.

[ 30 : 55 ] Because the church has these two modes. There is a centripetal mode and a centrifugal mode. To give examples, as a child, if you ever jumped on a merry-go-round and a person began to spin you around faster and faster and faster and faster and faster, there is a centrifugal force that drives you away from the center.

So much so that you can YouTube it. There are hilarious videos of kids flying off merry-go-rounds. But at the same time, there is a centripetal force.

We experience it as gravity. As the earth rotates, there is a centripetal force that keeps your feet on the ground that drives you towards the center. The church does both of these things.

We come together to the center. Namely, Christ. And we're scattered about away. We're scattered and brought together.

Scattered and brought together. The church rightly disperses and rightly gathers. The church both goes out to seek and comes in to draw. We go from here to there and we bring from there to here.

[ 32 : 16 ] We are the church assembled in worship and we are the church dispersed and sent on mission. We gather to learn. We gather to speak and to serve.

As we gather, there are so many dimensions to our worship service. But our desire is that every part of it is instructive. May we learn of our faith by the words that we sing. May we learn how to pray as we join others in their prayer.

May we learn hospitality and welcome as we greet one another. May we be fashioned to Christ's likeness as we adhere to his word. May we learn how to be generous in how we give of our time and our finances.

May we learn how to uplift one another by singing toward one another. May this be a place of instruction. May we learn how to be merciful and loving in action.

May we learn how to be merciful and loving in action. Witnessing and testifying to the Lord Jesus Christ. The anointed son of God. The appointed judge of God. The crowned king of God. May you be those who not only give yourselves to this congregation.

[ 33 : 36 ] But you give yourselves to others. Whether you be scattered to Blackstone Avenue. To Baltimore. Or Boston. Or back to San Antonio.

Bring relief. Bring relief. There is a great famine in our city. I don't speak of bread.

There is a great famine in the souls of humanity. Whether they be in the academy or the laboratory. The family or the firm.

There is a great famine at the bus stop. There is a great famine at the grocery store checkout line. There is a great famine in the coffee shop.

And there is maybe a very great famine in your very own soul. And you're starving. You excel academically.

[ 34 : 39 ] But there is a famine. There is a famine. Inside. You prosper materially. But you are impoverished inside.

And I offer to you. Not silver or gold. But I offer you the best relief the world will ever know.

Christ crowned as King, Savior, Judge, Forgiver to you. Do not leave this room starving.

Christ has set a table. A banquet. A feast. And it is all free. All of it is yours in Christ.

Christ. All of it. Let's pray together.

[ 35 : 46 ] Father. Thank you for gathering us in Christ. Thank you for feeding us with Christ.

And Lord, as we scatter from this place, may we go knowing that Christ is with us.

And may we be those who bring relief to the world around us. There's a famine in the land. And in us, the church of God, we have a banquet.

And Lord, let us invite everyone from the highways and the byways, from the classrooms to the laboratories, from the street corner to the corner offices.

Let us beckon them all to come in. Amen. And Father, would you reveal yourself to them and show them that you are able to save.

[ 36 : 57 ] And Father, we pray as we stand and prepare to leave, that you would arise in our midst, that you would cause the church of God to arise.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.