

Christians in Antioch

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a look into the chapter we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 11, and reading at verse 19. 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, 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 they 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 Tarshish to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

[1 : 14] For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now back in the Indian world, there were quite a few places that had the name Antioch.

But this Antioch that is spoken of here, where those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ were first called Christians, was one of the greatest cities within the Roman Empire.

I think it was probably the third greatest city. There was Rome, of course, was the number one city, and then Alexandria, and then this city of Antioch.

It was a very wealthy city, and it was noted for the length of the street that ran through it. When we go to our great cities and we look on the great streets, maybe of Edinburgh and see Princes Street, or go to Argyle Street in Glasgow, we say, my word, these are long streets.

But this street, the street running through Antioch, was apparently four miles long. This Antioch is in present-day southern Turkey.

[2 : 25] And while it was a very wealthy city, it was also a very wicked city. It was a city that was completely given over to idolatry, and the gods of Syrian gods and Greek gods and Roman gods were worshipped.

And it was very much a city like Corinth, that more or less anything went. Whatever you wanted to do, you could do. There was almost like a license to do anything in Antioch.

But it was into this city that the Lord began to work. And of course, it was largely through the arrival of Christians from other places.

Because after the martyrdom of Stephen, the Christians began to flee the persecution that had started. And of course, a work of the gospel began in Antioch.

And I think we always find these things encouraging. Because when we go to the word of God, and we see how God worked in cities like Antioch, and cities like Corinth, you would say to yourself, these, if you were just to, supposing if we went back the 2,000 years, into the time of the great gospel spread, and you went to Antioch, you went to Corinth, you would say, well, this is as dark a place as you'll get.

[3 : 49] It's absolutely impossible that God could work here. And maybe there was almost a feeling of that when Paul arrived in Corinth. But remember how the Lord came to him, and he said, I have many souls in this city.

And you know, that's one of the great encouragements with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must always remember, it's his gospel. It's not ours. And often we limit the power of the gospel because we look at ourselves.

And we look at our trying to communicate it, or our trying to spread it, or in whatever way. And we bring, we sometimes look at just to ourselves, and we forget, this is God's word.

This is God's work. And God is able to break down all barriers. And God is able to enter into the hardest of hearts. And as we said, as we know that the gospel is just that.

It's the power of God, the dynamite of God, that blows apart, that enters into people's hearts, and brings in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 59] And if you're here tonight, and you're saying to yourself, you know, I believe the gospel. I believe the word of God. I believed it since I was knee high, just a young person.

I believed all this. But I've never come to, I've never come to be able to lay hold upon it personally. And sometimes you may feel it's too big for you.

It's too hard to achieve. It's too far away. You may say that somehow it's for other people, but it's not for you. But you say, I wish it was for me. Well, don't limit God.

Because his power is able to break, and to enter, and to make you, enable you to do what, right up to now, you've never been able to do.

He's able to make you believe. In fact, only he is able. Because we cannot of ourselves. The faith comes from him.

[5 : 56] By grace you are saved through faith, not of yourself. And we've got to remember that the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is a gift. It's not something we work up in ourselves.

He is a gift. We receive. It's our duty to seek. And when we truly seek, the Lord tells us that we will find. So here's this city, Antioch, and from a human point of view, human perspective, you would say, oh, well, this city's a write-off.

And again, we should try and encourage ourselves that while we live in a dark day, and sometimes we say, oh, what's the point in praying? I'll go through the motions.

Yes, I wouldn't pray for our nation, but I don't really expect much. Well, that's wrong. Because God is able, as he did in Antioch, as he did in Corinth, he's able to do in our land as well.

And so we mustn't limit the Lord. So, into this great city, God's work began. And news had traveled back to the church in Jerusalem of God's work taking place in Antioch, and that there were many, many Jews there.

[7 : 10] So, the church in Jerusalem decided to send somebody down. And they chose this man, Barnabas. Barnabas, actually, his name was Joseph, but the apostles gave him the name of Barnabas, which means the son of encouragement.

And that was a great name, because Barnabas, he was a great man. And what a wonderful title to be given, the son of encouragement. And that's the kind of man that Barnabas was.

He was encouraging. To encourage somebody is to give a person courage, to give them the incentive to go on and to do maybe what they don't feel that they can.

And we always love being in the company of encouraging people, people who encourage you. They're not negative. They're positive.

And they make you feel positive. They make you feel good. And particularly in the Christian faith, we love to meet people who encourage us in the faith. Because I think we know that it's very easy at times to become down in the Christian faith.

[8 : 23] Times that we feel that we're struggling. And it's always good that we are encouraged and that there are those who do encourage us. Well, Barnabas was an encourager.

And in fact, when we go back to chapter 4, at the end of chapter 4 in Acts, it gives us a little insight, one little glimpse of Barnabas there.

In fact, it shows us something very interesting. If you go back to Acts 4 and up from verse 32, you will find that, you know, we talk about the gospel and some people talk about a social gospel.

And what they mean by a social gospel is simply that people try their best and they assume that they're Christians if they try and adhere to Jesus' teaching and that they're very good to other people.

And it's kind of like a social gospel. But the gospel of Jesus Christ actually is a social gospel because it affects social life.

[9 : 31] It affects the well-being of society. And this is a tremendous insight into the power of the gospel within the community. And verse 32, Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul.

And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but that they had everything in common. And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Isn't that amazing? So that there was no social deprivation amongst the whole Christian church, there was nobody in want, nobody in poverty, nobody in need because everybody, those who had more than enough, they brought so that everything was distributed equitably.

And when you think about where we are as a nation, it just shows us of how we are in many ways receding and the further we go away from God, the worse the social situation becomes.

[11:05] And here we see the very reverse that as the gospel of Jesus Christ flourishes within the community, nobody is in need. And it's here then that we meet this man, Barnabas, and tells us there, thus Joseph, in verse 36, thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, so he was a real Jew, he was right from the very heart of the Jewish faith, though he was a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

So you can see it tells us in our text that he was a good man and you can see that part of this goodness was his liberality, that he wanted to reach out to every person who was in need.

So this man, Barnabas, as we say, he was a good man and he was also a man that was full of faith and was ready to be used by the Lord wherever.

And that's important because people will say, oh, I'm ready to be used by the Lord. But in the same breath, they'll kind of say, well, I'm ready to be used by the Lord in certain places and doing certain things.

And they put qualifications on it. whereas the Lord wants like an open life and he might say to you, I want you to go here.

[12:34] I want you to go there. And the thing is I'll say to you as a congregation, sometimes people, you often hear people say, people talk and they say, you might hear of a congregation being interested in something and say, oh, he won't go there.

You can never, ever, ever say that because it is the Lord alone and that's the way it should be. The Lord changes people's hearts and many a minister has gone to congregations that they had no intention of going.

You hear people say, oh, he won't leave where he is, he's happy there. That doesn't count. That doesn't matter. When the Lord touches a person's heart and makes clear to them this is the way to go, then he has to go.

That is the way it should be. And so, just by way of, we've always got to have an open mind for the Lord's leading and believe that they'll leave then the rest to the Lord and that the servant of the Lord should be willing because we should always be willing to go wherever the Lord would have us go. Well, this man Barnabas, he was that kind of man. He was ready and he was willing to go. And so, he went down to Antioch. And the thing is, if we look at verse 19, there was a problem initially in Antioch.

[14:02] Because it tells us there, 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. You say, that's great.

They're going out. They're speaking the word. But here's the problem to no one except Jews. See what they were doing? Here were the Jews that had been converted and they went to other places to escape the persecution.

And the good side was that they were ready to share the gospel and speak the gospel and tell about the Lord Jesus Christ and tell about the transformation in their own life, but only to other Jews.

Jews. The Jews had an incredible, you'd almost say secretarian spirit, the spirit of segregation. The Jew and nobody else.

And in fact, at the beginning of the chapter, we find that Peter himself was brought to answer. He was being criticized by the rigid Jewish people.

[15:11] And we've got to remember that these actually were Christians, people who had come to faith. But you see, they hadn't grasped the great promise that God had given to Abraham.

These Jews, they were so proud of their race, proud of their ancestry, proud of the fact that they were God's people, that they belonged, that they were the ones who had the promise. But they didn't look at the promise in its fullness. Because God had told Abraham that through his seed, all the nations of the world were to be blessed. And of course, in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in our nature, Jesus, in our nature, was born into a Jewish community, born of a Jewish woman. And so, from a human point of view, Jesus was a Jew. They termed him the King of the Jews. Jews. But they hadn't taken it further to see that through his death and through his resurrection and ascension, and as the gospel is spread out, that it's to be spread to the whole world. [16:20] So they had this exclusive spirit. It's us and nobody else. And you know, the church has always got to guard against that spirit.

Because, you know, we can have without realizing it. James warns us about this, the Apostle James, that we don't love those, that we love only those who are like ourselves. That we don't love those who don't look like ourselves, even although they're Christians. And that is so wrong. And it's possible for the church to have this attitude and spin. Now, of course, it's far easier to fellowship and to be with people who are absolutely like minded and from a similar background and all that sort of thing. But that's not the way the church works. And sometimes the church has to be made to feel sometimes a wee bit uncomfortable. Because that's, that's, this is what it involves in the whole body of Christ.

[17:28] And so the church had to learn lessons at the very beginning. that they weren't just to be this secluded little group that didn't reach out to anybody else.

That the gospel is for everybody. And so this was an important lesson for them to learn. But we read then that there were these, that's some in verse 20, but there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists.

These were Greek speaking non-Jews, also preaching the Lord Jesus. And that might have been one of the reasons why they sent Barnabas, because he was, he was from Cyprus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them. Now that's the key to everything. The hand of the Lord was with them. Without the hand of the Lord with you, nothing, nothing, nothing will be of any lasting good.

you can have the most awesome, eloquent preacher in the whole wide world, but unless the hand of the Lord is with him, then there will be no lasting impact.

[18:42] You can have all the methodology in the world, but unless the hand of the Lord is in on what you're doing, then it will be of no avail.

Now that doesn't mean for one moment that as congregations and as churches, that we are to do all that we can to promote the gospel.

But never relying just on ourselves, because sometimes it's so easy you begin to rely on the arm of flesh. And the Bible tells us, by strength shall no man prevail.

In other words, on your own strength, you will not prevail. It's doomed to failure. It is only in the Lord, so that we go, it's not by might, it's not by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.

And that's what these people had discovered. And they went in relying purely on the power of God. And God worked. He did a great work, because the hand of the Lord was on them.

[19:46] And that's what we want. That's our prayer, that the hand of the Lord may be upon us. And if God's hand is upon you for good, then you will be truly blessed.

And so here was this great work was going on. And this is the work that Barnabas came down into. And of course it was a good choice in sending Barnabas, because if they had possibly sent one of the circumcision group, if they had sent one of them down, they would have laid in to those who were preaching to non-Jews.

But Barnabas, he came down, he understood, and it tells us that when he got there, he was glad. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.

Now what does it mean when you see the grace of God? Well, at one level you can't see the grace of God, the grace of God is something you experience. What it means here very simply is he was seeing the effects, the impact of God's grace in people's lives, the transformation.

And whenever God's grace begins to work in a person's life, their life is transformed. And you know, sometimes people when they're converted, they might be very unsure.

[21 : 09] They're not, they're saying, I believe the Lord is doing something, but I'm very hesitant, I'm very unsure, and they don't tell anybody. They try and keep it really quiet, hidden away.

And then eventually they may have the courage to tell someone. And they'll say, you know, I think I've been converted. And the person will say, oh, I was waiting for you to say that.

And I'll say, how do you know? Because you see, you can't hide. It's impossible. God's people, they're able to identify, and they're able to see the grace of God in people's lives.

And sometimes there are people who can spend years, and they never publicly come out on the Lord's side, and yet it's very evident that God's grace is in their life.

Most people do come out, and if you're one who's trying to hide, and there are, not just the elders, but other people in the congregation can see in your life that God is at well.

[22 : 25] It's high time to come out. Because, you know, you won't prosper spiritually, you won't develop spiritually, until you come out and nail your colors to the mass. It really changes things in your life, for good.

So, Barnabas came down, and he could see the impact of changed lives, reformed lives, and here is in this city of gross immorality and sin, and there's this glowing, wonderful church developing all the time.

And then in verse 23, it tells us that when he came down and he saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

God's love. You see, they were living in, as we say, in a very difficult time. Persecutions were on the go. It was going to cost to be a Christian.

They were living in the kind of city where it would be so easy to compromise. And compromise is so easy, isn't it? We live in an age where compromise is so easy.

[23 : 33] But you know, the thing is, if you're operating a kind of a give and a take gospel where you say, well, I'll mix and match, you can't.

Because it doesn't work. If it's a give and take, you end up, it'll be taken all away. So there has to be a steadfastness, there has to be a faithfulness to the Lord.

And remember that this is one of the wonderful things about, if you're a Christian here tonight, just remember how faithful God has been to you. Yes, from all eternity.

But he's been faithful to you. Think about your life before you became a Christian. He was faithful to you every day. You think of the times that you had brushes with death.

Times that you look back and you say, you know, I could have been gone then. But he was still watching over you, every day, every night. Some been taken, but you were left, you were still there.

[24 : 36] And since you've become a Christian, he has been faithful to you all the time. His commitment to you is absolute. He loves you more than anything in this whole wide world.

If you take all the silver and the gold and all the natural resources of the world and all the wealth and pile it all together, the Lord loves you more than all of that.

because all of that will one day be burnt up. But your soul is precious and he's going to take your soul to be with himself.

And that's why the Lord said, what will it profit a man or any person if they gain a whole world and lose their soul? What will a person give in exchange for their soul?

Soul is the most precious, more precious than anything in this world. And if you haven't looked out for your soul before, look out for it now and ask the Lord to save your soul.

[25 : 37] But the Lord is utterly committed to you. Absolutely. But he also wants us to be committed to him, to be faithful to him.

Faithful, remember at the end of the day, that's how you're welcomed home. Well done. What is it? Good and faithful. servant. And I know the word faithfulness can bother us at times because we can feel so unfaithful.

So often as we look at our lives and we're ashamed and we say, oh Lord, forgive me, forgive me my sin. And he does. But he's utterly faithful.

In fact, the word, if it was in the AV, the word, it says, to cleave. that idea exerted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

It's just the idea of cleaving. Like you know in Genesis 2, when we have this about the marriage, that for this reason, for this cause, shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife.

[26 : 47] And they too shall be one flesh. They will cleave. In other words, this is a union where there's to be nobody else. It's an intimate, precious union for life.

And that's exactly how it is to be with the Lord. That we are to be cleaving, we are to be utterly faithful to him. So that's what Barnabas did.

He was exhorting them in this way. And then in verse 24, we find that, again, it tells for he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And a great many people were added to the church. Well, it mentioned before he was a good man, part of the fruit of the Spirit, goodness. Every Christian should be a good person.

We often use the expression, he's a good man, good woman. But a Christian always should be a good man, a good woman, a good boy, a good girl. Their life should display goodness.

[27 : 48] there should be from their heart, goodness should be, as we saw in Barnabas, that goodness that was a fruit of the Spirit gave him an open heart and gave him an open push, gave him an open hand.

He was willing to be used always for the good of others. This is a way that God's goodness works within people. And so we see that so many people were added, many were added to the church. But Barnabas needed help. And so we find that he goes, he doesn't send back to Jerusalem, but he goes to Tarshish to look for Saul.

And you might say to yourself, for Saul, Saul of Tarshish, is this not the most radical, fervent Jew of the lot? Is this not the man who was involved with the martyrdom of Stephen?

And yes, the Lord, he's been saved, but will he not be one of those who's against the Gentile, against the non-Jew? No.

[28 : 58] You see, Barnabas knew that when Saul was converted, the Lord told him that he was giving him a special commission to the Gentile world.

that it was to the Gentiles that he was to go out with the gospel. And of course, we know as you read through the book of Acts, and you follow Paul's missionary journeys throughout all the different places, and the tremendous success at a terrible cost.

The Lord told him at that time that he would suffer much for his sake, and he did, but how he was used. So that's why Barnabas went. He knew this is the right man for me, and we believe the Lord would have led him in that direction as well.

So they come together and they work for a whole year, and it's a year of a tremendous ministry in Antioch where just so many people come to faith. And in fact, this is where they're first called Christians.

I believe that the IAN at the end of Christ there, IAN is the suffix in Latin for belonging to.

[30 : 07] So whether it was a derogatory term given by the people, the natives there, or people within Antioch, it was simply they added this IAN onto Christ, which means belonging to Christ.

In fact, it was often back then it was used with regard to political parties that you belong to, belonging to a particular party. Well, here they were, they were belonging to Christ.

Are you tonight belonging to Christ? Christ? That's the most important question you can ask yourself. Because if not, you're on your own.

If you're belonging to Christ, you know something? You are one happy person. You have everything that you need.

To belong to Jesus Christ is the most important, wonderful thing in the whole wide world. You make sure tonight that you belong to him. don't go out of here without praying from your own heart and saying, Lord, I need to be saved.

[31 : 19] I need to belong to you. Because you know this is our lonely world out there. And there might be periods where you feel that you have loads of friends around and things going well.

That will all go. And you know when you go down into death's dark veil, without Christ you have nothing. Everybody every prop and every support in this world will be taken from you.

There's just yourself. But if you belong to Jesus, then he's with you down into death's dark veil, taking you up on the other side.

So you make sure that you belong to Jesus, that you are a Christian. Let us pray. Amen. Amen.

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

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.