

Acts 11 "When God steals the show"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me, actually, to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Father, thank you so much that we can gather in your presence. I thank you that you really are present. We really are in your presence, that Jesus is here, that the Holy Spirit is moving and at work. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently bring the words of this text of Scripture deep into our hearts, that you might form us, Father, at a very deep level, and that you might guide us and help us to live each day for our good, for the good of this city, and for your great glory. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So for those of you who aren't aware, we have an eight o'clock service, which is just before this. And sometimes people who've just come to this service for quite a few times come to the eight o'clock service, and they're sort of a big shock. The eight o'clock service has maybe a dozen people on a good day. I do the whole service from down there.

There's a little booklet. There's no screen. There's no singing. We use the ancient, an old Book of Common Prayer service from 1662, which is basically unchanged from 1552. And they sort of get half a sermon.

Anyway, so one of the things I did the eight o'clock service today is I said, I gave an opening. I said, by the way, this is a pretty lame opening. If one of you have a better opening, could you tell me after the service so I could use your better opening? So this is the better opening. It comes from Barbara Allen, who is very well known at the eight o'clock service. She said years ago, they had the basement, and there was this area of the basement that her mom never went into. So her dad was going off on a trip, and the dad and the mom had often complained about the fact that the basement really needed tidying. And so she decided, Barb's mom decided, that what she would do is, as a sort of a gift for her husband, that she would tidy the basement. And so she tidied the basement, threw a whole pile of stuff out. And so she, her husband comes home. She's ready with a really, really big smile, expecting that her husband's going to be really happy about what she's done. But he's not happy at all with what she's done, because it turned out she threw away a whole pile of stuff that was really precious to him, that he was specifically saving. So we have this situation where she's expecting smiles reciprocated, but in fact, you get the complete opposite reaction. And maybe you have an even better story than that, and you can share it over coffee. All the thing, one side expects big smiles, and what you get from the other side is, in fact, great unhappiness. And that's what it's, that's one of the things which drives the beginning of the text of the scripture that we're going to look at. Very human problem situation. So if you turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 11, that's what we're going to look at this morning. Acts chapter 11. And if you're maybe here just tuning in for the first time, we're here for the first time, we generally preach through either books of the Bible or big chunks of the Bible. Over the summer, we did a couple of things. But we did Acts for a while, and we took a break, looked at Jude, looked at the Psalms, a few other things. And now we're going back to the book of Acts, and it's here, chapter 11. I'm going to give you the context in a moment. Let's just plunge in right away to look at what this, how the text begins. Acts chapter 11, beginning at verse one. And it begins like this. Now the apostles and the brothers and sisters who were throughout Judea heard that the pagans also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him. Just sort of pause here. I'm reading from the English Standard

[5 : 09] Version, and this is going to sound like a bit of an odd problem, but one of the problems with the version is that sometimes it's too literal. So they've translated it very, very literally. But it's a colloquialism just for Jewish people, who in Judaism, the men have to be circumcised, right?

It's just a, so it's sort of needlessly, it's almost like a bit pedantically correct. I know some of us are prone to being pedantically correct, so maybe you like this, but it just means Jewish people. I'll read it again. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the Jewish people, the Jewish people who are now Christians, criticized him, accused him, saying, you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. A couple of things about this. So what's just happened before this is that Peter, it's a very, very dramatic story. Peter has gone to the home of Cornelius, a pagan general in the Roman army who's a centurion and in charge of what we would call the Italian brigade. And he's gone there. There's been a whole pile of very, very spectacular miracles that God did.

And as the result of that spectacular set of miracles, this particular person by the name of Cornelius and the other pagans in his house have become Christians. And that's sort of why Peter would be going up with a big smile, just as you would be. I mean, I don't know, maybe you have spectacular, miraculous things happening in your life all the time, but if you'd had a series of visions, if you had God speak to you directly, if you just began to do something and God poured down the Holy Spirit and a whole pile of remarkable things happened, you'd probably be living off that for years to come. And it might be in Christian circles, people would take you out for supper for years to come to hear the story. And so he's coming back with a big smile, but they've already heard about it, and all they have are accusatory fingers. And so one of the things that you see, so the book of Acts is an eyewitness-based history, written when eyewitnesses were still alive, that tells the first 30 to 35 years, maybe 33 years, depending on how you count it, but roughly that number of years, it tells the history of the first days of the Jesus movement. It takes up with just a few days after the resurrection of Jesus, 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus, and it tells you the first 30-ish so years of the Jesus movement. And it's an eyewitness-based history. And one of the things that the book of Acts recounts is how the gospel, the Christian message, goes from something that just some Jewish people in Jerusalem come to believe, and how it extends beyond those people to other Jewish people, and then how it crosses linguistic divides to Jewish people who are in fact fundamentally living like they're very at home in a pagan world. They're more at home in a pagan world than they would be living in a Jewish world. It would be a little bit as if you're maybe a Jewish person today living in Manhattan or Ottawa, and you might find it very uncomfortable living in

Jerusalem, especially if it's in a neighborhood with Orthodox Jews. You become very acclimatized to living amongst, you know, in a different culture. So Acts is describing all these powerful moves whereby linguistic divides, cultural divides, racial divides, ethnic divides are being bridged, and ancient hostilities are being bridged. And this is sort of one of the final things before it continues on, because there's, you know, pagans aren't all the same. There's lots of different types of pagans. And so this is what the book of Acts is talking about in general. And so why are they fussed about the fact that Peter went in and ate with people who were pagans?

[9 : 25] Well, some of you are older. And it's actually so hard to live in Canada now to remember when Canada was a little bit different. But even just before COVID, a couple of years before the lockdowns, I think if I was preaching on this story, I'd really have to try to emphasize, like people would just be really puzzled. Because believe it or not, ancient history of Canada, like eight years ago, most Canadians would have just assumed that the right thing is that people all just get together.

Like that it's a good thing if you saw a group that was multi-racial, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, that that's in a sense what Canada should be. And in a sense, there were fewer divides.

There were always divides, but there were fewer types of divides. We've become a vastly more divided age. So in some ways, today we can understand this a little bit better than Canadians could have eight years ago. And by the way, the reason that most people in the world, many increasing number of people in the world, sort of think that people should just get along, that's something that they got from the Bible. I mean, it might, they don't realize that it went from the Bible to Christians to their neighbors to their neighbors to their neighbors to their neighbors. But in the ancient world, people wouldn't have problems with this. Like if you were to read this maybe in Iran or in China, I mean, they'd have to translate it, but they'd understand maybe why Chinese people wouldn't want to hang around with non-Chinese people or, you know, why Shia wouldn't want to hang out with another type of Muslim. Like that would just be obvious that those are things. But for a lot of Canadians, it's not obvious, but it's become a more fractured society. So the closest analogy I can come is what I've gathered from reading articles and talking to people is, let's say you meet somebody online because you want to start dating somebody and you meet them and you discover early on in the conversation that they're a big fan of Pierre Polyev. And then you, you know you're going to vote for Jagmeet and there won't be a second date. Like that just stops it right there.

And in fact, maybe in an American context, you're going to meet finally after having some conversations online and you're a big Harris supporter and the date comes wearing a MAGA hat and you probably wouldn't even acknowledge that you were there to meet them. You would just quietly leave. There's these huge divides that have come in our culture around certain culture-breaking issues.

And so all I can say is that even though the Jewish people are a conquered minority under pagans, it had become a very important thing for them. It's not that the Old Testament tells you that you can't go and have food in a pagan's house, but it's become a very, very big divide for them. It's become what we would call a wedge issue and it's deeply ingrained.

[12:24] And so they're just completely offended that Peter would do it. It might just be, once again, if you were a MAGA family and you found out that your son went to eat and spend time with a Harris supporting family and you just, you might feel like disowning them. Like, not that you folks would, but I'm just telling you that's maybe the type of thing. And so there's this huge divide. They're very, very, very, very offended by it. So what does Peter do? Well, there's this fellow who's been dead now for a few years. He has a wonderful phrase. He talks about how what God did to break this divide was that God delivers four hammer blows to break up that which was stuck. Four strong hammer blows to break things up. And that's what we start to see now when Peter tells him what happens. Look what, he begins like this in verse four. Now, by the way, it doesn't tell you whether Peter got really mad or whether he got blushed, you know, but the blush or anything like that, it just describes what he does.

Doesn't describe his emotions, just what he does. Verse four. But Peter began and explained it to them in order. Here's what he says. And really what he's doing is he's summarizing Acts 10. He says, I was in the city of Joppa praying and in a trance, I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners. It came down to me and looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, so it's not just a vision with his eyes, but it's also a vision that is audible. He hears a voice speaking to him and the voice says, rise, Peter, kill and eat. But I said, back to the voice, by no means, Lord, he understands it's come from God, by no means, Lord, for nothing common or unclean, and it's just two basically words to say the same thing for emphasis, nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth. But the voice answered a second time from heaven, what God has made clean, do not call common. Now this happened three times. So three times it happened. Every time, even the second time, the voice says, rise, Peter, kill and eat. And Peter says back to the voice,

I've never done things like that. And then the voice says, what God has made clean, do not call common. Peter's pretty stubborn. The third time it happens, he still says the same thing. So you can see that on one level, Peter accepts this ancient divide, this wedge issue between Jewish people and non-Jewish people. It's very close and dear to his heart. And then verse 11, and so that, by the way, is the first hammer blow. This very, very powerful, this very, very powerful, three-fold, three-time vision. Now here we need to just pause for a second.

One of the things which is very, very plain in the Book of Acts, which we need to get our minds around, is that the Book of Acts really does claim to be a work of history. It really does claim to be a work of eyewitness history, carefully researched. If you go back and you read the beginning of the Book of Acts, which is a sister book to the Book of Luke, and you read it, and that's the specific claim which is made. And one of the things is that it doesn't use symbolic language like the Book of Revelation.

It doesn't use allegorical language like the Pilgrim's Progress. It doesn't use once upon a time fairy tale language. It doesn't say, once upon a time in a city far away there once was a soldier who went by the name of Cornelius. It doesn't use that type of fairy tale language either. And it doesn't use the language of myth. It uses, in a sense, the type of language you'd see in a work of history, or you'd see in a newspaper article which is recording something which has happened. That's the literary genre, and that's what Luke is claiming. He's claiming that these things happened. And the second thing about it is if you go back and you see even in this story that the writer of Luke gives, he doesn't give footnotes, but what he does is he wants you to know for the eyewitnesses who are still alive that other people hearing this can go back if they want to check it out. So he doesn't just say, if you go back and read Acts chapter 10, he doesn't say, oh yeah, there was a city nearby with a soldier, and these things happen. No, no, no. Peter says that he's in Joppa, which is beside what is modern-day Tel Aviv.

[17:14] He says that he's going to go along the coast to Caesarea, which is a major city, but not huge. And he's not just going to go find some random soldier. He's going to be led to a soldier by the name of Cornelius, and he gives his rank. He's a centurion, and it gives the brigade that he's part of.

He's the head of a cohort, which is like a brigade, a battalion, and he gives all of that type of information. He's going to tell you in a moment that he travels with six people. He's going to tell you all these things. It's one of the things that goes on all the way through the book of Acts.

It's one of those things that if you were a skeptic and you got the early copy of this in the year 66 or 67 AD, you could go to Caesarea and you could check it out. You could go, or you could even go in the Jewish community and find who the six other men were who were witnesses. So this is all something which is claiming to be very, very, very naturalistic in the sense of that it's actually history. But the other thing about the story is it's extravagantly supernatural.

Extravagantly supernatural. You have a vision from God. You're going to go on and you're going to hear about the Holy Spirit falling on people. You're going to hear about angels. You're going to hear about other types of directed speech. And if you read the book of Acts as a whole, this is a feature of the book of Acts. There's times upon the normal types of planning and eating and travel and the normal types of things, things which are visions and miracles which happen all the way through the story.

And so you have this odd combination of an author who was very, very concerned with historical accuracy. And he was very, very concerned to give historical benchmarks so people could check it out.

[19:10] So he's very concerned about the truth and he talks about miracles. Now, I'm not going to defend miracles. Christianity teaches that God does miracles.

angels. It teaches that angels exist. I'm not going to make a case for it. But I am going to say for people looking at it, if you're sort of trying to figure out the Christian faith, this is a key inescapable feature of Christianity.

A concern for truth, a concern for historical accuracy, and acknowledging that it's not that you have miracles all the time. It's not like paganism where gods and goddesses do things all of the time, but God does miracles. That's the genre which is going on.

So if you go to some people who are getting deconstructed from the Christian faith or becoming ex-evangelicals and they try to tell you that these things aren't, the Bible isn't making these claims, they're just wrong. They might honestly believe somebody, but somewhere along the line, people are talking, they're just blowing it out their butt. It's wrong. It's just, this is a very historical work. Deal with it. But by the way, in my, I was only ordained about eight days. This is when I was in the Anglican Church of Canada and our synod, the gathering of all the Anglicans. We had this famous guy at the time called John Shelby Spong come to speak to our synod. He got multiple standing ovations and I was the only person in the room who didn't stand and clap.

You could have seen, I was just a bright red. I'm not a brave person. I was bright red. And there were probably literally streams flowing from my armpits with nervousness, but I didn't stand, I didn't clap, and I actually asked him a challenging question. And he said that basically, one of his basic message is that miracles don't happen. Nothing in the Bible happened. And it's just all metaphor and myth and all of those other types of things. And when I came back and they asked my my church, I don't think I'd been there to date eight days. And a week after that, they asked me about my reaction to synod. And I just said, listen, if I came to those beliefs, I would stop being a Christian because I'm not a Christian. And I don't understand why somebody would want to be a bishop and say those things. Like if you believe that, stop being a Christian. And I don't want you to stop being a Christian because miracles happen. But don't let anybody tell you that the Book of Acts is some type of work of metaphor or myth. It's history. But it frankly is also very miraculous.

[21 : 42] So what's the second hammer blow? Well, let's continue. Verse 11. It goes like this. And behold, at that very moment, so the vision stop, at that very moment, three men arrive at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. Acts 10 tells you that it's from Cornelius. He doesn't tell you that here. And the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, told me to go with them, making no distinction.

These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. That's the second hammer blow. He had a very clear direction and message from the Holy Spirit that he was to go with these pagans who've come from a pagan centurion who's part of the conquering, the group that's conquered Judea. They're their overmasters. And he's to go with them to meet this guy, Cornelius. That's the second hammer blow. And once again, there's six other brothers with him. So there's not only the two people. If you went back in time, I mean, if those people at that time, they could go ask the other brothers. They could ask the men who came.

But then it continues with the third hammer blow, which is verse 13 and 14. And he told us, he gets to the man's house. He doesn't tell you that it's Cornelius, but that's his name. And he told us, Cornelius, how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter. And he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household. Just pause for a second.

In Canada, if you were to say, okay, basically, if you were to go on late night television, and the comedian came out and began by, are you saved? How would the room react? They'd all burst into laughter. You can't be more uncool and hokey than using the word saved. Brothers and sisters, be prepared to be uncool and hokey. It's a wonderful word. It's a Bible word. It's a God-spoken word.

Anyway, here's the third hammer blow. And that third hammer blow is that God, so God has actually worked in a way to prepare Peter with the vision. And then he sends Peter to Cornelius. And Cornelius, this pagan centurion who's the head of the Italian battalion, he's been prepared because God had earlier sent an angel to him. That's the third blow. And what's the fourth blow? That can be seen in verses 15 and following. Look what it says. As I began to speak, so Peter begins to speak.

[24 : 32] By the way, as a bit of an aside, this shows that Peter knows Greek. Jesus knew Greek. Jesus would have regularly taught in Greek. And Peter obviously knows Greek.

Greek. Because you know what? If you're the over-mensch, if you're the overpowering above soldiers, you don't bother learning native languages. They learn yours. That's just the way it works.

You come in, like, let me tell you, if Russia came in and conquered Canada, they wouldn't bother learning English. We'd have to learn Russian, right? That's just the way it works. So Peter knows Greek. Anyway, sorry, back again. Verse 15. Sorry, that's a bit of an aside.

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who was I that I could stand in God's way? And so what he's describing is this. It's called the pagan Pentecost. And it's at the fourth hammer bowl. He just begins to speak. He says a few introductory words about Jesus. And while he's speaking, all of a sudden, the room breaks into ecstatic, speaking other languages, just as happened in Acts 2.

God just does this remarkable thing. Four hammer blows. And Peter just has to realize, oh, what Jesus said was going to happen just happened. And if God sent the Holy Spirit upon them as a sign that they had given their hearts to Jesus, and he's come in to be their Lord and Savior, and the implication, by the way, is he baptized them all, which, by the way, also means he would have baptized infants. But that's a whole other topic of conversation. Because Peter's just gobsmacked by it.

[26 : 46] So you can see, by the way, on one hand, that when he goes back to Jerusalem, he can, on one hand, understand why people are mad. Because he didn't want to do this. God had to send the vision three times. But on the other hand, he's just completely blown away. Angels, God speaking, visions, the falling into the Holy Spirit. God just does this remarkable work. It's all God. And that's what he says to the people. And here's the next bit, verse 18. There's an older Christian who was sort of well-known. His name is F.F. Bruce. He was well-known in the middle of the 20th century. He has a wonderful line to describe what happens. The accusation stops, and the worship begins. Isn't that something we can always pray for, if that ever happened in our conflicts? The accusation stops, and the worship begins. Look what happens. Verse 18. When they heard these things, they fell silent, and they glorified God, saying, then to the pagans also God has granted repentance that leads to life. Hallelujah!

John will get up stage. We're going to start singing. No, I mean, they didn't have that. Whoever their John was, you know, they start singing psalms and stuff like that. And probably being Jewish people, they do some dancing. If you want to see Jewish people really worship, go to the wall in Jerusalem on the Shabbat. They're all dancing and singing and shouting. That's what happens.

Accusations stop. The worship begins. Now, just a couple of things. There's a really big overarching story. If you could put up the point right now. I have a big point for the whole chapter. The second half of the chapter we'll go through quicker. And that's this. It's, and that's the overarching point of all of chapter 11. The Lord can steal the scene. The Lord can work behind the scenes.

But the Lord is always on the scene. So you can teach and witness and act and give with humble confidence. That's what you're going to see. In this first story, the Lord is the scene stealer, the show stealer. He just comes and he's the whole actor. He just takes over and he's the scene stealer.

What we're going to see in the next story is the Lord, all of his working is behind the scene. And the big point of the whole chapter is sometimes the Lord will steal the scene. He'll just show up and do everything. Other times he works behind the scenes. But the confidence that the text wants you and me to have as Christians is that the Lord is always on the scene. You know what? The Lord is present with us this morning, brothers and sisters. Some of you might really feel him. Of others, don't feel him at all. But he's here. God is present in our midst. The Holy Spirit is moving, whether you feel it or not. And if he's not present on the scene making a difference, everything I do is a complete and utter waste of time. But brothers and sisters, the God of the Bible, the God who speaks the Bible, he wants us to understand. Sometimes he's on the scene. Other times behind the scenes, he's always on the scene. I mean, sometimes he's still, but, and that's why you can teach others about Christians. You'll see that in a moment. You can witness.

[30 : 05] And you can act. And you can give money with humble confidence. See, here's the thing about Christianity. It's part of the reason why I was emphasizing about this, the book of Acts. On one hand, you know, in fact, I was just reading something the other day showing how, documenting how Luke, in his language in the beginning, shows familiarity. Because by the way, the person who wrote this gospel is a pagan who becomes a Christian sometime after the death and resurrection of Jesus, he becomes a Christian. In fact, he becomes a Christian in Antioch, probably. And he's a very well-educated man. And he shows in his language that he's familiar with the rules of writing history in the ancient world. And yet, in his history, we have these mystical and miraculous things. You see, sometimes Christians, when I talk to people, and when I read things and I see how people react to the Christian faith, it's as if sometimes people say that the Christian faith is too mystical.

And other times they say that it's too ordinary. Sometimes they say it's too hidden. Other times they say it makes it look like it's too in-your-face. Sometimes they say it's too simple. Other times they say it seems to be too complicated. Sometimes they talk about it being too authoritative. Other times they talk about it having too much freedom. I'm thinking of a time I was in a cab and a Muslim asked me what I was doing going to the airport. I told him I'm a pastor and I'm going to this thing where I'm going to meet other pastors. And then he says, out of the blue, does your Bible forbid drinking of alcohol?

And I said, well, no, it doesn't. Sorry if you're some Christians listening, but it doesn't forbid the drinking of alcohol. And he said, well, the Koran does. That's one of the reasons the Koran is better than the Bible. The Koran forbids alcohol drinking. And I said, do you drink alcohol? He said, yeah, I drink alcohol all the time. Okay. Maybe the Bible's wise about how it talks about alcohol. Anyway, you know, but sometimes it's too authoritative. Sometimes it gives you too much freedom.

You know, sometimes it's too word focused. Sometimes it's too prayer focused. You know, some, you know, and people will make all of these contradictory types of complaints and criticisms of the Christian faith. But maybe the issue is that it is exactly right. And you and I are out of whack.

In fact, maybe it is because if we're honest with ourselves, human nature and human life is a riddle and in a mystery and an enigma. And maybe you need something that is exactly like the Christian faith that sometimes seems too miraculous and other times seems not miraculous enough. Sometimes seems too mystical. Other times not mystical enough. Sometimes too ordinary. Other times not ordinary.

[32 : 57] Like all of those. Maybe it's because the Bible is describing the exact shape that fits the human heart and only the Bible. Only the gospel.

Well, what happens? The flip side of God being the scene stealer is the ordinariness. Look at this. I have to do this sort of a bit quicker. Verse 19. Now, those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews, Jewish people.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking pagans, also preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Now, if you're like me, you're going, whoa, whoa, whoa, Cyrene, boo, boo, boo, boo, boo. Okay, just pause for a sec. Just sort of pause here for a couple of simple things. This shows already the growth of Christianity within just a few years, because this has been told probably about 10 years, 11 years, maybe 10 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And Cyrene is what we now call Libya. Cyprus is what we now call Cyprus. Phoenicia is what we now call Lebanon.

[34 : 21] And Antioch is in Syria. Okay? And so a couple of chapters earlier, a couple of years earlier, there was an intense persecution centered in Jerusalem. And as a result of this intense persecution of Christians, the first one, many ordinary Christians scattered.

And that's just what it's describing. They went traveling to different places looking for safety. They were what we would now call refugees looking for a new home to flee persecution. And some of them, as they go, all of them, many of them, as they go, tell others about Jesus.

And many people become Christians. In an ironic way, a paradoxical way, the persecution spread the Christian faith. If they'd really wanted to contain it and put it out of, they would have, they would have, I don't know, give them meals and kept them in the city.

But instead, they scattered them and they told others about it. And here's this wonderful thing. And this is this wonderful behind-the-scenes work that some of them go.

So Luke is telling a story that goes both earlier than what's happened and later than what's happened. And some of them go to this place called Antioch.

[35 : 28] And they tell people about Jesus. And they're pagans. And the pagans become Christians. But here's the remarkable work of God. These people in Antioch who are pagans who become Christians, that happens organically or naturally after Cornelius and after the church in Jerusalem has come to accept that pagans become Christians.

That's something that couldn't be organized. I just want to share with you something. Just within the last couple of weeks, an organization that I was involved with, we had a meeting.

And one of the things that, there was a couple of things that we talked about in the meeting. And one of them, of course, was the need for money. And one of them was for the need of a person to come along with a particular type of expertise. And a particular name came up and all as to whether we should approach this person.

And the response was, this person would never take it. He's way too busy. And as soon as the meeting, and we prayed about all of this. And as soon as the meeting finished, one of the people in the meeting decided that they would call up the person we mentioned.

And he listened and he said, I've been thinking about this. And I'm open. And as soon as that was like a six or seven minute conversation, he hung up and the phone rang.

[36 : 48] And the phone rang. I am not making this up. By somebody saying, I'm sitting in a meeting. It was in a city quite a few miles away. And we were talking about the organization I'm talking about.

And we'd like to give you some money. He called from the meeting. You can't organize that stuff. Now, many people will just say that's synchronicity.

But synchronicity is a cheat word. There's no such thing if the world is just empty of God. It's only if there is a God, as described in the Bible, who's active in the world, that you can have something like synchronicity.

And the real Christian word is called providence. Synchronicity is an attempt to sneak the triune God into your language without using the language of the triune God, which is providence.

So here we see the Lord moving pieces and acting all behind the scenes. And one of the really neat things as well, by the way, here, I have to watch my time, in verse 21, Oh, no, it comes up in the next bit here.

[38 : 08] There's this really neat thing that comes up in this next bit. Look at verse 22. The report of this, that the pagans had become Christians, comes to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. Now, they've already heard about Cornelius, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

And verse 23, When Barnabas comes and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. Now, listen to this, verse 24, For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Just want to pause. If all you get out of this sermon today is one thing to pray for, I would like to be like Barnabas. And if you're a woman, you can say that too.

I would like to be a woman described as being full of the, that I'm a good woman, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. Pray that, brothers and sisters, for yourself.

And that's, in fact, a thing that you can pray if you're married. Pray that for your spouse. That your spouse would be a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. That your wife would be like that.

[39 : 13] That's a good thing to pray. Pray for your kids, that they will grow into that. And here's the cool thing. And a great many people are added to the Lord. And this is one of the weird things about the original language.

That word, a great many people are added to the Lord. That makes it sound like they become Christians and they're added to Jesus. But the act also can be equally translated as saying, and the Lord added a great many people to the Christian faith.

So it's the Lord doing it. Here's the thing, folks. Notice, every conversion is a miracle. There is no person here who's a Christian who can say that they've never seen a miracle.

If somebody says to you, have you ever seen a miracle? You can say, I only know of one. Oh, yeah? What was it? Me becoming a Christian. That's a miracle. Only God can do it.

And it's just as much a miracle if you gave your life to Christ when you were a little kid and you're not even conscious of it. It's still a miracle. God doesn't have to have you be conscious of it for it to be a miracle. In fact, that's what parents pray for.

[40 : 16] Christian parents pray that God will do a miracle in their children and that their children will never know a time when they don't know Jesus. You're a walking miracle if you've given your life to Christ.

Just very, very briefly have to wrap it up. Verse 25.

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for a whole year, they met with the church. In other words, they taught the church. And they also taught a great many people.

It's implying that they go out of the doors and do evangelism and apologetics. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. And just one other pause. Antioch was known as the gateway to the east.

Archaeological and anthropological evidence shows that people from China, India, and Persia lived in Antioch. And Antioch is to become the center of the great Christian missionary encounter with the pagan world.

[41 : 20] Friends, can you pray that we can have a season of a new missionary encounter with Canada? Now, in those days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Holy Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined, according to his ability, to send relief.

Here's this wonderful thing. These are pagans. See, that's why this text is saying the Lord can steal the scene.

He can be a scene stealer. And he can work behind the scenes, like he does in this text. But he's always on the scene. And that's why you can teach the Christian faith.

And you can bear witness to the Christian faith outside of these doors. And you can act as a Christian. And you can take initiative. And you can give money for the furtherance of the gospel.

[42 : 27] And you can do that with humble confidence. Because the Lord is always on the scene. I invite you to stand. Stand. Let's bow our heads for prayer.

Father, I ask that you would make me more and more like Barnabas. I ask, Father, that you would make me a good man. That you would make me full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And I ask, Father, for my brothers and sisters here in this church and for those online and downstream, that, Father, you would make them like Barnabas.

That you would make them a man or a woman who's good and filled with faith and filled with the Holy Spirit. And, Father, if there are any here who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior and Lord, that you might help them, that you might work in their lives.

You might turn their heart, that they might know Jesus. And I ask, Father, that you know how we can get down and we can be depressed and all. And we thank you that there are times like this on a Sunday morning when we can not only remember through the Lord's Supper, what Jesus did for us on the cross, but we can remember through your word that you are with us.

You are on the scene. And that we can pray and act and bear witness, Father, knowing it's not our actions that do anything, but that you still move and act. Grow in us that humble confidence.

[43 : 55] Grow in us a patience. Deliver us from our impatience with you, but deliver and grant us patience, knowing that you are acting.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.