

So this took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his abilities to send relief to the brothers living in Judah. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

This is God's word. Pray for me and with me. And let's ask God to teach us tonight. Lord, thank you. Lord, sincerely thank you for this moment.

[4 : 10] These next few moments that we get to spend together in your word. Pray, Lord, that whatever distractions might be in our mind, whatever might be going on in life, that these next few moments we would focus on what you have to say to us.

And Lord, I pray that you would help me teach your word faithfully. Lord, that what I say tonight would be according to your word, according to the scriptures. And Lord, that you would give your people discernment to know what is true and what is error.

So help me now and may the words of my mouth be your words spoken to your people. And I pray this in Jesus' name and God's people said, amen. You can be seated. I love New York.

Now don't misunderstand me. Listen, I am a country boy through and through and I love me some back roads, Tennessee. But there's something I've always loved about New York City.

It's the city that never sleeps. It has the most recognizable skyline than any other city in the world, which provides some of the most incredible views you could possibly imagine.

[5 : 20] It offers any kind of food you could possibly want. You can have pizza in Little Italy, dumplings in Chinatown, Korean barbecue in Midtown. You can have Turkish or Mediterranean food in Hell's Kitchen.

Or like my daughter, you can have pancakes in an all-night diner. If you're still hungry, you can have a hot dog cooked in toilet water on any street corner.

Now my favorite or one of my favorite New York foods is the brisket sandwich at Cat's Deli. Can I get an amen? All God's people said amen, right?

Now not only that, New York is home for famous sporting arenas like Madison Square Garden, popular sports teams like Jesus' favorite baseball team, which is the New York Yankees.

I got a boo, really? Yeah, I know some of you would think that's heresy. It's the location of the best theater district in the world. There's Broadway and Times Square. It's home of the nation's most known financial district or some of the landmarks, the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building.

[6 : 27] It's also known for the famous financial district of Wall Street. And I mean art, music, fashion, culture is world-renowned.

I mean think about how many movies, TV shows are based out of New York. So amazing is the city of New York that there have been so many songs written and sung about New York City.

This one's my favorite. Start spreading the news. You can sing along if you know it. I'm leaving today. I want to be a part of it.

New York, New York. I feel like I'm leading the choir, right? No songs written about Big Rock, Tennessee that I know of.

My point is there really is no city like New York City. In fact, I love New York so much that if I've been away for quite some time, I miss it.

[7 : 31] I'll crave certain foods at certain restaurants. I'll want to make that pilgrimage to Yankee Stadium. Or maybe it's just in the busyness and stress of life in ministry. I just want to get lost in the bigness of the city.

It's a nostalgia. And I know that you know what that feeling is like. For you, it may not be New York City, but there is something that you have a nostalgia about.

Maybe for you, like upcoming here in a few weeks, it's those holiday meals that you have with your parents or your family where you eat your mother's homemade cooking and you just kind of dream and have a longing for that.

Maybe for you, it's walking back on that field one more time. That field that you put all your blood, sweat, and tears in. The game you loved so much.

Maybe for you, it's going back to that place you met and fell in love. Maybe for you, it's going back to the house that built you.

[8 : 35] Your childhood home. Whatever it is, in one way or another, you know that experience of nostalgia, that reverence for something, that longing for something, being a part of something that is bigger than you.

And what I want you to do, Faith Family, here's what I want you to do. What is that for you? It may not be New York City, whatever it is, I want you to get that in your mind. Do you feel that feeling, that feeling of nostalgia, that feeling of reverence for something? Now multiply that feeling by a thousand and that's the feeling that the Jews in the book of Acts had towards Jerusalem.

It's the city of all cities. I mean, far greater than New York. It's the city of God's people. It's where the temple's at. It's the city where God dwells. It's the city that they believed that God's Messiah would come to rule the world.

It consumed their thoughts. It captivated their affections. It was the city that they dreamed about returning to. If for some reason they were in exile. They were so obsessed with the great city of Jerusalem, they sung songs about it.

[9 : 50] Let me give you just a few of the lyrics. Psalm 122. I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem built as a city that is bound firmly together to which the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord. Verse 6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

May they be secure. Who love you? Peace be within your walls and security within your towers. Oh, how I would love to hear Sinatra sing that.

I'll give you one more example. Psalm 48. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation.

It's the joy of all the earth. Mount Zion in the far north. The city of the great king. Within her citadels, God has made himself known as a fortress.

[10 : 54] These are, as you know, songs. We call them the book of Psalms. But they were songs that were sung. And some of these songs were about the great city of Jerusalem.

In other words, faith families, zone in here. It wasn't I love New York. It was I love Jerusalem. And some of you are thinking, why is he making such a big deal about the city of Jerusalem?

Jerusalem. Because I want you to imagine what it would have felt like for the Christians in the book of Acts.

Most of whom at this point all have Jewish backgrounds. To discover that the central location of the Christian mission would no longer be Jerusalem.

That the strategic influence of Jerusalem is fading. Because that's exactly what Luke describes for us here at the end of Acts chapter 11.

[12 : 10] My aim this evening is simple. I'm going to show you from the text and rather quickly for me, you'll be impressed, three proofs that the strategic focus of the Christian mission has moved away from Jerusalem.

That's where it started at the beginning of the book of Acts. We're going to go from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth. And the strategic focus of the mission has shifted from Jerusalem.

And then I want to tell you why that matters. Because some of you might be like, well, why in the world would I care where the mission has shifted? Well, I'll make that case after I first prove the case from Acts chapter 11.

Pick it up in 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 one another except the Jews.

To no one except the Jews. But watch verse 20. 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.

[13 : 18] And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The first thing we see here is a shift in strategy.

Now we've already been seeing signs of this already leading up to Acts chapter 11. Signs like the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. That's one sign.

The conversion of Cornelius. That's another. The Holy Spirit coming down on the Gentiles. Acts chapter 10. And the same way the Holy Spirit came down on the Jews.

So we've been seeing glimpses of this. But now here in Acts chapter 11, there's a clear break in strategy. And here's what it is. Listen closely.

Rather than proclaiming Jesus almost exclusively to Jews, the strategy now targets non-Jews.

[14:15] The strategy shifts here from the people here in Antioch and Cyprus and places like that. There's a different strategy here. And Luke tells us that the hand of the Lord was upon them and that a great number of these Gentiles believed.

Same language used of the Jews earlier in the book of Acts. Look at verse 22 of chapter 11. It says, The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.

They sent Barnabas to Antioch. And 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.

In other words, Barnabas comes to Antioch and he sees the grace of God upon them. He bears witness to the evidence of their salvation, just like he had done with Saul.

So my point is this. The strategy of the mission is making a major shift. It's not focused on Jews with a few Gentiles sprinkled in.

[15:21] Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius. It is now intentionally targeting Gentiles. That is a very important shift in the book of Acts.

Here's the second thing. Look at chapter 12, verse 1. And we'll get into more of chapter 12 the next time I preach. I say next time I preach because I won't preach next weekend because you already know that.

Verse 1. About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw, watch this, when he saw that it pleased who?

The Jews. He proceeded to arrest Peter also. So you have a shift in strategy. That is, we're not just targeting Jews with a few Gentiles sprinkled in.

Now we are proclaiming Christ to Gentiles as well. We also see a shift in attitude. In other words, the important thing here that I want to note at the beginning of chapter 12 is that it pleased the Jews that James, one of the followers of Jesus, one of the sons of Zebedee, one of the twins, the sons of Thunder, was executed.

[16:37] And again, this too has been building in the book of Acts, but we see it even more so here. That is, listen, the Jews are starting to hate the movement of Christianity. And you say, well, why is that a shift?

Why is that different than earlier in the book of Acts? Well, look back here on the screen. Look at Acts chapter 2 and verse 46. Acts chapter 2 and verse 46.

You will remember this. And day by day, attending what? The temple together, and this is in Jerusalem, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. So they are growing in favor with all the people. Who are all the people? You're in Jerusalem.

They are gathering at the temple. The odds are pretty good that the people to whom they are growing in good favor with are the Jewish people. That's different now, isn't it, Acts 11?

[17:43] The very people they were growing in favor with now are pleased in their execution. In the same way that Saul was quite pleased with seeing followers of Jesus thrown into prison.

In other words, Christians were growing in favor with the people in Jerusalem in Acts 2, but by Acts 11, they're pleased with the death of Christian disciples.

The point I'm making is the attitudes in Jerusalem among the Jews are changing towards the followers of Jesus, and it's becoming harder and harder and harder to do ministry in Jerusalem.

That's the first two points. The strategy is changing. Number two, the attitudes are changing. And then if this wasn't the most obvious thing, look at verse 26, Acts 11, verse 26.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. That is, he found Saul, Barnabas did. And for the whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people.

[18:53] And you really should probably underline this in your Bible or note it or highlight it if you're using an electronic device. Well, now we have a shift in location.

This is a BHD. Do you know what a BHD is? A big, hairy deal. It is a big, hairy deal. This is really, really significant. It is unbelievably important.

It is why I could not skip past the end of chapter 11 to get on to chapter 12. This needs notice. This needs emphasis. That is, listen to me. If you've zoned out, zoned back in.

The Christian movement does not get its name Christian in Jerusalem. Instead, it gets its name in an extremely pagan city called Antioch.

That's a big deal. That's a really big deal. And why is that such a big deal? Because by this point in Acts, listen to me, most people thought that these followers of Jesus were just some kind of like a sect of Judaism.

[20 : 10] I mean, there were lots of different sects of Judaism. You had Pharisees. You had Sadducees. You had Zealots. You had the Essenes.

You had lots of others. And so most people in terms of the outsiders just thought, well, these followers of Jesus must be some kind of branch or offshoot of Judaism.

And so they just lumped the disciples in with all of those other groups. But here in Antioch, look at it on the screen. In Antioch, it becomes clear that Christianity is not a new version of an old group. It is a brand new humanity. It is a new thing. And it is undeniable as to this new thing. And why is it undeniable as to this new thing?

Because it's Antioch. Antioch. You don't seem near as excited as I do. So what's the big deal about Antioch? Only that it's the third largest major city of the Roman Empire.

[21 : 15] And it has all kinds of different people groups living there. Pagan peoples in this time. You had Persians and Indians.

That is people from India. You've got Chinese. You've got Egyptians. You've got Latin-speaking Romans. You have all different kinds of races and cultures. Here's my point.

Please lean in and listen. The church is so diverse in Antioch that outsiders can no longer see it as an extension of Judaism, but recognize it as its own movement.

And so for the first time, they receive a name. The name Christian.

And it isn't in Jerusalem. It's in Antioch. The point I've tried to give three reasons to argue for is this.

[22 : 20] Notice it on the screen. The mission has shifted from Jerusalem. It has shifted in strategy. We are now intentionally preaching to the Gentiles.

It has shifted in attitude. We are no longer, I'm talking about in the book of Acts, on friendly terms with the Jews. It is not safe to do ministry in Jerusalem. It has shifted in location.

We're called Christians, not in Jerusalem, but first in Antioch. Isn't this exciting? And God's people said, no, be honest.

God's people said, what am I doing here? Like, really? I took time out of my Saturday evening to come and hear a sermon about the strategic mission 2,000 years ago, shifting from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Big deal. I mean, Pastor, I don't know if you know this, but, like, I'm trying to live out my faith every day. I mean, I wouldn't give a wooden nickel about the strategic shift of the early church from Jerusalem to Antioch.

[23 : 28] Well, I want to spend the rest of my time telling you why I believe this is so important. Two reasons. Two reasons. Two reasons that this shift is more than geographic.

It is gospel. You are going to be so excited. Listen, when you leave tonight, you're going to find somebody at the restaurant you go to. You're not going to believe. Two thousand years ago, the mission shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And it is the most awesome thing I've ever heard. First, this shift from Jerusalem to Antioch shows us a picture of the gospel itself.

A picture of the gospel itself. You say, how in the world does the shift from Jerusalem to a place like Antioch picture the gospel? Go ahead and ask me. How?

I'm so glad you asked. Here's how. Look at it on the screen because everybody has a Jerusalem. Every one of you, myself included, has a Jerusalem.

[24 : 28] Here's what I mean. Every one of us has something in your life you boast in, something you take confidence in, something you pride yourself in, that thing that you look to that forms your identity.

Listen, the Jews in the book of Acts base their life on and in the city of Jerusalem. Notice it on the screen. That is, rather than Jerusalem simply being the city of God, Jerusalem became their God. And all of us do that with something, even good things like Jerusalem. Even God things like Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Your Jerusalem may not be a city, but it could be.

I mean, there are a lot of New Yorkers that pride themselves in being from New York. There are a lot of people from Minnesota who pride themselves from being from Minnesota. There are people from Tennessee that pride themselves in being a southern boy.

It could be where you came from. But it might be your resume. It might be your skill set. It might be your bank account. It might be your background.

[25 : 35] It might be your status in society. It might be your physical appearance. It might be the color of your skin. It might be the denomination that you came from. It might be your politics. It might be your marital status.

It might be the friends that you have. It might be how big your church is. It might be how well-behaved your children are. It might be how successful you were in school. It might be anything that gives you a sense of confidence outside of Jesus.

Anything that gives you a sense of identity outside of Jesus. Faith family, hear me loud and clear. Everyone loves their Jerusalem. Everyone loves their Jerusalem. That thing that is nostalgic in your life. That thing that you base your life on.

That thing you dream about. Everybody has one of those. And the gospel of Jesus. Listen, please listen. Please listen. The gospel of Jesus must do for us what it did in Acts 11.

[26 : 40] Namely, move you away from your Jerusalem. Let me say it a different way. Notice it on the screen. You must come to realize that you are not accepted before God because of your Jerusalem.

You are accepted before God because of the grace of Jesus. And only the grace of Jesus. I don't give a rip that you're from Jerusalem. Or from Minnesota.

Or had a 4.0. Or the color of your skin. I don't care about any of those Jerusalems. The only thing that matters to give us confidence before God is the grace of Jesus Christ.

And if you're living in Jerusalem tonight. That is, you have all this self-righteous pride in this thing. Oh, I pray that the Lord Jesus would shift your heart to Antioch.

It would shift you away from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of the beautiful truths of Acts 11 is that whether you are from Jerusalem or Antioch. The saving grace of Jesus is offered to you.

[27 : 46] And the only reason, by the way, that you wouldn't like a message like that. Is because you love Jerusalem more than you love Jesus. You see, the shift that happens in the mission.

Is actually a shift that must take place in every one of our lives. And not only is that true in our relationship with God. But it's also true in our relationship with other people.

I mean, we've already seen this. And I'm going to show some verses to back it up in just a second. That the Jews in the book of Acts wanted nothing to do with Gentiles. Remember when Peter was told to rise, kill, and eat?

And he said, no. I've never had anything unclean. Remember, the issue wasn't those foods. It was those people that eat those foods. I don't associate with Gentiles.

Look at the shift that takes place in Peter's life. Here's Acts 10 verse 28. Notice it on the screen.

And when Peter said to them, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.

[28 : 58] But God. Two best words in the Bible. Amen. But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

Don't you see? The gospel moved Peter away from his Jerusalem. Just as the mission is shifting from Jerusalem, Peter is shifting from Jerusalem because he now realizes it's not about having confidence in my Jewishness.

Or confidence that I would derive from the law. It is the grace of God alone. One more.

Acts 10 verse 34. So Peter opened his mouth, which he did often. Amen. Opened his mouth and said, truly I understand that God shows no partiality.

Faith family, listen to me. When the gospel, please, please listen to me. When the gospel moves us from our Jerusalems to our Antioch. That is, it moves us from the confidence in self to confidence in the grace of God alone.

[30 : 08] It is impossible. It is impossible. It is impossible to look down your nose at someone. It is impossible for you to not approach them.

Or it should be impossible for you to not approach them with grace and compassion. Why?

Because there is nothing that makes you superior to anyone.

Anyone. Let me say it again loudly. There is nothing in your life that makes you superior to anyone.

Anyone. And so if you are a Jew in the book of Acts clinging to your Jerusalem, the grace of God moves you to Antioch where you can look at other people wherever they come from, whatever their skin color is, whatever their background is, whatever their political alignment may be.

And you don't treat yourself as better than them because you are just in need of God's grace as they are. That's what the gospel does. That's how the gospel shifts us from Jerusalem to Antioch. [31 : 19] It shifts us away from that confidence in the flesh to be able to actually relate to other people and receive them by the grace of God.

Because the gospel, more than anything else, will destroy your self-confidence and humble you towards God and other people. Do you see? I told you this shift from Jerusalem to Antioch is a big deal.

It's not just geographic. It's gospel. And one more, because that's all the time I have, is it's a picture of the kingdom. This shift from Jerusalem to Antioch is not only a picture of the gospel.

It is a picture of the kingdom. And I'm just going to slow down, but probably not say a whole lot more. But I just want to kind of share my heart with you and say, Faith Family, I'm still learning this. Like, I'm still learning the kingdom of God. I'm starting to see more and more how the kingdom of God is not how I used to think it was.

[32 : 21] Because I'm somebody that grew up in church all his life. And listen, by that I don't mean that the kingdom is both for Jews and Gentiles. That's obvious from the teaching of the New Testament and the teaching of the book of Acts.

I'm saying I want to go beyond that. Okay? Let me explain. I'm going to first explain it from the text, and then I'll explain it in terms of how it relates to us, and then we'll be done.

All right? The group... Are you listening? Are you listening? The group that was first called Christian in Antioch, not in Jerusalem, but in Antioch, were more than just Gentiles.

Again, let me explain. The Ethiopian eunuch was a Gentile, but he was a God seeker. Remember, he traveled all the way to Jerusalem to try to find some answers. Cornelius was a Gentile, but he was a God fearer.

Cornelius was as close to being a Jew as you could possibly get as a Gentile. This group in Antioch is an entirely different group of people.

[33 : 32] It is full of pagans, outsiders, again, people that worshipped from other nations, other gods. People, again, from Persia, India, China, Egypt.

The mission is now including people that those who spent all their life in a Jerusalem mentality could never comprehend.

They would actually be a part of the kingdom of God. I mean, sure, Cornelius is probably going to make it in. I mean, he's a Gentile, but he's a really good Gentile.

And I mean, the Ethiopian eunuch, yeah, it kind of makes sense that he makes in. I mean, listen, he was seeking and searching and trying to find answers. I mean, he was just waiting on the side of the road for Philip to explain things.

But these people in Antioch, it is why Barnabas goes down and testifies to the grace of God that he sees on them. And then he gets Saul, and they stay for a significant amount of time teaching them.

[34 : 41] These people are different than anything else you've seen in the book of Acts. Notice it on the screen. This makes me want to just jump out of my skin.

The kingdom of God has shifted from robes and rituals to rejects and ragamuffins. I mean, you can go to Jerusalem, get all the robes and rituals you want.

Here in Antioch, you're going to find rejects and ragamuffins. And if you were paying attention in the Gospels to the ministry of Jesus, you would discover that these are the people Jesus attracted the most.

The down and outers. Not the people that needed a second chance. The people that needed a second second chance. A 30 second chance.

These were the lowly, the rejected, the outsiders. Jesus said the kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit. That the people who know they need a physician are the people that realizes their sickness.

[35 : 47] And this is what I'm learning. I don't even know how this is going to come out. It's not planned or prepared. I'm telling you after spending 25 years in institutional, organized religion, I'm not saying the kingdom of God isn't there.

But it's not the kingdom of God as we think it to be. I'm learning the kingdom of God is in places most of us would never think it would be found.

I'm going to read from a book I love. I've quoted it before, The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning, who has since passed. Yes, he was Catholic. He got a lot wrong in my view, but he got a lot right in my view.

And I think he got the gospel of grace and the kingdom of God right. He writes the following. Listen closely. Because salvation is by grace through faith, I believe that among the countless numbers of people standing in front of the throne, in front of the Lamb, dressed in white and holding palms in their hands, will be the prostitute from the Kit Kat Ranch in Carson City, Nevada, who tearfully told me that she could find no other employment to support her two-year-old son.

Or the woman who had an abortion and is haunted by the guilt and remorse. Or the businessman besieged in debt who sold his integrity in a series of desperate transactions.

[37 : 20] Or the insecure pastor addicted to being liked who never challenged his people from the pulpit and longed for unconditional love. Or the sexually abused teen molested by his father who sells his body on the street and falls asleep each night whispering to the God he learned about in Sunday school.

Or the deathbed convert who for decades had his cake and ate it too. How, we ask? Because they were washed in the blood of the Lamb.

My friends, if this is not good news to you, you have never understood the gospel of grace. It's the shift from Jerusalem to Antioch.

It's the people you think don't belong that actually belong. And it's the people you think should be in the highest levels of leadership with their squeaky resumes and, my goodness, do you know their business experience?

That will be ruled over by janitors in the kingdom. Because on that day, and I hope we start seeing it now, we are going to discover that what we thought was first is last.

[38 : 46] And what we thought was last is first. We were impressed by Jerusalem's. But it had shifted to Antioch.

And it would do us well-faith family as a pastor and as a church to not consume ourselves in impressive Jerusalem ministry that we miss the mission in Antioch.

Are you following what I'm saying? I'm becoming less and less comfortable in religious settings. Not because I think it's all wrong. Because I'm starting to see that I think I and we've gotten a lot wrong. We've gotten used to our Jerusalems. That is professional Christianity with its great programs, events, and institutions. And if you want to make a group of church people mad, take away their Jerusalem.

But the kingdom of God is found in Walmart break rooms, neighborhood bars, the local homeless shelter, as much as it will ever be in a \$20 million church.

[40 : 01] And that's no dig on anybody that has a \$20 million church. I'm just saying Antioch doesn't look nearly as impressive.

Are you with me? But in Acts 11, it's where the kingdom of God is found. Faith family, I love New York.

I love New York. But it's just another city of man. And there comes a point in life when God's grace has to move us from the city of man towards the mission of Christ.

God wants to detach our hearts from worldly kingdoms so that we will be on mission for His kingdom.

Listen, don't get me wrong. I still enjoy the amazing food of New York. But I'll take a piece of bread and a shot of juice with you any day.

[41 : 08] I still think New York has some amazing music. But I'd rather sing a worship song about our God with God's people any day of the week.

I still think and like the New York Yankees and Derek Jeter. But it doesn't come close to the love I have for Jesus. And I stand amazed at the New York monuments.

But I fall on my knees every time I think about the grace of an old rugged cross and an empty tomb.

That's because the gospel has and I pray will continue to make strategic shifts in our hearts.

That He will move us further away from our Jerusalem and closer to Antioch. And God's people said, Amen.

Would you pray with me? Lord, only You can do that work. I certainly can't. So I pray that Your Spirit in this moment would reveal to us what our Jerusalem is.

[42 : 29] That thing we are so prideful about. That thing we draw so much confidence in. The thing we form our identity on. Would You do for us what You did for the church in Acts 11 and move us from Jerusalem to Antioch?

