

# THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

## Acts 11

### INTRODUCTION:

We closed with a study last Sunday evening with a matter of gifts - and the church today has gifts that she did not have in the apostolic age. And we have no business wasting our time wondering why we do not have the gifts that the early church possessed because he giveth as he will. And if we are wondering about something more spectacular - more likely to make us notorious - we are actually neglecting the gifts of the spirit which will make us helpful. And we will hinder the work of God.

We do not need something like "Jesus Christ - Super Star". But this is the thing that human nature seeks after - the age of the spectacular. But we must remember that we are living in the age of the spirit. And we are to be obedient to his present work and his will when it pleases him. There are many who think that only that which is notorious or which is great, is accomplishing anything. We must never be in danger of losing the freshness of the spirit in the victories of our Lord.

Tonight in our study we consider again the great manifestation of the spirit at work without any plan or promotion on man's part - the church at Antioch came into being.

I wish to discuss this in agricultural terms tonight -

1. Planted By Persecution - Acts 11:19-21
2. Fertilized by Evangelism.
3. Cultivated by Missions. - Acts. 13:1-3.



#### 4. Harvested by the Spirit -

##### I. Planted By Persecution

This is a very interesting city at Antioch because they had a great deal of mythology which played any important part here. (Diana, the goddess) of the chase, was supposed to be attended by beautiful maidens, that frequented this valley. The story goes that she was visited here by her brother, Apollo. He saw love and sought Diana's fairest nymph daphne. The nymph fled and Apollo persued hotly. And in her flight she prayed to her mother earth for protection. And was immediately changed into a laurel. And the laurel became sacred to Apollo. And the emblem for which victors were crowned.

It became the center of the worship and pleasure. I suppose the gross excesses were practiced by heathen worshippers. Those who were vice promoters and Roman soldiers. The morals of this goddess symbolized the worst.

There was another myth about typhon a terrible dragon. Who raged bitter war with Zeus. He was killed - so the legend says by a thunder bolt and buried in the mountain near Antioch. Hence, the movement of the muscles under the mountain was the reason for numerous earth quakes. According to mythology. And of course they say that the city of Antioch was known for it's earthquakes.

There are several legends about this city - there is another one about a gifted actress who was performing in the theatre, of Antioch, while the Perysians were beseiging the city. While the audience applauded, the words of



the actress, who had her outstretched arms toward the mountain, and exclaimed - behold the Persians are coming. They thought it was part of the play - and Persian arrows pierced them and left them dead in their seats.

There was another legend about the flight of a flock of birds. And while Seleucus was sacrificing an eagle swept down on the alter. Ceased a piece of meat and flew away to the mountains. And of course, they said this was the place where Antioch was built.

Antioch had a lot of history behind it. One story tells us that it was established by a general of Alexander the Great. But the custom in the ancient times was for the conquerors to commemorate their victories by building cities. And Seleucus excelled all others. He founded 34 cities. 16 of which he named for his father's family - Antioch. The greatest of his cities was Antioch in Syria. For a thousand years it controlled the commerce of the Mesopotamian plain. It was termed as the great white way. Ben Hur walked about these streets of Antioch. In this capitol full of mythology, influenced by politics, and rich in history - we discover that a church was planted. And this first missionary church - the plan and the procedure for establishing christianity from the very beginning was to take it to the cities. As go the cities, morally, and religiously, so goes the country. If we can save the cities, we can save the country. The city is the center from which the force is built up or torn down the society of our civilization.

Cities are the most difficult problems concerning Christianity in America. And the Gospel must begin first in the cities.



Acts 11:19-21 - Gives us the origin, the planting of this church.  
Certain Syrian Jews were in Jerusalem. And they heard Peter's memorable sermon and were converted. Nicolaus of Antioch was one of the seven set apart to look after the tables.

V. 19  
V. 20  
When (persecution) drove the brethren from Jerusalem - some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene went as far as Antioch and preached to the Greeks also the good news of the Lord Jesus.

V. 21  
Now the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number turned unto the Lord. V. 21. Verifies that a great number, a multitude believed and were changed, and turned unto the Lord Jesus.

It is interesting to note that in the planning of this church, the Jerusalem church heard about the happenings.

V. 22  
Acts 11:22 - Then (tidings of these things) came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem. And they sent forth (Barnabas) that he should go as far as Antioch. This man was sent to inspect this work among the Gentiles who had been planted here. Barnabas was a distinguished man, he had deep sympathy, he had an open mind. He had broad vision. I would say that he had keen perception.

V. 24  
The Bible says that he was a good man - full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. He was a man who was not full of prejudice or pride - but of the spirit. And he had faith in God and faith in his neighbors. And the church sent him as a committee of one without instructions.



Spurgeon once said, that the best committee is a committee of three.  
With two of them sick in bed.

Now Peter and John had investigated the situation in Samaria.

Barnabas is sent on a somewhat similar mission. It was the longest continuous journey taken thus far in the interest of Christianity.  
It was farther from Jerusalem than Samaria or even Galilee.

His soul instruction was to go as far as Antioch.

Arriving there he heartily approved the work as being of the Lord.  
Not an alteration was made nor an amendment. He does not purpose any radical changes.

He then returns to Jerusalem to report. Not at first, however. Instead of returning to Jerusalem, he stays there to carry on the work that had been started by the men of Cyprus and Cyrene. He spoke very earnest words - he exhorted the brethren to cleave unto the word of God - V. 23.  
Because he had seen the grace of God at work. And he was glad of it. And Barnabas felt that he needed (some help) and this is a remarkable thing about the situation that happened here. He looked at the task, it was too much for him - but he thought that (Paul) the man who had been saved on the Damascus road - the man who he had stood up for in Jerusalem. Is the very man I need, he said. I will go and get him to help me. Down in Tarsus he found him. And he brought him back to Antioch and for a whole year they had a real revival - with scores of people believing. And this was a wonderful experience because here was a man 44 years old. Who 10 years before had seen the Lord. And abandoned his course and had been baptized and received

V. 23

V. 25



his commission. And he had three years of retirement, meditation, and prayer in Mt. Sinai. Where he had been taught to adjust the law and the Gospel. Now Barnabas believed in him and gave him a hand of fellowship - and I suspect the same kind of preaching that Paul had done in all places with boldness and yet he endured the suffering. 2 Cor. 11, 12:4.

Barnabas was strickingly impressed with the religious experience of Saul. His outward appearance counted little - small in stature - bent in form. Affected eyes - bluntness of speech but he had a great heart. And he had a great head for clear logic.

V, 26 There had been about 7 years between the time that Barnabas and Saul had met and parted in Jerusalem. But in need of help to carry on the meeting, Barnabas thought not of Peter nor of John - or some of the more experienced brethren, in the mother church at Jerusalem - but he turned to Saul. He went after him and brought him down here. Saul had worked, waited, and watched for the open door. The door is now flung wide open and then here this mighty advocate of Christianity enters.

What we might say is that the (man and the hour) have met. For one whole year the soul stirring meetings continue. And the church at Antioch is firmly planted. So that Antioch begins to eclipse - or go beyond the church at Jerusalem. This brings us to our second idea.

## II. Fertilized By Evangelism

This is really the proclamation of the Gospel. But once the church was planted - it was fertilized by evangelism.

V. 21 - Affirms this by saying that the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Jesus set it first in his great command. Growth is essential to our well being. It is earnest direct, personal, proclamation of the Gospel to the lost - to give them a saving knowledge.

Jesus made his people responsible for contact. With the unsaved.

Now Jesus does not make you responsible for their conversion. But he makes you responsible for your contact with them. If you understand it correctly - one is Christian work and the other is God's work. That is, God does his part when we do our part.

Witness the beginning at Antioch. Directly after the Gospel is brought here according to the record it says - and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed. Power from above attended the faithful preaching of the glad tidings. Barnabas visited - and similar results attend his labors. A multitude were added unto the Lord. The revival waves seem to rise and to roll higher and stronger.

Saul came to assist him and for a whole year multitudes were taught. And the normal condition in the church was that it was being fertilized by evangelism.

This changed the morals of the city. Licentiousness was rebuked. Extravagance was checked. The myths were contradicted. And they showed people a more excellent way. The people saw the difference and abandoned the old for the new.



The very (life) of the church was molded in evangelistic appeal. And when the passion for lost souls is lost - God writes Ichabod over the door. The solution for the problems of society, or the troubled issues, whether political or economic, or religious. This will remedy even suffering.

Give us a watchword for the hour. A thrilling word - a word of power.  
A battle cry, a flaming breath.

That calls to conquest or to death.

A word to rouse the churches from their rest.

To heed it's master high behead.

The call is given, ye host arise.

Our watchword is evangelize.

The glad evangel now proclaim

Through all the earth in Jesus name

This word is ringing through the skies

Evangelize, evangelize.

A dying men of fallen race

Make known the gift of Gospel grace

The world that now in darkness lies

Evangelize, evangelize.

So once the church was planted - it was fertilized constantly by evangelism.

This evangelism led to liberality which thrived on such an atmosphere. The heart that is warm with the grace of God is generous. Money flows freely from the Christians who are in a state of revival. The financial



V. 27-29 problems of this church and all churches are fundamentally spiritual problems.

One of the first acts of the Antioch church was to take a collection. There was a man who told them about famine. That was taking place - V. 27. And then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto his brethren which dwelt in Judea.

And so the man who gives his money can induce others to give anywhere and everywhere for objects.

Antioch was not a rich church. Famine was on in Jerusalem and also threatened their city. But they were determined to send relief. Really this is the essence of Christianity - it is a gift. God gave his only begotten Son - living is giving. Withholding is death. God cares for those who seek first the Kingdom. The Kingdom as represented by the saints of Jerusalem was in need. And these Gentile Christians put that kingdom first above their own church. Or their individual needs. There is no records that Antioch starved or had such hardship. But here was an attempt to relieve the poor and the needy - outside their own membership.

This was done according to every man's ability. And these individual gifts were given. Too many times we are self-centered in our wealth. And what took place here should take place everywhere - Antioch set a standard. That every man must serve according to his ability - and every man must help when help is needed. This is real brotherhood. And this lifts the load of another brother's burden. They were not self-centered. We either do this, or we dry up. And this is not socialism. And this is not as Russia's plan.

Now the material help was brought from Antioch and first reports were made by Barnabas - he was sent to inspect. And of course, the report seems



to have been entirely satisfactory. The church at Jerusalem - V. 30.

v. 30 They sent it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

### III. Cultivated By Missions

The church was planted - the seed were now developing and growing. They had been fertilized by the spirit of evangelism and now through the cultivation that was taking place in the church - all of these things were linked like links in a chain. And the missionary practice was developing.

Jesus had given his missionary command after his resurrection. And this was the order to his disciples - and it contains six all's.

✓ All power.

✓ All ye.

✓ All the words.

All nations.

All things.

All the days.

And so, it remained for this first Gentile church at Antioch. To be come the first great foreign mission church.

While they were busy with their religious duties in this church, we find that they had plenty of teachers and plenty of workers - according to Acts 13:1.



13:2 - As they ministered to the Lord - the Holy Spirit said separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto I have called them. While the church was busy with it's evangelistic program - the Spirit moved upon them and therefore it is anti - to be anti missions is the resistance of the Spirit of God. This was a golden moment in the life of the church. The people were praying, they were ministering, performing their task, carrying on their work - and the spirit spoke to them.

Now the church (responded) to the impulse for the larger campaign. The commission of the Lord has said that it would be through the spirit. And he did not say specifically where the missionaries were to go. But they were to work to which I have called them. I will assign them. They have no assigned definite field to which they are going.

But keep in mind - obedience was the key. Isaiah was called - the general call - who shall I send. And he made a personal response - here am I Lord, send me.

If for a moment we could think about character and qualifications of those first missionaries in the church at Antioch, five prophets and teachers who spoke God's revelation. And there were teachers who were spirit guided - who interpreted. One was called Niger. Another, Lucius, and Manaen. This man was a brother of the king who beheaded John the Baptist. And there were other members of the church who were very capable teachers, and workers. But they were steadfast and there was Paul and Barnabas who labored in this church. These two perhaps were more widely known, and perhaps better trained and experienced, than some of the others. They were outstanding men. I want you to see that the



the most able were sent as foreign missionaries. The church had emptied it's pockets of money for the poor. Now it seems they are emptying the pulpit of the strongest preachers and teachers that they had - and they were going to send those to regions beyond.

Now the work of the church went on. Barnabas settled in Cyprus--in that same unselfishness in the Gospel, it's most gifted young preacher decided to accompany Paul.

It is truly selfish for the church not to be ~~jealous or~~ generous with it's money or it's men. Antioch was not lacking in it's readiness to send forth it's best preachers and because of the missionary endeavor - it should remain an impressive lesson for the churches and the mission boards today.

Heathen need the best. In the early history of Virginia Baptists - we have somewhat of an example. David Thomas was the only degreed man among the preachers - and that was an honorary degree. Daniel Marshall was the next best trained preacher. Now the lesser men pastored the churches while Thomas and Marshall went out as missionaries calling sinners to repentance and establishing churches. It was somewhat of a distribution of the labors. And many years have passed since this movement started in Antioch. All that is highest and noblest in the civilization is related directly or indirectly to that movement. It was the cultivation of missions that really William Carey was to take part in. Because a few years were sufficient to cover the then known world. We want in all of our churches, the vision - the impulse - the effort of the church at Antioch.



It seems to me that the South Norfolk Church has in the past years fulfilled this work of the Antioch church - in the young men that have been sent out from this church to be ministers of the Gospel. The dozen or so that have gone to preach. Today, one of our members, who is a missionary in Argentina. It seems that this was the spirit of the Antioch church.

13:3  
V.3

And the Bible says, V. 3 - when they had fasted and prayed - they laid their hands on them and sent them out. And so being sent forth of the Holy Spirit - they departed - and they sailed to Cyprus and they preached the word of God there. And the story tells us that they went on to these other places to preach on this first missionary journey. Our obstacles today are nothing like as great - and really perhaps our numbers today are much larger and our resources are much vaster. Our Gospel and the order we have are the same. There are nations tonight that are waiting for the message and we move so slowly. Somehow, we ought to quicken our pace.

Give us, they cry, your cup of consolation. Never to our outreached hands, tis past.

We long for the desire of every nations.

And awe, we die so fast.

This is the challenge of the age - that we shall practice the cultivation of missions.

14:26-27

Report of the missionaries - 14:26,28. The Bible tells us and hence they sailed to Antioch. Where they had been recommended to do by the grace of God - this work. And here is a most thrilling thing - and when they had come -



and gathered the church together - all that God had done with them - and how they he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they stayed a long time with the disciples. And so the cultivation of missions brought about a grand and a glorious report when they returned - telling how that evil had been over-ruled and good had been established. And of the many triumphant victories they had won, for the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### IV. Harvested By The Spirit

Now in conclusion - we would like to think about some of the things that were harvested here by the church at Antioch. There was a great harvest.

First, they had sound doctrine. And this is a great thing in Christianity - that it must have been kept pure and it must be at the heart and the life of the individual. It is more than a system - but it is a religion of a person. You know this is what the Old Testament tried to forecast - Jer. 31:33 - after those days, sayth the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write in their heart. The Jews had missed the deeper meaning of their prophesy. But here was a universal religion. Not territorial - not national - but it was going to claim the whole live world. And the Jews had missed the meaning of their mission. And the character of the Messiah.

Now I am not depreciating Judiasm. It was surrounded by all sorts of nations. It had noble history. And there is a recognition of their holy law and their rule of life. We find that the law and the traditions - they failed to see the Messiah.

The first converts were Jews. The mother church at Jerusalem was composed



almost 100% of Jews. The Disciples brought much of their Old Testament practices with them into the church. It is not easy because of this conservative element in the Jewish church that was strong. You remember upon hearing (Peter's) reported conversion of Cornelius - they were willing to give the Gospel to the heathen. The vision of clean and unclean meats taught Peter another lesson. There would be fellowship. The grace of God cleanses from sin and creates brotherhood. The Jerusalem church did not see this far so after Peter's visit to Cornelius - brought the vision that God saved the Gentiles. It did not touch the question of how he saves them. That was postponed for about 15 years for settlement. And the soundness of this doctrine of the faith was harvested in the Antioch church. For here it was proved that it was a universal Gospel.

One of the most radical changes in the history of man took place in the Antioch church too place from the time of it's organization, Jews and Greeks - Jews born outside of Palestine. Greeks, Gentiles, heathened mingled and merged into one religious group. There is no parallel to this wiping out of racial lines in such a short time.

Peter later was afraid when his brethen learned that he had conformed to this liberalism - Gal. 2:11. Some men from Judea visited Antioch. And endeavored to subvert by teaching unless ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses - ye cannot be saved.

Paul and Barnabas joined issue with them - it was a crucial issue. The principle involved was the most vital in the New Testament church. The Gentile church saw the issue - they appreciated the seriousness of it - but they refused to surrender or compromise. Paul never waived, Antioch and Jerusalem he contended for the salvation of the Gentiles without circumcision. He had



received his Gospel from the same source and in the same region that Moses received the law from God in the Sinai area. He merely enlarged upon Moses. He won his case before the Jerusalem council - he preserved the Gospel of grace for all men. How much we owe to Paul and this church who was able to contend for the faith few people appreciate.

Jesus said, ye must be born again. Not ye must be born alike.

Now the Pharisees contended for conformity. They insisted on freedom. They made salvation based on ordinances. Paul put it all on grace and faith. They confined it to the Jews - Paul preached it was for all men on the Gospel terms.

Now the spiritual blindness of the Jews in the New Testament times is one of the saddest tragedies of history. They did not understand their own Scriptures. The most - the Messiah to be a Jew but the Saviour of all. The Messiah was a Jew. And the Prophets and Gentiles had come to thy light. Also that it might be fulfilled - as spoken of by Isaiah, the prophet. These broad prophesies. Instead of giving attention to them. Matt. 4:14, Isaiah 9:1.

I think this is one of the things in all history that is misunderstood. There are four women mentioned in Matthew, Genalogy of Gentiles, Tamar Rabhab, Ruth, and Uriah's wife. Each became a mother in the Messianic line. In an irregular or extra-ordinary way. Matt. 1:3, 5:6. The Magi were Gentiles who recognized and honored Jesus. Matt. 2:11. The Gentile Egypt provided refuge against Jewish violence. Matt. 2:14. And so, on and on - we could go. Even Pilate's Gentile wife had nothing to do with him for he was a just man. Matt. 24:14. It seems that the believing Jews should have known Jesus better. Paul was the one who had the deepest and the truest knowledge of the



Saviour. And we are indebted to the Antioch church and to Him for turning the Gospel into an ocean that it might wash upon all shores.

Now in the early times, the Jews hated the Gentiles. They were wrong and so are we. And we should not forget that Christ offered the Gospel first to the Jews and he commanded his disciples to begin at Jerusalem. And Paul's rule was first to preach to the Jew. And then following opposition and persecution - he made his way to the Gentiles. Without Christ the Jew is lost. He is neglected even by the Christian today. His soul is precious and if saved - it must be saved through the faith of Jesus the Messiah of the Old Testament.

✓ Another thing that they harvested was - I would say, (sane practices). Not only did they have sound doctrine but they had sane practices. The relation between the Antioch and the New Testament Church furnish us an interesting study of the development of the self government which was carried on within the church. Antioch sent for Saul who the Jerusalem church mistrusted. We find that they had a sane practice in that the congregation sent forth the missionaries. Acts 13:3. The church undoubtedly appointed this group to go under the direction of the spirit.

They also appointed the committee to go to Jerusalem.

And the church also made great care in the handling of their finances.

Acts. 11:30 - great care was exercised. Two men, no one was entrusted with the funds from Jerusalem. For business methods, they sent two men to

carry this offering for the needy. This experience at Antioch taught Paul valuable lessons in church finance. And I suppose he used this in the other } sent two men to



churches. They arranged for representatives from the church to convey the offering - which had been collected. And they collected honest men to do this.

I think there was also common sense to deal with the perplexing problems which they had.

Acts. 15:1-2. Now this is something that I have slightly touched on in the matter of doctrine. But certain men came down from Judea and said except you be circumcized after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.

Now there was no small descension about this and a great dispute. Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go down and to discuss this question with the other churches. Now what an opportunity for a real division. I think Antioch displayed a wonderful spirit in deciding to confer with others. They were not going to break loose from the other churches - they were not going to be independent. They were ~~not~~ going to try to work ~~the~~ other churches. So Antioch said - let's go to the place of the trouble. We'll ask them about this and get a ruling on this. Now there was great wisdom in consulting with these other friends about this. It was really no frame up - that this was true and it certainly brought about a wonderful harvest. They were able to settle this dispute and discover that the Gospel was for the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. And so their common sense paid off. In this way, and there was a great harvest.

Where can you find a better model than the church at Antioch.

✓ The last thing that was harvested in this church - they received a new name. (The new name) - Christian.