

The Model Of The Antioch Church - part 1

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[0 : 00] today with the time change and everything. I don't know, I used to scoff at the idea that it made much of a difference, and maybe it doesn't, but man, every Sunday that we change it, I'm just feeling different. I don't want to say off, make it sound like I'm sick. I'm not.

But just like, I don't know, everything just feels very different. I don't know why, but there it is. It is. It is what it is indeed.

All right, so coming back, excuse me, try that one again. Coming back to Acts in chapter 11, we pick right up where we left off.

It was right after the, we're picking up right after the Apostle Peter's report of the gospel going out to the Gentiles. Remember, he returned back to Jerusalem, and he was met with some questions from a critical group, traditional Jewish folk known as the circumcision, these converted Jews, were wondering, Pete, why are you talking to Gentiles?

And so Peter had to give his report, had to talk about it, and the ultimate conclusion is recorded for us in verse 18.

[1 : 26] Then to the Gentiles also, God has granted repentance that leads to life. And this is a pretty big deal, because what we've seen take place in the book of Acts is that the gospel first was preached at Pentecost to a Jewish-only audience.

And then in Acts 8, we saw after the persecution of Saul started, or Saul's persecution of the church started, that Philip went up to Samaria, and he preached to the Samaritans.

And they're kind of a half-breed Jew, but still following the Jewish law and customs. So they were still kind of within that realm, and the church of Jerusalem sent down Peter and John to make sure things were all good, and that indeed they were receptive of the gospel.

Then in Acts 10, we saw that Peter had made his way all the way to Joppa, and was called from Joppa to Cornelius' house.

And he went to the house, and Cornelius told him, hey, I had a vision that I needed to reach out to a guy named Peter in Joppa, and you would have a message for us.

[2 : 49] What is it you've got to say? And so Peter shared the gospel, and the Gentiles get saved. We saw the sign of the Holy Spirit coming upon them.

They're speaking in tongues. Again, tongues acting as a sign that God was indeed saving the Gentiles. It was indeed an act of God there. Not a common occurrence, not a usual occurrence for people who are saved.

It's not expected for you to put faith and trust in Jesus and then come out speaking in tongues. That's a false teaching. It's estimated from the time of Pentecost to the time that Peter spoke in Cornelius' house.

It was about a seven to ten year period. So this was definitely a slow progression, to say the least. But it's not to say that the Gentiles had no opportunities for the gospel, because we're going to actually look at that today when we pick up in verse 19, that actually they did have an opportunity to hear the gospel, and maybe not as prevalent as Peter going, and now everyone going to the Gentiles.

And certainly as we continue on in the book of Acts, we'll see that that is Paul's ministry, is to the Gentile believers, which is ironic given that Paul considered himself to be basically the Jew of all Jews, you know, the best of the best, the cream of the crop.

[4 : 20] And we were actually just talking about that this morning in Sunday school, that he put all his stock in his credentials, and the righteousness that he had obtained as a Pharisee through keeping of the law there.

Excuse me. So why did it take so long for the gospel to go to the Gentiles? Why did it take so long for Peter to finally be called to go talk to Cornelius? Well, because God needed to work on Pete. He needed to prepare his heart. There needed to be time there. Because Peter is a Jewish, traditional Jewish man, and to speak to a Gentile was off limits.

And especially to speak of the promises of God being offered to Gentiles was just out of the question. I think one principle, I don't think that, I don't know if I mentioned this before, that can be taken from this section in Acts, especially as it relates to Peter and the Gentiles and sharing of the gospel, is that it may take time for a church to get on board with an idea, but it does not mean that idea should be tabled until it's fully accepted.

And that's what we're going to really pull out of the text today in Acts 11, 19 through 21. The establishment of the church in Antioch is that this, I believe, took place before Peter went to Cornelius, before it was brought back and was commonly, or it was reported to the church at Jerusalem, and they made the decision, okay, well, I guess the Gentiles also will partake in the gospel, in the salvation in Christ.

[6:00] So as we pick up in Acts 11, 19, we're introduced to some men who heard the gospel as a result of that persecution that started in Acts 8. We know from Acts 8 that Christians were scattered from Jerusalem as a result of Saul persecuting the church.

He was finding people who associated with the way, those who identified with Jesus and committed to following his teaching, and he was imprisoning them, and he was casting his vote to have them killed.

And so because of that, many Christians scattered from Jerusalem. And when that happened, godly men went out from Jerusalem with the gospel, and they preached the message of repentance wherever they went.

And we saw that specifically with Philip and Samaria in Acts 8, also speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, Peter and John, after they visited Samaria, went to the Samaritan villages, and of course, Peter in Cornelius' house.

Now as the focus now starts to settle on reaching the Gentile world, which is what we're seeing through the rest of the book of Acts, as they start to reach Gentile world with the gospel, we're introduced here, as I was giving a lot of thought to this this past week, Acts 11, and a little more into Acts 13, present us a model of the Antioch church.

[7:34] I feel like it's a good biblical model of church, if I can put it that way. It's not about programs, it's not about songs, it's not about worship, not all that, but like basic, you know, what do we see the church?

How do we see it being planted, established, and carried out in Acts 11, at Antioch, and also spilling into Acts 13. So this is actually, I anticipated this to be a one sermon, go at it, but as God was leading in preparation, as I was writing, I've determined this is going to be a three sermon, go at it. Maybe, if not more. So part one of this model, if I can put it that way, Acts 11, 19 through 21, is the establishment of the church.

It's the establishment of the church. Acts 11, 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.

But there were some of them, the 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.

[9:02] We're told here in verse 19 that people who left Jerusalem would speak the word to no one other than the Jews. So they went as far as Phoenicia to Cyprus to Antioch.

We're talking hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem. And they still were preaching, speaking the word to only the Jews, to only Jewish people because they are the people of God.

They're the ones who have received the promises of God. They're the people of the Messiah. So that's who their focus was on. We're going to tell other Jews about the Messiah. We're going to tell them that he had come and that he had died and risen again.

We have salvation. We have righteousness in his life. And so as they went out of Jerusalem, this one thing to know about the ancient world at that time, especially in the Middle East there, is that in many places like Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, you can also talk about Egypt, other places as well, there were communities of traditional Jews.

See, these are Jews whose ancestors, after being dispersed from Jerusalem during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities that took place between 722 B.C.

[10:18] and 586 B.C. So these Jews, the Assyrian Empire came in, took over the northern tribes of Israel, took them out, dispersed them among the kingdom, the empire, Babylonians come in starting around 605 B.C.

and complete the job with the southern tribes of Israel and do the same thing, take them out of Jerusalem and settle them in other areas of the empire. So that's really why you have all these pockets and communities of Jewish settlements in the Middle East in these different countries because they were displaced during those two captivities which God sent as a punishment on his people.

And so these folks as these men are now being scattered out of Jerusalem because of the persecution of Saul and they're going into these countries, they're finding these Jewish communities and they're sharing the gospel.

They're telling them about Jesus. and the ancestors of these folks sorry I've got to see this is time change throws me off.

So they were dispersed during those captivities, settled and the ancestors of these folks never returned to the homeland when they had the opportunity to. So that's why these men are leaving Jerusalem, going to all these areas, cities, countries.

[11:49] There's these Jewish communities because that's where they settled and they chose not to return back home. There we go, got my thought in order. So it would make sense to a traditional Jew who's come to Christ to reach out to other traditional Jews scattered abroad.

The persecution of Saul in Jerusalem pushed the men into scattered regions. These men, they had no special injunction, they had no special command given to them particularly by the apostles or by Jesus that we have recorded for us that says all right, as you guys leave and escape the persecution, go and tell others about Jesus.

There's no implication of that at all. In fact, we're not even told these guys names. Now there are those who were scattered because of the persecution it says in verse 19 and then verse 20 but there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene.

We're not even given names, we're just told these are people, these are Christians, these are followers of Christ that are being spread abroad and going out and sharing. And it's not that they were told to do it, yes, Jesus gave the command to his disciples to go and make disciples but it's not like the apostles said, all right, as you head up to Cyrene, I want you to hit this community and this community and this community.

There's no strategy, there's no strategic vision in that regard. God sent a persecution among the people through Saul and the people spread and they were sharing Jesus out of the abundant joy they had in knowing him as their savior.

[13:24] They knew Jesus as the savior, they knew Jesus as the one who offered forgiveness of sins and as they were traveling, as they were encountering these people, as they were encountering the Jewish communities and the Gentiles as well, they were seeing the need for Christ everywhere they went and they had this spontaneous impulse to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They were faithful to it and they were excited about it. They know the abundance of joy that they had knowing the love of God through that and they shared with others. Thought of reflection here. Are you so consumed with joy in knowing Jesus Christ as your savior that the need for others to know him is evident to you?

I mean, we sit in our groups, we sit at our dinner tables, we sit amongst our friends and we can complain about things and point things out, oh, how bad are, you know, the bad direction our country is going and whatnot.

I know the public school system was brought up in Sunday school this morning and we can complain about, you know, how that's gone south quick and all that. And we can complain and complain and complain and like, oh, it's not like it once was.

[14:46] But do we see the people that are involved in this? Do we see the people who are in our government systems? Do we see the people who are in our school systems not as the enemy, but as people who need Jesus?

Are we so, consumed with the joy of knowing Christ ourselves that we are hurt and we are burdened for people who don't know him? Are you ready to introduce them to him?

This is really what I was thinking about as I was reading through this. Like these guys, they have no name, but apparently they love Jesus so much that they want others to as well to know him. So while the focus here in these few verses initially was to bring the gospel to traditional Jews, we see in verse 20 that some men were compelled to speak to the Hellenists.

Now the Hellenists are, you know, I mentioned them before when we were in Acts 6 that they're Greek-speaking Jews who had an intellectual orientation to the Greek culture.

And that's true. That's what Hellenists are, Greek-speaking Jews who have this, you know, growing up in the Greek culture, they're Greek-ized Jewish people. And maybe this next statement that I'm going to make is where the word Greek comes up on that word cloud there.

[16:14] There's a variance in the Greek manuscripts in verse 20 that indicate that the word that I have in the English Standard Version, does anyone have a different word other than Hellenists? Greeks? Okay. Well, that's the variant. So Hellenists is the Greek word Hellenistas. You hear it, Hellenist, Hellenistas.

Hellenistas. And the word for Greeks would be Hellenas. Literally, the difference between the two words is the English equivalent of I-S-T being inserted in the word.

But it's two different words. Because if it's the Hellenists, you're talking about these Greek-speaking Jews. But if it's the Greeks, you're talking about Gentiles. So it's a pretty big deal, I think, you know, that variance.

I think we need to get it right. And looking at Acts 11, it would make sense for Greeks or Gentiles to be used here in the immediate context of Peter having gone back to Jerusalem to talk about how he shared the gospel with the Gentiles and how they had received it and how God had given them faith to believe in Jesus.

[17:28] So it would make sense that now verse 19 picks up, oh, by the way, before Peter, there are these people who were scattered through the persecution. and as they were traveling, they were sharing with the Jews first, yes, but they were also sharing with the Greeks, the Gentiles.

So they were sharing it probably before or maybe the same time that Peter was with Cornelius. You know, sometimes it takes some thinking out of the box and acting on that thought to be a trailblazer for others to follow in the battle for the souls of men.

Just think about this. In verse 19, we're told that as people were scattered, they were speaking the word to no one except Jews. But then in verse 20, there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists or Greeks, the Gentiles, also preaching the Lord Jesus.

Obviously left to their own traditions and ways, the men from Jerusalem would have continued speaking only to the traditional Jews. Yet here in verse 20, we see some men, no names given, who make the connection that the Gentiles need to hear this message to.

And so sometimes in the church, we've got people who kind of think out of the box. Different ways in which to reach our community and different ways in which to speak life in the community and share the gospel with folks.

[18:59] And those who've been around for a while and established and settled in the ways that we've done things for however many years kind of scoff at her. Like, oh no, I don't think we should do that.

Why fix what's not broken? Whatever. Well, if that was the mentality, these guys could have said, well, you know, we're going to the Jews only.

Let's continue to go to the Jews only. But that wasn't the case. They did something different. They pursued, they saw the need for the Gentiles to hear the gospel and know Jesus.

And so they went and they shared with them the gospel. This type of burden for souls brings to mind what the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 9.16, he says, for if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me. He's saying, I need to do this.

[19:54] Then he makes the statement, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. Paul understood that his job was to share the gospel.

His duty is to share the gospel with people. And he said, woe to me. That is literally curse on me if I do not preach the gospel. Because that is the only thing in which a Christian has anything to boast

in.

Paul, who was a Jew who was circumcised on the eighth day of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a persecutor of the church, who had all these great credentials as far as the Jewish faith goes, recognized, he said, I count that all as rubbish.

That's worth nothing. I'm sorry. I know, Siri, I'm sorry too. I put that down so that doesn't happen again. That's worth nothing to him but to know Christ and his sufferings and to make Christ known to others.

The whole intent of the book of Acts is to show the continuing work of the risen Jesus Christ in and through his church. And the church is not a building. The church is not a program or a set of programs.

[21 : 10] The church or the people of God call out of this world into his marvelous light. And he has tasked the church with tremendous responsibility. Matthew 28, 19 and 20.

He says, go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

That is the command that Jesus has given for his church to do and we need to go and do it. The Apostle Peter reiterates that fact in 1 Peter 2, verse 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that, here it is, why?

Why are you all these things? Why are you chosen? Why are you a priesthood? Why are you a holy nation? Why are you his own possession? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The church, the body of believers, have a responsibility to go make disciples, baptize them, and teach them the ways of Christ. And we are called out of darkness to proclaim his marvelous light, his excellencies to all people who are in darkness.

[22 : 27] The fact that these men were preaching in Antioch is both impressive and it ought to serve as an encouragement for those of us who are severely discouraged with the way things are in the United States of America.

So I haven't told you anything about Antioch yet. But that in itself is an interesting insight. I'm going to read to you, rather than just put it into my own notes, I'm going to read to you what Warren Wiersbe writes in the Bible exposition commentary about Antioch.

With a population of half a million, Antioch ranked as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria. Its magnificent buildings helped give it the name Antioch the Golden, Queen of the East.

The main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. It was the only city in the ancient world at that time that had its streets lighted at night.

A busy port and a center for luxury and culture, Antioch attracted all kinds of people, including wealthy, retired Roman officials who spent their days chatting in the baths or gambling at the races.

[23 : 42] With its large cosmopolitan population and its great commercial and political power, Antioch presented to the church an exciting opportunity for evangelism.

I'm going to pause there. I'm not done reading yet. An exciting opportunity for evangelism. This humongous, amazing city, right? Okay. Antioch was a wicked city, perhaps second only to Corinth. Though all the Greek, Roman, and Syrian deities were honored, the local shrine was dedicated to Daphne, whose worship included immoral practices. Antioch was to the Roman world what New York City is to ours, writes James Kelso in his book, *The Archaeologist Follows the Apostle Paul*. Here, where all the gods of antiquity, here, all the gods of antiquity were worshipped, and Christ must be exalted. Think about that.

Antioch, this beautiful, gorgeous, large city, a lot of people. I mean, it's hard to understand in Shapley, Maine, unless you've actually been there to that type of situation. But this is a place of luxury.

[24 : 54] It's where culture was like just in and out. It was full of wicked people. It was full of false deities. You had the shrine dedicated to Daphne, which included prostitution worship.

This was the world of Antioch. Depraved, horrible, wretched. It was an imposing city for sure. Beautiful, marble, you know, the marble colonnades and street.

Much like America today, paganism runs rampant throughout it. Yet, we're assured in verse 21 that these guys who went into Antioch, they saw what they saw.

They saw an amazing city and they also saw wicked people in pagan practices and they preached the gospel. And what they were doing was right.

Verse 21 says that the hand of the Lord was with them. The hand of the Lord indicates both power and blessing on their ministry and what they were doing.

[26 : 10] and as his word was being preached, as the gospel was being shared, the Holy Spirit was convicting hearts and drawing people to call on Jesus. And we're told that a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Just like at Pentecost when 3,000 believed and were baptized, turning to Jesus in obedience, we see a response in Antioch. We don't know how many, we're not told the number, but we're told that a great many, great number who believed turned to the Lord because the hand of the Lord was upon these men who faithfully shared the gospel in a wicked, depraved city that they could have easily just, I'm going to have nothing to do with this.

Their sin and depravity is so rampant and dripping everywhere I want, I don't even want to touch it, I don't want to be near it. They could have separated themselves, they could have said, I'm just going to go to the Jewish communities because they have at least some sense of morality about them. They didn't. They saw the need and preached the gospel. Now, as encouraging as that is that the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord, the scary reality about that statement is the implication that there were people who believed and did not turn to the Lord.

It's not a, you know, oh, I believe and I'm turned to the Lord. It was, there were, you know, a lot of people who believed and there was a great number who turned to the Lord but there were also some who didn't.

[27 : 46] The gospel requires repentance and faith. Just to say believe in Jesus can produce a false assurance of salvation because even the devil believes in Jesus.

To believe in Jesus is to turn from a life of sin, receive him as Savior, and follow him as Lord by obeying his word. And when this happens, a person's desires change as they begin to follow his teachings found in the Bible.

That is a quote from Billy Graham. It's not enough to just say, oh, I believe in Jesus. It's a, when you say you believe in Jesus, it actually results in a life change.

So you had people here who intellectually believed in Jesus but didn't turn to the Lord. The Apostle John wrote warning of these individuals in 1 John 2.19, they went out from us but they were not of us.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us. The reality is that it is not up to an individual to declare whether or not someone is saved because the fruit of an individual will bear out and ultimately their salvation or lack thereof will be revealed on the day of judgment.

[29 : 05] The Apostle Paul warned the church at Corinth, 2 Corinthians 13.5, to examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test.

So let's take with us the boldness of these men from Cyprus and Cyrene who went against the flow and preached the gospel to the Gentiles in a woefully depraved city. Our world is desperate and in need of hope.

That hope is only sure through the gospel of Jesus. And as we go and share the gospel we can know that God's hand is with us because His word is with us.

And as people make their, you know, choose to believe and turn to the Lord praise God. but it starts with us being faithful to begin with. Alexander McLaren said, if ever we are tempted to think our task heavy let us not forget that He who said it helps us to do it and from His throne shares in all our toils.

God sets us in the opportunities to share the gospel and proclaim His truth and His love and He'll help us to do it as well. Father, I thank You for Your Word.

[30 : 23] I thank You for this text, Lord, as we are beginning here in Acts 11, 19 and following as we see the establishment of the church at Antioch. As we see, Lord, the church as it is established and as it grows, Lord, as it ministers, I pray, Father, that we would ourselves examine ourselves personally and we'd also examine the ministries of this church, Lord, in our intent and our purpose, Lord.

I pray, Father, that You would guide and direct and give us discernment, help us to be faithful to You, to unashamedly go out in a world full of depravity and desperation, people who so need the hope of the gospel and let us unashamedly proclaim it and share it.

And Lord, not look judgmentally at the life that they're living now, but Lord, to see the desperate need they have for You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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