

Acts 11:19-30

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Glad you braved the snow this morning and made it out. Hey, we're looking at Acts chapter 11, verses 19 through 30 this morning.

I believe that's page 920 in the Pew Bible, so let me encourage you to turn there with me and we will study this passage together this morning. Acts chapter 11, verses 19 through 30.

Let me read this for us. 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.

[1 : 2 0] And he exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. 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, in those days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, named Agabus, stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius.

So the disciples determined everyone, according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Well, we've been following Luke's history of the early church this winter. And it's hard to imagine a more exciting church in Luke's narrative than the church in Antioch.

[2 : 3 5] For starters, what Luke is showing us here is that this church is really a groundbreaking church. Here, for the first time, you have a whole church made up of Jews and Gentiles.

That's something that hadn't ever happened before Antioch. You see, God's ancient plan to heal the nations, to build a new family from every culture and language and ethnicity, was actually breaking into history and becoming a reality right here for the first time.

Of course, up to this point in the narrative, we've seen Gentiles converted to Christ. Remember the Ethiopian official in chapter 8 and Cornelius and his household. Just last week we looked at that in chapter 10 and 11. But now, in Antioch, it's not just an individual here or a family there, but a whole church where Jews and Gentiles and people from all sorts of cultures and backgrounds are joined together in one body.

A groundbreaking, promise-fulfilling church. But as Luke's story continues, we see that this groundbreaking church also becomes a strategic church.

We'll see in chapter 13 that it's from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas are sent out. The pioneering mission work to the Gentiles is launched from Antioch.

[4 : 02] God uses this church in major ways, and this church ends up playing just a pivotal and central role in Luke's history of the early church. It comes up again and again and again.

So as we think about this text this morning, and as we think about fulfilling our calling as a church, we can actually look to what God did in Antioch and learn from their example.

What made this church such a special and exciting place? What does Luke want to show us about this church so that we can be built up by God's grace to be and to do the same?

Well, I want to break this passage down for us this morning by asking four simple questions that will just walk us through the text. And hopefully they'll teach us what there is to learn from the church in Antioch.

So first we're just going to ask, how did it start? Then we're going to ask, how did it grow? And then we'll ask, how did it live? And then finally we'll ask, how was it known? How did it start?

[5 : 01] How did it grow? How did it live? And how was it known? So first, Luke shows us how did it start. This is verses 19 through 21. And he tells us that it was actually some utterly unknown guys from Cyprus and Cyrene.

That's northern Africa, Cyrene. Cyprus was an island sort of off the coast. These unnamed men started sharing the gospel with the Hellenists. Now that word actually just is sort of a general word that means people who speak Greek.

But it's pretty clear from the context that what Luke means here are non-Jews. Here for the first time, the church is actively evangelizing people who aren't Jewish.

I mean, last week we saw that God had to literally just pound Peter over the head to get him to do it. And now they're doing it naturally. Now, the city of Antioch was massively diverse.

It was probably the third largest city in the empire behind Rome and Alexandria. And historians think the population might have been upwards around half a million people. And because of its location, it was sort of on the northeastern part of the Mediterranean.

[6 : 09] And its role was sort of as the regional capital. It was an incredibly cosmopolitan place. It was a place where Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Asians, and Jews all sort of lived together in one tight spot.

And in this place where cultures were pressing together, the church finally starts to see just how powerful and how international the gospel really is.

They start to see in this place, maybe a very unlikely place, that it really is good news for everyone. Now, Luke doesn't tell us what the circumstances were when these men from Cyprus and Cyrene first evangelized their Greek-speaking neighbors.

Maybe they were God-fearers in the synagogue. That is sort of non-circumcised Greeks who worshiped Israel's God. Or maybe they just got to know these Greek speakers through their business or in the marketplace.

Who knows? But the encouraging thing is that this groundbreaking work of God happens through the boldness of ordinary believers. who love their neighbors and share the message of Jesus with them.

[7 : 26] They didn't wait until the professionals showed up. It wasn't as if spiritual conversations started happening and they said, Wait! Let's call the people up in Jerusalem and get them to come down.

No! They didn't have to. Luke says they preached the Lord Jesus and God began working. Now, it's probably significant, as Luke says here, that they preached Jesus as Lord, rather, at first, than as Christ.

Did you notice that? The title Christ, after all, what is that? It's a Jewish category, right? It means the Messiah, the anointed one, the long-awaited king. Now, that category probably would not have made much sense to their pagan neighbors at first, right?

But, to introduce them to Jesus as Lord would have resonated much more deeply. F.F. Bruce, the great 20th century New Testament commentator, suggests that many of the pagan mystery religions of the time claimed to connect their followers to a divine kurios or a divine Lord who, through their initiation and rites, which were very costly, actually, could sort of bring them salvation and immortality.

So, their neighbors were all looking for a Lord who was going to save them. And perhaps these unnamed Christians in Antioch had heard about that and then started to tell their friends about Jesus as the real Lord that they were seeking.

[9 : 03] The one who could truly bring salvation and life and who could give it to them free of charge. You're looking for a Lord. Let me actually introduce you to the one true Lord.

His name is Jesus. In other words, they were contextualizing the gospel for their Greek friends. That is, they were speaking it in a language that they could understand.

Of course, more teaching would follow. We see that in the rest of the passage, right? But these pioneering Christians in Antioch knew the spiritual needs of their friends well enough to be able to proclaim Jesus meaningfully to them.

Now, you might be thinking, okay, well, how do I do that today? That kind of sounds hard. Well, actually, it's not really that difficult.

You simply need to spend time with people and listen to them and ask them some good questions and love them. And then trust that the gospel is good news for everyone.

[10 : 10] That's what they found in Antioch. They had been worshiping Jesus as Lord. The Christians, mind you, had been worshiping Jesus as Lord long before they got to Antioch. And then, lo and behold, they show up and all their pagan neighbors are talking about finding the Lord.

Hello. Let me introduce you to him. His name is Jesus. Imagine sitting at lunch with a classmate or a colleague and just being interested in them, listening, asking questions.

And then perhaps they eventually tell you how anxious they are, fearing that they're never going to measure up to the performance standards of everyone around them, always fearing that their best isn't good enough.

And then they ask you, how do you handle it? And suddenly, here's your Antioch moment.

When you get to tell them about the God who accepts you apart from your performance because of what Jesus has done. You get to tell them that you know your best will never be good enough.

[11 : 14] But there's one who is good enough and who loves you and gave himself for you. And now, of course, you still feel pressure, but it doesn't crush you.

And it can't crush you because you know him. You see, that doesn't take a graduate-level course in contextualization, as fun and as useful and as helpful as that would be.

It just takes a loving and listening ear and an ongoing relationship with Christ. You see, we too should seek to speak of Jesus in ways that our neighbors can understand.

And oftentimes, it's going to be the way that your heart understands it. But, you know, the real comfort is, at the end of the day, it's not about, actually, how skillfully we share the gospel.

Look at what Luke says in verse 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them. You see, God was at work. He can use even our most feeble and failing attempts to do great things.

[12 : 21] Not that we shouldn't strive to do our best. We should. But we shouldn't rely simply on techniques or cleverness. That's not what it's about. And practically, I think this means that we should pray.

If the Lord's ultimately the one who needs to change people's hearts, then we should be praying that he should do so. So, friends, do we pray? Do we really pray for spiritual renewal to happen in our city and in our neighborhoods and in our families?

You know, if God can take a city like Antioch, massive, cosmopolitan, powerful, pagan, and do something utterly groundbreaking and strategic there, surely he can do it here.

You know, it's very fascinating, isn't it? That what maybe seemed like barriers to the gospel in Antioch, its size, its diversity, its affluence, its pluralism, those are the very things that became the opportunity for the gospel to shine out even more brightly.

And God can do the same thing here in the New Haven area. Well, let's pray that he does. And watch what he'll do.

[13 : 39] Well, the last detail that Luke adds to his description of how the church got started in Antioch is the end of verse 21. He says, And a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Over and over again in Acts, you see that this is what a genuine response to the gospel looks like.

Believing the message and then turning to the Lord Jesus. If you're new to Christianity, if you're sort of exploring things, That's what's meant by those sort of words faith and repentance.

They're sort of weird, scary religious terms. But that's really what they mean. Just believing the message and turning to the Lord. That's genuine conversion. Not a warm sort of fuzzy spiritual feeling.

Not sort of just merely intellectually assenting to certain truths. Not a moral resolution to try harder. And important for the context of Acts and Antioch. Genuine conversion wasn't getting circumcised and following the law of Moses.

No, genuine conversion wasn't any of those things. It was simply believing the message about Jesus. And turning your life over to him.

[14 : 45] Entrusting yourself to him. So that's how the church in Antioch gets off the ground. That's how it gets started. Bold, ordinary Christians who love and listen to their neighbors well enough to share Jesus in a way that they can understand.

While God works to bring out genuine belief and genuine turning to the Lord. Now, it's maybe hard for us to realize how fragile this new work in Antioch really must have been.

After all, this is seemingly the first time there's been sort of bold, active evangelization of non-Jews. That probably was making some people uncomfortable.

This is probably one of the first churches where Jews and Gentiles are sharing table fellowship with one another. And worshiping as equals with one another without the expectation that all those Gentiles become Jews.

And all this is happening in the face of hundreds of years of cultural animosity between Jews and Gentiles. Not to mention all the other cultural animosities that would have been happening between all the other ethnic groups that were being gathered together in the church.

[15 : 52] On top of all that, there was a group known as the Circumcision Party. That was doing their best to enforce the law of Moses on new converts. So there was a present threat as well. You see, the potential for misunderstanding and conflict both within and without was huge.

This thing could have blown up at any moment. But instead of falling apart, Luke tells us that it grows.

How? And that's the second question that we see answered here. Luke shows us how it got started. And now he's going to answer the question, how did it grow? And this is verses 22 through 26.

And in these verses, Luke introduces us to a man named Barnabas. The church in Jerusalem hears what's going on in Antioch and they send Barnabas to investigate.

And, you know, as I've been meditating on this passage, it strikes me that there couldn't have been a better person to send than Barnabas. It's amazing in God's providence that it's Barnabas who ends up going.

[16 : 59] Because Barnabas, true to his name, shows up. And what does he do? He begins to encourage them. He begins to encourage this young church and these new believers.

The word translated in our ESV as exhort in verse 23 actually could be translated encourage. That's what he shows up and starts doing. In fact, if you look back at the end of chapter 4 in the book of Acts, you see that the name Barnabas literally means son of encouragement, Bar-Nabas.

It was actually a nickname that the apostles gave him. His given name was Joseph. He must have been so good at encouraging people and building them up that they just started calling him Barnabas. How do you like that?

There's your spiritual gift. You know, you don't need to take a survey. Boom. And it's because Barnabas shows up in Antioch and begins to encourage them, that instead of the whole thing collapsing, it grows.

Friends, have you considered how important encouragement is to the life of the church, to the life of your fellow believers? I don't think it's something we naturally think about.

[18 : 07] I think we're much more easily to sort of, we much more easily default into sort of a critical mode of being. We're prone to comparing, to sizing things up, trying to see the weaknesses and the holes and the defects and the imperfections.

But you know, over time, that sort of merely critical culture becomes toxic and just deadly. And people end up becoming defensive and disheartened.

I mean, imagine if Barnabas had shown up in Antioch and begun to give them nothing but honest feedback, as we sometimes say. There must have been plenty to point out that was goofy and wrong.

I mean, there were a bunch of pagans who just came to Jesus. For sure there were things that they were doing that weren't right. And yet, had Barnabas shown up and just been pointing out all that was wrong, the thing would have just stopped in its tracks.

You see, encouragement is kind of like the grease in the wheels. Encouragement just keeps the whole thing spinning and moving and working together. But without it, everything comes grinding to a halt.

[19 : 18] And our life as a church, not to mention our marriages and our friendships and all our other relationships. Friends, we need to cultivate a habit, a practice of encouragement.

And thankfully, we get a helpful picture here of how good biblical encouragement works. Look at verse 23 again. When Barnabas came, Luke says, he saw the grace of God and he was glad.

Now, this tells us a couple things, right? First, when Barnabas got to Antioch, there was actually genuine evidence that the grace of God was at work. Like what? Well, like faith in Christ.

Like changed character. Like heartfelt worship and prayer. Like visible expressions of unity and love among believers. You know, so Barnabas wasn't just blowing smoke when he affirmed the work in Antioch and started encouraging them.

He wasn't making stuff up. He could see the grace of God in them. But that also tells us that he was looking for it. He had his eye out for ways in which God was working.

[20 : 29] And friends, that's the way we need to look at each other. We need to become specialists in spotting the grace of God at work.

You know, not that we ignore the rough edges or the areas for change that we see in other people's lives. But, you know, we have to learn how to look in some sense through them or beyond them to the grace of God in someone's life.

And when we see it, we need to be glad. And we need to rejoice. This is really the first step of encouragement. Rejoicing in God's grace at work in another person.

And one way to do this, actually, is to share specifically with someone how something they said or did blessed another person. That would be one way of encouraging someone like this.

Saying something like, hey, I wanted to let you know how much it meant to so-and-so that you prayed for them the other night at small group. You know, they were really blessed by that. And the Lord actually really spoke to them through some of the things that you prayed for.

[21 : 35] So, I just want to let you know, be encouraged, sister, brother. Or maybe you'd say something like, hey, so-and-so just told me that they really appreciate the time that you spend with them when you get lunch together.

They told me you ask really good questions. And God's really been using that in their life. Find some way that what the person is doing is affecting others and show that to them as a way to encourage them.

And, of course, you can also just tell them what you see of God's grace in their life, what you see in their life. You know, especially if you've known someone over a length of time, you can really see how they've grown and changed.

You know, with some of your relationships that you've had for a long time, you are in a special position to be able to affirm the work of the grace of God. Because oftentimes we don't see it in ourselves because it's so slow and it's so gradual.

But you can see it. So maybe it's Christ-like character that's grown. Or maybe it's a ministry they've taken up that's really doing well. Or maybe it's something you've seen that's changed in their relationship with others or with God that's improved.

[22 : 39] Maybe it's the fact that they're an example to other believers in how they sort of live out faithfully in the workplace. Whatever it is, this aspect of encouragement is so important.

And what does it really take? What does it take to do this kind of thing? Well, I think it takes a genuine Christ-centered interest in others. Right? To rejoice in the grace of God in others means doing something that's actually kind of hard.

It means consciously putting on pause our natural tendency to think about how others are thinking about us. Which is like 99% of your thought life, right?

Putting that on pause and purposing to think about what God's doing in them. Asking the simple question, where is God's grace at work in this person?

You know, encouragement is a lot like restarting a fire. I was sad I didn't get a chance to go with a youth group this weekend on their retreat. But it's like zero degrees in New Hampshire, so I'm not that sad.

[23 : 50] But you know, on our fall retreats, we often start fires and do things like that. But, um, sorry parents, they're not really that safe. That's why we have you sign all those waivers. Um, no, so we've relit some fires as a youth group.

Anyway, this is what you do when you have to restart a fire, right? When the fire's going out, what do you do? Well, you look for the coals that are still hot. Maybe they're just the tiniest little bit, orange and yellow and still glowing amidst all the other blackness.

You find those and what do you do? You start blowing on them. Sometimes just gently. And then you get a little more and a little more. You get some oxygen going across those coals until they come to life.

And friends, that's what we're doing when we see the grace of God in another person's life and we rejoice in it with them. You're blowing on the coals.

And once the coals get going, then what do you have to do? You have to throw some wood on there, right? And that's actually the next aspect of encouragement that we see in the rest of verse 23.

[24 : 58] Look back there again. And Barnabas exhorted or he encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. Notice the focus here is on the Lord.

It's not merely just saying you're doing a good job. You're a good person. I'm really, you know, glad that you're so awesome. No, saying keep going. Look to the Lord.

Remain faithful to him. Set your eyes on him and keep running the race, as Hebrews 12 would put it. God's at work in you.

He's faithful. Now keep going. Don't give up. Don't turn back. That's the sort of fuel when we start speaking those kinds of words into each other's lives. That's the sort of fuel that starts drawing forth more fire from those coals.

When we encourage each other to look to Jesus, to remain in him, to hold fast, that takes our little spark and starts growing a fire. So think about your relationships for just a moment.

[26 : 01] Who has God put into your life that you can be encouraging in this twofold way? Think forward into the week.

Who are you going to run into? Who are you bound to run into? Your spouse, if you have one. What about the people in your small group? What about the friends that you get coffee with after the service downstairs or go out to lunch with?

Who else? Who are you going to run into this week? Where do you see the grace of God in their life? Where do they need a fresh reminder to look to Jesus and remain in him?

What aspects of who Christ is can you be sharing with them to fuel that flame? As we said, this sort of work is vital to the health of the church.

But it's not easy, right? As we said, it takes looking outside of ourselves and often looking past the faults of others. In fact, it's ultimately a work for which we need the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 10] Look at verse 25. Barnabas is described as a good man. One of the few people in the Bible who's actually called a good man. A good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And you know, it shouldn't surprise us that we need the Holy Spirit for this work of encouragement. Not just because we're naturally selfish, but because the Holy Spirit seems to actually specialize in this ministry. Do you remember in John chapter 14 through 17 when Jesus is teaching his disciples about the one that he's going to send?

What's the name that he gives the Holy Spirit? Well, the ESV translates it helper. I think that's kind of lame. But the word actually means the encourager, the comforter.

It's the same word that's behind encouragement. It seems that the Holy Spirit is the encourager par excellence. He's the one who takes the grace of God and fans it into flame in our hearts.

He's the one who lifts our gaze to Jesus, making him not only clear to our minds, but real to our hearts so that we remain steadfast. That's the work of the Spirit.

[28 : 16] And it's also the work of the Spirit to equip us to minister in those same ways to others. So, friends, if you think you stink at encouragement, pray for the Holy Spirit.

Pray that he would be more and more at work in our lives as a church, in particular with this regard, with regard to this ministry of encouragement. And don't forget what Jesus said to his disciples.

Do you remember what he said? He was teaching them about prayer, and he said, If our earthly fathers know how to give good gifts, how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them who ask?

Well, we see that once Barnabas encourages them, the church grows even more. And by God's grace, that's what we want to see too. And at this point in the story, Barnabas does something incredibly wise and profoundly humble.

The work just starts growing and growing and growing. And what does he do? He goes to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him to Antioch to help with the work.

[29 : 24] Because Barnabas knows that he can't do it all on his own. Now, isn't that surprising? Just picture Barnabas. Barnabas is there. He is one of, if not the only, kind of mature, long-standing believer in this new church.

He's the leader from Jerusalem who showed up. You know, he probably had the respect and admiration of the whole place. And his ministry was bearing fruit. I mean, he was kind of the man in Antioch.

But instead of basking in that glory, he goes and gets Paul and starts sharing the work. And that's really the second reason why the church grows.

The first is Barnabas' encouragement. And the second is Barnabas' willingness to share the work with other skilled leaders. Even with leaders who are really more qualified and talented than themselves.

I mean, that's kind of what we see in the rest of Acts. Barnabas says, who's the best guy I can get? Who's going to outshine me? I'm going to go get him and bring him here. Because I love these people.

[30 : 25] And for a whole year, he and Paul meet with the church and they teach. In other words, they do life together and they just dig into the word.

And the church grows like wildfire. Notice again that it's the word, taught, lived, proclaimed, that brings spiritual joy and health to the people.

Well, quickly, Luke has shown us first how things got started in Antioch. Then he's just shown us how they grew. And now he's going to answer a third question. How did it live?

How does this growing, exciting, groundbreaking church actually starts living its life? And here's what he says they do. They start publishing materials on how everyone else can become exactly like them.

And they set up, no, I'm just kidding. What do they do? This is verses 27 through 30. There's nothing wrong with curriculum, by the way. Briefly, their life was marked by generosity.

[31 : 28] Upon hearing about a coming famine, they all purposed to give to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. You know, we've seen in Acts up to this point how the gospel creates radical and thoughtful generosity within a local church.

But now we see it doing the same thing globally. That an international people of God is being formed. And in an expression of fellowship and solidarity, the believers in Antioch send relief all the way to Jerusalem.

As if to say, we're one family, and we love you, and we're in this together. There couldn't have been a more profound and telling sign of the unity that they shared across all that, humanly speaking, divided them.

Distance and culture, all sorts of things. And yet here they were saying, we're one. And again and again, we're going to see this in the life of the church in Antioch, that it's characterized by giving.

Here we see them giving money to another church. But in chapter 13, we're actually going to see them giving some of their best leaders away to the work of church planning and missions. They send Paul and Barnabas off to continue the work of the gospel in new cities and new regions.

[32 : 46] And this is so critical, this giving impulse of a healthy church. Friends, the reality is that a growing church that's not a giving church is going to soon be a dying church.

Count on it. Why? Because the very DNA of the Christian message is about the God who gave.

Who gave what was most valuable and treasured in, I don't even know how to describe it, of all. God gives his only son, the one through whom he made the world for our sake.

And if he's given us his son, as Paul says in Romans 8.32, how will he not with him give us all things? We have become the recipients of the most radical act of generosity in the universe.

Though we are sinners, God has given us his son to save us. And in his son, we actually have all things. And that means nothing that we give away in this life, money, time, energy, resources, talents, nothing that we give away will actually diminish what we abundantly have.

[34 : 10] In fact, it's only going to increase our joy. So friends, when we partner as a church with missionaries like the Kings, or when we send aid, as we did around Christmas time, to Hannah Massad and his work among refugees in the Middle East, or when we help plant a church and give money and send people off to make it happen, in six months, we're not going to have any drummers at Trinity.

Do you realize that? Because they're all going to New London. In all these ways, as we give, as we give, as we give, we're living in line with what God has done for us in Christ.

And we're showing not just to one another, but to the world, the radical glory and love of God and Jesus. And that brings us to our last point, our last question.

The church started, it grew, it lived, but finally, how was this church known? Luke tells us at the end of verse 26, And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

And the language that Luke uses here suggests that it wasn't a name the believers were using for themselves, it was a name that was given to them. Probably a label that was sort of put on them by their neighbors.

[35 : 31] But you see, their neighbors had to come up with some kind of name for it, right? Because what was going on in the church in Antioch was something that no one had ever seen or heard of before.

Here were Jews and Greeks and Romans and Asians and Arabs all meeting together and sharing their lives with one another. That's ridiculous.

You can imagine their neighbors looking on in curiosity and almost disbelief and probably some cynicism, saying to one another, what is going on there? I heard they actually sent a bunch of money to Jerusalem to care for their needs too.

What's it all about? And someone else says, well, they keep talking about someone named Christ. And the other guy pipes up. Yeah, that's all they talk about.

Well then, let's call them Christians. May have even had a tinge of ridicule. But the label stuck. Friends, you see, what was happening in Antioch was that believers no longer needed to cling so tightly to their own culture or upbringing or preferences as a means of bolstering their own identity, as a means of justifying their existence.

[36 : 50] Why? Because they'd been given a new identity. Now, not that this new identity did away with the old, but it was an identity that actually ran deeper.

In other words, Greeks were still Greeks. They still ate Spanakopita or whatever Greeks ate in the first century, right? But now something ran deeper than their Greek identity, than their language, than their culture.

And Romans were still Romans. But now a deeper identity had taken first place. And that deeper identity was Jesus, was Christ.

And you have to ask, what was it that made people of every nationality and culture so attracted to him? Why would people cross every known social taboo and barrier to worship Christ together?

How was Christ so different than anything or anyone else that had come before that this started happening? What made people of all sorts of backgrounds willing and glad to identify with him?

[38 : 04] Well, the answer that the New Testament gives is because he identified with us. When every other religion had been saying, here's what you need to do to get to God, pay the fee, follow the rules, and maybe God will identify with you, the gospel message came and said something radically different.

That God has come and identified with us. Not just in our humanity, but even in our sin. That God stood in the place of our worst and bore our penalty so that we could stand in him and know grace and life and peace with God.

The message of the grace of Jesus, that's what was so powerful then, and that's what continues to be so powerful today. And the call remains the same.

To identify with the one who has so lovingly identified with us. So friends, as we grow and live as a church, let's hold fast to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And let's continue to bear his name, even if it brings a little bit of ridicule. Let's be confident that the gospel is for everyone, and it will open up their hearts like a lock and a key.

[39 : 36] And let's pray that God will use us like he used Antioch for his glory. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would, indeed, by your Holy Spirit, make these things so.

God, help us to be thoughtful and bold evangelists. Help us to be encouragers. Help us to be generous. Orbit in and through it all.

Help us to be resting in you, Lord Jesus. God, I pray for those who are here who don't know you, who are seeking you. God, I pray that you'd open their eyes and draw them to yourself.

And Lord, for those of us whom you've called to yourself, Lord, would we be excited by the prospect of being your church in the world. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. The music team's going to come up, and we're going to sing a song in response that's really a call to love and to serve one another.

[40 : 44] So, as they come up, why don't we stand, and we'll...