



BETTER

**The Church
That God
Blesses**

Acts 11:19-26

Acts 8:1–12 (NKJV)

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

23When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

25Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

BETTER

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In our text, we see an example of impressive church growth. From a small group of persecuted refugees, the church in Antioch saw large numbers of people come to Christ. In fact, three times Luke underscores the large numbers (*11:21, 24, 26*). But the reason this church experienced such remarkable growth was not that the leaders employed the latest church growth principles.

They didn't study the demographics of Antioch and come up with a strategy to market the church to the masses. Rather, the reason for the growth was simple: "The hand of the Lord was with them" (11:21). This was a church that God was blessing. That should be our aim, that the hand of the Lord would be with us.

**To Be A Church
That God Blesses,
We Should Learn
From The Church
Of Antioch.**

BETTER

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Antioch

- With a population of half a million, Antioch ranked as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria. Its magnificent buildings helped give it the name “Antioch the Golden, Queen of the East.” The main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. It was the only city in the ancient world at that time that had its streets lighted at night.

Antioch

- A busy port and a center for luxury and culture, Antioch attracted all kinds of people, including wealthy retired Roman officials who spent their days chatting in the baths or gambling at the races. With its large cosmopolitan population and its great commercial and political power, Antioch presented to the church an exciting opportunity for evangelism.

Antioch

- Antioch was a wicked city, perhaps second only to Corinth. Though all the Greek, Roman, and Syrian deities were honored, the local shrine was dedicated to Daphne, whose worship included immoral practices. “Antioch was to the Roman world what New York City is to ours.

Not Only Was An Effective Church Built In Antioch, But It Became The Church That Sent Paul Out To Win The Gentile World For Christ.

BETTER

The Church That God Blesses

Antioch

- When the persecuted believers arrived in Antioch, they did not at all feel intimidated by the magnificence of the buildings or the pride of the citizens. The Word of God was on their lips and the hand of God was on their witness, and “a great number” of sinners repented and believed. It was a thrilling work of God’s wonderful grace.

Barnabas

- Acts 11:24 gives us a “spiritual profile” of Barnabas, and he appears to be the kind of Christian all of us would do well to emulate. He was a righteous man who obeyed the Word in daily life so that his character was above reproach. He was filled with the Spirit, which explains the effectiveness of his ministry. That he was a man of faith is evident from the way he encouraged the church and then encouraged Saul. New Christians and new churches need people like Barnabas to encourage them in their growth and ministry.

Barnabas

- How did Barnabas encourage these new Gentile believers? For one thing, he rejoiced at what he saw. Worshiping with Gentiles was a new experience for him, but he approached it positively and did not look for things to criticize. It was a work of God, and Barnabas gave thanks for God's grace.
- He emphasized dedication of the heart as he taught the people the Word of God

Barnabas

- There were two wonderful results from Barnabas' work in Antioch. First, the church's witness made a great impact on the city so that "many people were added to the Lord" (*Acts 11:24*). When the saints are grounded in the Word, they will have a strong witness to the lost, and there will be a balance in the church between edification and evangelism, worship and witness, teaching and testifying.

Barnabas

- Second, the growth of the church meant that Barnabas needed help; so he went to Tarsus and enlisted Saul. But why go so far away just to find an assistant? Why not send to Jerusalem and ask the deacon Nicolas who was from Antioch? (*Acts 6:5*) Because Barnabas knew that God had commissioned Saul to minister to the Gentiles (*Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17*). You recall that Barnabas befriended Saul in Jerusalem (*Acts 9:26–27*), and no doubt the two of them often talked about Saul's special call from God.

Put It In Practice

- What Barnabas did for Saul needs to be practiced in our churches today. Mature believers need to enlist others and encourage them in their service for the Lord. It was one of D.L. Moody's policies that each new Christian be given a task soon after conversion. At first, it might be only passing out hymnals or ushering people to their seats, but each convert had to be busy. As previously mentioned, he said, "It is better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men." Many of Mr. Moody's "assistants" became effective Christian workers in their own right and this multiplied the witness.

It was at Antioch that the name Christian was first applied to the disciples of Jesus Christ. The Latin suffix *ian* means “belonging to the party of.” In derision, some of the pagan citizens of Antioch joined this Latin suffix to the Hebrew name “Christ” and came up with Christian. The name is found only three times in the entire New Testament: Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16.

Unfortunately, the word Christian has lost a great deal of significance over the centuries and no longer means “one who has turned from sin, trusted Jesus Christ, and received salvation by grace” (*Acts 11:21–23*). Many people who have never been born again consider themselves “Christians” simply because they say they are not “pagans.” After all, they may belong to a church, attend services somewhat regularly, and even occasionally give to the work of the church! But it takes more than that for a sinner to become a child of God. It takes repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross and rose again to give us eternal life.

BETTER

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The believers in the early church suffered because they were Christians (*1 Peter 4:16*). Dr. David Otis Fuller has asked, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

BETTER

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God Blesses A Church Where...

every member is a minister.

- One remarkable feature of this church was how it started. It was not founded by apostles or pastors or trained missionaries. Rather, some unnamed men who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen came to Antioch and began talking, not just to the Jews, but to the Greeks (*Gentiles*), telling the good news about the Lord Jesus (*11:20*). The Greek word for “speak” (*11:19, 20*) is the word for normal conversation. The implication is that these men didn’t preach as orators in the marketplace. Rather, in their everyday contacts, they told others about Jesus Christ.

BETTER

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God Blesses A Church Where...

the gospel is proclaimed as the power of God to save sinners.

- One remarkable proof that the gospel is from God is that wherever it goes, it has the same powerful effect. The message does not need to be changed when it is taken to a tribe of primitive headhunters. It does not need to be intellectualized when it is taken to a sophisticated university crowd. Whatever their culture or background, people are all sinners who need to know how to be reconciled to God before they face Him in judgment. If we will tell the simple gospel message to the people we come into contact with, God will bless us with conversions.

BETTER

The Church That God Blesses

God Blesses A Church Where...

His grace, not legalism, permeates the body.

- Word had gotten back to Jerusalem, “Have you heard what’s going on in Antioch?” “No, what?” “A bunch of laymen are sharing Christ with the pagans, and they’re all meeting together, Jews and Gentiles, as one church!” Alarms went off! Red lights started flashing! It was one thing when the God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius, had become a Christian through the preaching of the leading apostle, Peter. That stretched the limit. But when raw pagans from a notoriously immoral place like Antioch started coming into the church through the witness of a bunch of laymen, it was time for the mother church to check things out!

BETTER

The Church That God Blesses

God Blesses A Church Where...

His grace, not legalism, permeates the body.

- So they sent Barnabas. Some of the circumcision crowd might have said, “Make sure that Barnabas gets that Antioch situation under control!”

BETTER

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A Godly Example

- So Antioch is set before us as an example. It was a church founded by simple believers who knew that God has called every Christian to serve Him. They proclaimed the gospel as the power of God for salvation to every one who believes. They operated by God's grace, not by legalism. They saw grace as the motivation to go on with the Lord. Their leaders set the example and taught them from God's Word. They were generous givers, trusting God to meet their needs. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.