

Letting God Lead

Acts 11

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By way of a little review, Acts 10 and 11 are one unit. Basically, in this one unit we have a very important point in the book of Acts in which the gospel officially goes for the first time to the Gentiles. That may not seem like a big deal to us today, but in the first century the Christians were all Jews. It was very difficult for them to conceive of the idea that God would save Gentiles just as He had saved them as Jews and even harder for them to realize that the Church, which is the body of Christ, would actually be made up of Jew and Gentile and would be one new humanity or one new family of God. You see, they didn't have the books of Ephesians, Romans, or Galatians. These books haven't been written yet. They were just being written and coming together. They were an infant church and were ignorant in a lot of ways, even though God in the Old Testament and Jesus Himself had spoken about other sheep have I which are not of this fold He would call (referring to Gentiles). They had to learn that God was saving Gentiles, and we're one new humanity, one new group, with Jesus Christ as our head and we're the living church.

There are implications for us today; that is, today the church is not made up of cultural divisions or racial distinctions. It's not made up of social distinctions. We're all one in Christ. Amen? In the Church, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," and we stand equally at the foot of the cross and have a relationship with Him.

In Acts 10, Peter had gone from Joppa. (I got a couple photos for you tonight from our recent trip. Everybody's kind of bugging me like, "When do we see photos? When do we see photos?" I'm going to throw up a couple of pictures on the screen in just a moment of Joppa, Caesarea, and some of the places we're going to read about in our Bible tonight.) Peter was in Joppa on the housetop and got the vision of the sheet coming down with all the animals. God told him that there's nothing common or unclean. He was preparing Peter for going to the Gentiles. Cornelius had an angel visit and sent men to Joppa to get Peter to come to him. He went and preached to them, and the Holy Spirit fell. Let's back up into chapter 10 and start reading in verse 44 rather than telling you the whole story. This is the conclusion, Acts 10:44, to get a running start on Acts 11.

Verse 44 says, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." "Them which heard the word" were Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. It says, "And they of the circumcision," which were the Jewish believers that were having a hard time believing that Gentiles could be saved, "which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed

they him to tarry certain days.” In other words, they begged Peter, “Hang around for awhile. Stay with us.” Peter is in the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. He had been prepared by God through the vision, and he went there and began to tell them about Jesus. As he was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all of these Gentiles, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. They were born again. They were saved. They got the Spirit. They got the whole dose of the Ghost, you might say, in one big kind of a moment.

I want to mention something I didn’t mention three weeks ago back in Acts 10:47. Just a footnote, but I didn’t want to miss it and I did many weeks ago. It says, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” There are some people who wrongly teach you have to be baptized in order to be saved. Sometimes it’s called baptismal regeneration—when you are dunked in water, that’s how you are born again or saved. I disagree, and I don’t believe the Bible actually teaches that. The Bible says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” There is nothing we do—no rite or ritual—in order to be saved. When the thief died on the cross Jesus said, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” He went to heaven. He wasn’t baptized. Jesus didn’t say, “That’s too bad you haven’t been baptized,” or “Too bad you’re on a cross right now because if we could just get you baptized, I could get you to heaven.” There is nothing we do to save ourselves. Baptism is an outward work of an inward reality. We should be baptized as evidence that we’ve been saved.

Why do I point this out? Because this is a classic passage proving that they were born again, they received the Holy Spirit, and then they were baptized in water. It came after or subsequent to their regeneration. They were born again, filled with the Spirit, they spoke in tongues, and Peter says, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have,” past tense, “received the Holy Ghost,” just like we did at the beginning? I just want you to tuck that away somewhere if you ever run into somebody that says, “Well, you gotta be baptized in order to be saved.” There are some that say not only do you have to be baptized, but you have to have the right formula—it has to be in the name of Jesus only, not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in Jesus’ name only—you have to be baptized and you have to speak in tongues or you’re not saved. Again, that’s not what the Bible teaches. I just wanted to point that out to you.

Peter was tarrying with them for many days, and this was a blessed time. God was working. God was manifesting Himself and saving Gentiles. It was a high and holy time and they were rejoicing, but not everyone was happy, Acts 11. Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Jerusalem, Acts 11:1, “And the apostles and the brethren that were in Judaea,” which is down in the area of Jerusalem, “heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem,” so he left Caesarea and came to Jerusalem, “they that were of the circumcision,” these Jews who were legalists and believed that Gentiles could only be saved if they became Jewish, proselyted into Judaism, “contended with him,” Peter. In other words, Peter gets called on the carpet. Peter gets in trouble. It says in verse 3, “Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” We laugh when we read that. We think,

“Are you serious? You mean, Peter’s in trouble because he went to Gentiles?”

Do you know what really, really upset them? Not that Gentiles were being saved (they could accept that, although many of them thought and it would grow in their understanding, that in order for Gentiles to be saved they’ve got to be circumcised, keep dietary laws of Moses, they have to worship on certain days, and they’ve got to become Jewish in order to be Christian), but what really upset them was that Peter ate with Gentiles! This was bad news—that you would actually eat with them—because in their mind when you ate with somebody you became one with them and were entering into fellowship, and so he says, “You kept company, you went to men who were uncircumcised and actually ate with them!” These men are legalists. They’re freaking out. They’re thinking, This is really bad. This is really dangerous. You can’t just tell these Gentiles that all they need to do is believe in Jesus Christ and they get to go to heaven, that they’re accepted like us and can be a part of the church! They’re in panic mode freaking out.

You know, there are a lot of Christians today that freak out. They show up from church and maybe someone of a different race is in the church and they’re thinking, What are they doing here? Someone from a different social background, What are they doing here? Why are they in our church? Sometimes we get upset with people because they have a different custom or they’re from a different background and we don’t want to accept them. One of the things that we learn from chapters 10 and 11 and so many other places in the Bible is that “God so loved the world,” right? “that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Do you know what whosoever means? Whosoever means whosoever. I studied all day to figure that out. Red, yellow, black, and white, They are precious in His sight. Jesus loves...not only the little children but everyone in the world. Amen? It doesn’t matter. Don’t be so freaked out by this, but this was a big problem to them.

Beginning in verses 4-18, is the next section. Peter gives his defense. By the way, if Peter were the first Pope, it’s interesting that they’re tapping on the Pope here. They’re actually confronting the Pope. They’re dealing with that, and I don’t believe, obviously, that Peter was the Pope; but if he were the Pope, then he’s in trouble with the believers there in Jerusalem. “But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,” now when it says that Peter “rehearsed the matter from the beginning and expounded it by order unto them,” it uses some interesting Greek words that actually mean that Peter goes all the way back to the beginning and gave the story in perfect sequential order. He goes all the way back and says, “Let me just tell you what happened,” and goes back step-by-step and rehearses it for them.

Again, another little footnote. The story of Peter in Joppa and the sheet with the animals that were unclean and God telling him to rise and eat them is given three times in the Bible. You say, “Why do you mention that?” Because if God tells us something three times, I think God wants us to know it, right? If something is repeated three times in the Bible, and all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it was something the Holy Spirit inspired, then I believe that God wants us to get the message behind this vision. God wants us to understand and comprehend

it. Now, in Peter's defense (and this is where I want you to take some notes tonight), we're going to see how God leads us. A lot of people want to know: How do I know the will of God? How do I know what God's will is for my life? How do I know if God is leading me in a certain direction or if God is giving me a certain gift and calling on my life or calling me into a specific ministry of my life? What are the steps and some of the circumstances and ways that God leads me? I want to point them out as we go through this passage, verses 5-18.

Here's the first thing that God does for Peter. God actually gives Peter a vision. God speaks to him. When does God speak to him? When he's praying, notice verse 5. "I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me." When he prayed, God spoke. When he prayed, God revealed. Let me give you step 1 in knowing and finding the will of God—get on your knees and pray, how's that? Get on your knees and pray. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found." Pray to God. Seek the Lord. Talk to the Lord. He received this revelation as he was praying. I just thought I would throw it in. It's kind of cool, but notice the mention of Joppa in verse 5.

Off into the distance on the top right over here of the photo is the modern city of Tel Aviv. Just to the south of Tel Aviv, where the picture is taken, (these are actually Hailey McDonald's pictures, our soon-to-be missionary to the Philippians. She took these photos.) I'm always checking the waves to see if the surf is good when I'm in places like this. It's like, "Let's grab our boards and go surf." That's the Mediterranean Sea, looking west out on the Mediterranean and looking north up the coast of Israel, but you're in the ancient seaport city of Joppa. It's one of the oldest seaport cities in the entire world. (There's one more photo of Joppa looking from the north back down the other direction. You can see the little cluster of buildings at the far point down there. That's the ancient seaport city of Joppa.) This is where Peter was when he was on the rooftop, and the vision came down to him and he saw all these creepy crawlers on this thing. This is also, by the way, the city of Joppa as where Jonah went down and got in a boat to try to flee to Tarsus to run away from God and was swallowed by a whale. It's just kind of cool. I thought I would throw that photo up there. The places that are mentioned in the Bible really do exist, by the way. You can actually go visit them.

Peter says, "I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." These are animals that were unclean according to Levitical law for a Jewish person to eat, but Peter heard a voice (verse 7) saying to him, "Arise, Peter; slay and eat. 8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth." He's arguing with the Lord. A perfect contradiction by the way, "No, Lord." You can't really say, "Lord," and say "no," but Peter does that. He says, "No, Lord. I've never eaten anything that is not kosher, that is common or unclean." "But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." God is trying to show Peter that He wants to save Gentiles, that they're clean. "And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into

heaven. 11 And, behold, immediately," catch that term "immediately," God's timing, "there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me."

God leads us as we pray, but let me say something again, too, about the will of God. When you pray for God's will, guess what? God will not show you His will unless you are first ready to obey it no matter what it is. You don't pray and say, "God, I want to know Your will, and then once You tell me what Your will is, I'll tell you whether or not I'm going to do it." You basically say, "Lord, I want You to reveal Your will to me, and when You do that I will obey." A lot of times God is not revealing His will to us because we're waiting to know what it is as to whether or not we'll do it. You say, "Lord, I want to go where You want me to go," and you feel like God is calling you to Barstow or something like that and you're saying, "Rebuke you, satan." No. I'll go where You want me to go. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll be what You want me to be, and I'll say whatever it is You want me to say. Are you willing right now, (ask yourself in your own heart of hearts) to go, be, do, and say whatever it is God wants you to do? If you don't answer yes to that, then you're not really going to find the will of God. If you're not willing to say, "Lord, I'm Yours. I want Your will. I'll do whatever it is," then why would you expect God to reveal His will to you if you're giving God terms or stipulations. "If it's this or that or the other, then God, I'll do this or I'll do that," rather than just saying, "God, I offer my life to You and I'll do whatever it is You've called me to do, and I'll do it faithfully as unto You."

God's timing is perfect. Peter is praying and God reveals and sends the three men from Caesarea (verse 11). That's another thing about God's circumstances—God works through circumstances and His timing is perfect. What if these three guys would've come before the vision and knocked on the door at Peter's house at Joppa? What if these three Gentiles from Cornelius' house would've come the next day? Then the vision and its effect would've worn off, but immediately he sees this vision and BOOM! at that same time DING DONG! they're ringing the doorbell. You see how God works through circumstances and in situations? (I've got a second couple of pictures real quick. Let's just throw those up.)

This is Caesarea (and we could do a bunch of pictures of Caesarea), but there is an amphitheater there. The seating isn't all original but the foundation for that amphitheater is. That was the headquarters for the Roman government. It's mentioned so often in the Bible. It's up the coast from Joppa. There's another photo there. You can actually see out where the water is. There's a pool there. Herod had a bath there. He had a fortress there. He had a palace there. Some of the white on the forefront on the ground there was some of the mosaic and the marble that is still there from Herod the Great's palace, but a lot of ancient ruins there in the city of Caesarea which is the location in verse 11 where Cornelius was. This was the seat of the Roman government, and the Roman government and authorities were there in verse 11. So, God's timing—perfect!

Beginning in verses 12-15, we have the Spirit of God. We first have the vision from God. Secondly, we have the Spirit of God (verse 12). "And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said

unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." So, he prays and God reveals Himself to him in a vision. Now, God may not give you an actual vision. God may not give you a trance like He did and a vision for Peter, but God will speak through His Word by His Spirit, and we're going to see that in verses 16-18. God speaks to Peter by the Spirit, "the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house," that is, Cornelius' house there in Caesarea.

Here's another principle of guidance or another principle of God leading and guiding us; that is, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will bear witness with our spirit, that God will speak to us. This is the subjectivity that is a bit of a challenge and difficult because sometimes we can go by our own emotions or by our own feelings or thoughts, but the Holy Spirit can speak to us or make impressions on our hearts. We may not hear an audible voice, but God's Spirit can speak to our hearts. He can prompt or convict us or guide and direct us. Then there's the confirmation from others. He took six brothers with him. Why did Peter (verse 12) take six men with him? Well, I knew that Peter actually believed that he was going to be in trouble. Peter thought, I better take some witnesses with me. If I'm being called to go to the house of Cornelius, this Gentile, I better take some other men with me so they can testify.

Again, another principle of guidance and leading of the Lord is that when God is guiding and leading your life, God can also use other people to confirm it in your life. If God is calling you and God is opening a door for you, get some wise counsel. There is wisdom in the multitude of counselors. Now, you've got to be careful because everyone will have their opinion and everyone will have their views about what you should or shouldn't do, but if you seek good, wise, godly counsel, there is wisdom in the multitude of counselors. Also, if God is giving you a gift and a calling, others will confirm it. If you're the only one that believes that God has given you a certain gift, then perhaps God has not given you a certain gift. I've had people say, "I believe God has called me to sing." I say, "Well, just sing something for me." "Uhahuhah." "I think you should pray about that. Usually, if God calls you to sing, He gives you a voice; and in this case, I don't think God has given you a voice." "Well, I don't care. I believe God's called me to sing." "Well, then sing solo or something—so low we can't hear you. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." God will confirm your gift as other people are recipients of that gift and God is using you in that way.

God opens the doors. God opened the door and the three came from Cornelius' house. When they got there (verse 13), "He shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." So, the door was opened—God prepared the hearts, God went ahead, and God spoke to them. I pointed out a couple of weeks ago when we were in chapter 10 that God works at both ends—God prepared Peter and God prepared Cornelius. God was preparing the soil as well as the sower. God prepared the hearts, God opened the doors, and God sent Peter. If God is leading and guiding you, many

times God will open the door and God will prepare the soil and the hearts of those that you go to minister to. Verse 15, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning,” which is a reference to Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.

The first is the vision from God, verses 5-11. Then, in verses 12-15, there is the Spirit of God. In verses 16-18, there is the Word of God, and always God will lead us consistently with His Word. I want you to notice it in verses 16-18. “Then remembered I the word of the Lord,” Peter is still speaking, defending himself, “how that he said,” that is, Jesus, “John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” There’s a vision from God, the Spirit of God, and then there’s the Word of God.

Let me give you some principles in God leading us. You always need to make sure that you judge your personal experience and your circumstances in light of Scripture—that what the Scriptures teach is consistent with what’s going on in your life. You never want to go somewhere or do something or be involved in any experience that is contrary to the written, revealed Word of God. So, all of our experience—here’s the principle, it’s super important—must be judged in light of Scripture. What does the Bible teach? What does the Bible say? What is in the Scriptures? You never want to judge the Scriptures in light of your experience. I’ve had people say, “Well, I know it’s true.” I say, “How do you know it’s true?” “Because I saw it. I felt it. I experienced it. I heard a voice or had a vision or had this experience,” and what they’re saying is unbiblical. The experience they had leads them to believe things that are unscriptural. I have to conclude that your experience was not from God, your experience wasn’t the work of God, it wasn’t the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you an example that just popped in my brain. I don’t mean to freak anybody out but Joseph Smith, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, the Mormons base everything they believe on an experience that a man by the name of Joseph Smith had. An angel Moroni showed up and gave him some golden plates that contained the everlasting gospel and gave this new revelation, this new truth, to him on these golden plates which were written in Egyptian hieroglyphic; and God gave him special glasses to be able to read this Egyptian hieroglyphics. Basically, what he learned and what he understood about Jesus is not biblical. It’s not scriptural. It’s not consistent with the revelation in God’s Word, so Paul says in Galatians, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,” or let him be anathema. So, we have to reject the gospel of Joseph Smith and hold onto the gospel of Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ and of the Scriptures found in the New Testament. We must judge our experience by the Scriptures.

Notice verse 16, “Then remembered I the word of the Lord,” so Peter goes, “Wow, just like a light went on in my mind, and I remembered. God gave me this vision. God sent these men. They rang the door at the right time, and I went. God sent an angel to them and the Holy Spirit fell, and all this stuff happened. Then, all of the sudden, I remembered, ‘This is what Jesus

prophesied. This is what Jesus said would happen. This is exactly what our Lord spoke about.” “John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us,” Peter says, and I love it in verse 17, “who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” He’s actually saying, “You expect me to argue with God? You expect me to resist God? You expect me to fight with God? If God wants to do it, what am I supposed to do?”

Again, a little subpoint I want to make; that is, this baptism with the Holy Spirit in the case of Cornelius. Cornelius and the Gentiles in Caesarea believed, they were born again, they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and they spoke in tongues all at once. Write that down. It happened to them all at once! There was no time delay. There were no apostles came and laid hands on them. They got everything all at once. I just so happen to believe that this is the way God works today. When you invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart and forgive your sins, you are born again and the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. You are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, and you become one united with Christ—that living head—into one family, in one body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” This is the pattern, I believe, for believing today. All of this takes place as a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person that trusts and believes in Jesus Christ. By the way, this is the last reference in the book of Acts to this experience known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and you find Paul teaching on it in the epistles in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, but God gave them like gift.

“When they heard these things,” what did they do? The Jews in Jerusalem, the legalists? It says, “they held their peace,” this is a fancy way for saying they just set there quiet. They didn’t know what to say. They were speechless, and then they began to glorify God, “saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” When they heard what Peter told them about the vision from God, about the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, and he recounted his experience (not only did he have three but six witnesses go with him who said, “Yeah, that’s exactly what happened. We were with him.”), the Jews basically just threw up their hands and said, “Wow! That’s amazing. I guess God actually is saving Gentiles. Isn’t that amazing!”

I would guess that most of us here tonight are Gentiles. We just got back from Israel. We were around a lot of Jews—Hasidic Jews, devoted Jews, committed Jews, Jews that are kosher, Jews that are keeping the law, Jews that are observing Shabbat and sabbath and things like that—but to think that God makes no distinction nor is a respecter of persons, and we as Gentiles can come, be saved, and become fellow heirs of the family of God and members of the household of God. It’s just an amazing thing, and we can be thankful for that. So, they glorified God. This position wouldn’t last. When we get to Acts 15, the legalists come back on the scene and they’re really bothered by the fact that Gentiles aren’t keeping the law of Moses—they’re not following dietary laws and all of these things—so they have to have a big meeting in Jerusalem again to determine what the relationship of the Gentiles is going to be to the law of Moses. By the way, the entire book of Galatians in your New Testament is written to deal with

this kind of legalism—thinking we could be more spiritual by keeping laws, rules, and regulations. It's not necessary. We're set free in Christ, and we need to stand in that liberty where Christ has set us free.

In verses 19-21, we move into an entirely new section in Acts 11 dealing with a new church that is born. There is going to be several new things happen, and a new church is going to be born in the city of Antioch. I'll explain more about that in just a moment, but it becomes one of the leading churches in the book of Acts as a missionary-sending church. In verse 19 it says, "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen," that takes us all the way back to Acts 7 and 8. We actually find the very same statement in Acts 8:4, that there was the persecution that arose from Stephen and now they're being scattered. When they were scattered, they went everywhere preaching; so God was using even the problems of their persecution to get the message out. "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only." They were still being scattered but only preaching to Jews not Gentiles.

Phenice is up the coast of Israel in modern-day Lebanon. Cyprus is the island that's out off the coast, but I want you to notice this place called Antioch in verse 19. This is what's known as Antioch and Syria. There are about three or four Antioch's in the New Testament. This is what's called Antioch of Syria. Get a Bible map and look. It's about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, a little bit east. It's up in what's known today as Syria, kind of the Lebanon-Syrian border. It was the third largest Roman city. It was a part of the Roman Empire. It was a large prosperous city but was kind of like a modern-day Las Vegas, New York, or San Francisco. It was a very worldly cosmopolitan place. It's a place where God is going to begin to work among the Gentiles and a new church is going to be born.

Verse 20, "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene," he doesn't name them, only refers to them as "some men." These are unnamed individuals but God used them wonderfully. "...which, when they were come to Antioch," that northern city, Antioch of Syria, "spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." Now, they're preaching to Gentiles in this cosmopolitan center of Antioch which, by the way, had about a half a million people in this large city. It says, "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." Some believed that Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, was originally from this area and that maybe his conversion took place at this point in time, but God was blessing their ministry—the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles—and many of them were believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. "...a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." Note that we have a new church—a new church is born, the church in Antioch—and the church in Antioch is going to become the center hub of Christian missions. The focus is going to shift from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch. It's from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas are going to start out on their missionary journey. So, the church in Antioch becomes famous as the missionary-sending church.

Notice with me in verse 22, "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church

which was in Jerusalem,” so the believers in the church of Jerusalem heard about the church at Antioch. The Gentiles were being saved and so, “they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.” You have a new church, and guess what a new church needs? A new church needs new leadership. A church must have leadership. They sent someone, not just anyone, they sent their best. I’ve often thought that this is interesting that many times the church today when it comes to missions or sending people to foreign places to do the work of the Lord, we don’t always send our best, but the church in Jerusalem sent their best. They sent Barnabas, the son of encouragement. He was a man who was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and God used him in a wonderful way to encourage this new congregation of Gentile believers.

Verse 23, “When he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all,” there in Antioch, “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” Barnabas, true to his name, was encouraging them to hang onto Christ, to focus on the Lord, and to follow the Lord. These new believers needed this encouragement, and new believers today need encouragement. “For he was a good man,” referring to Barnabas, “and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.” A commentary on Barnabas in verse 24, he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. You get a little insight into the kind of man that God uses. “...and much people was added unto the Lord,” in other words, they were born again.

You don’t have a church unless people are saved. Just because people get together in a building doesn’t mean that a church exists there. The church is made up of people who are saved not just people who are sitting in the pews. It says, “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.” Don’t let me lose you here. You’ve got to track. In verse 25, Barnabas is in Antioch. He’s ministering to the new believers and realizes that this church needs more leaders. It needs help. He leaves to go to Tarsus where Saul, who we know to become Paul, has been now for 10 years. It’s been ten years since Saul’s conversion, and we don’t have any knowledge of what was going on in Saul’s life. He was probably preaching and evangelizing, but Barnabas basically says, “We need another pastor.” Barnabas had a good understanding that, I can’t do the work of the Lord myself. We need a plurality of leaders. We need other pastors. We need a teacher to come and instruct these new believers. As God adds to the church, we need to be involved in nurturing, helping, building up, and discipling those that are coming to Christ. So, Barnabas goes up to Tarsus and finds Saul. We have a new church. We have new leaders, and now we have a new team—Barnabas and Saul—who become Barnabas and Paul who become missionaries from this church in Antioch. They were doing evangelism and teaching the Word of God. We need to realize, too, that we can’t do the work alone.

Verse 26, “And when he had found him,” that is, Barnabas found Saul, “he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” This is that really cool spot in the book of Acts where we actually find for the first time not only the Word “Christian,” and by the way, the word “Christian” only appears three times in the Bible—Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28 where Agrippa the king says to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” and the third time the word is used is 1 Peter 4:16 where it says, “Yet if any man

suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” The first time the word is used were the believers, the disciples, those who are called of the way, they are now being referred to as Christians in Antioch. Now, there are some interesting things to observe here. Paul shows up (called Saul, but I refer to him as Paul) and starts teaching the believers. He does this for a whole year. At the end of the year, the people are so taught, so built up, so instructed, that they’re living Christ-like lives, and the world looks at them and says, “They’re Christians.”

The word “Christian” actually has the idea of identified with Christ or Christ followers. It has the prefix at the beginning of the word “Christ” which actually carries the idea to be identified with or tied-in with or part of with. What they’re saying is that they’re identifying them with Christ. They’re like little Jesus’ walking around. They talk about Jesus. They preach about Jesus. That’s all they want to do is think and talk about Jesus, so they called them Christians. We don’t know for sure, but a theory is that this was a derogatory term given to them. I don’t know that that’s the case. It’s possible. Even if it is, what a glorious thing to be called—a Christian.

In our culture today people think you’re a Christian if you’re not a pagan, or you’re a Christian if you’re not a Jew, or you’re a Christian if you’re born in America. You’re a Christian if you eat apple pie with cheese on it, you know, or you’re a Christian if you’re a certain ethnic background or you have an American flag on your four-wheel drive pickup truck and you go to Israel, you have the Christians, the Muslims, and the different quarters that are there. People say, “Well, I’m a Christian,” but they don’t know what a Christian is. The only people who are Christians are people who have been born again. Those are the only people that are Christians.

If you haven’t been born again, you’re not a Christian. You can call yourself a Christian. You can act like a Christian. You can talk like a Christian. You can go to a church like a Christian, but if you haven’t been born again, you’re not a Christian. A Christian is a person who has Christ living inside of them. We need to make that very clear. You don’t go to church to become a Christian, you come to Christ to become a Christian. You don’t get baptized to become a Christian, you get born again to become a Christian. This is the first time they begin to call themselves Christians, and I believe that it was the result of Paul and Barnabas teaching them God’s Word. They were being taught by the Spiritual leaders and were becoming mature and living Christ-like lives.

There’s a new church. There’s a new leadership. There’s a new name. Lastly, there’s a new love and benevolence being shown by the Gentiles toward the Jews, verses 27-30. “And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch,” again, to this city of Antioch. It says, “And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” This was around 41-54 A.D. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote about this famine that took place in Judea which was so severe at this time. “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea,” or Jerusalem, “Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” This is the conclusion of this eleventh chapter where we have a new church, new leaders, a new name,

and now we have a new benevolence. We have a new love. What happens is these Gentiles hear that the Jews in Jerusalem, the believers in Christ in Jerusalem, are going through a time of famine and lack food, money, and the things they need, so the Gentiles in Antioch take up an offering and send it by the hand of Barnabas and Saul down to Jerusalem to help them out. You can imagine what the Jewish believers were thinking, This is like really freaky. We didn't even think that these Gentiles could be saved, that they could even be Christians, and now they're helping us out. Now they're sending us money.

You see how God changes hearts? You see how Christianity gets people to love their brothers and to help others out? This is actually faith that works. This is Christianity 101. This is putting your faith into shoe leather. When you hear about a people that love the Lord that are going through hard times, then you open up your heart, you open up your wallet, you open up your pocketbook, you open up your home, and you reach out and try to love, help, and encourage them. John says in his epistle, how can you say the love of God dwells in you if you see your brother or sister have need and you shut your heart up and don't help them in their time of need? How can you love God whom you haven't seen and not love your brother whom you have seen? There is this new love that is fostered by these Gentiles in reaching out to the Jews.

This is a spiritual principle. The spiritual principle is given in Galatians 6:6. It says, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." The principle is that if somebody is ministering to you spiritual things, that you should take care of their material things. You should take care of them physically and take care of them by feeding, encouraging, helping, and ministering to them. It's a principle of giving. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." This is grace giving.

Notice verse 29, "...every man according to his ability," that's what the Bible teaches about our giving. It says that we should give according to our ability, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver," or a hilarious giver. If you don't give with cheerfulness, you might as well not give because God really doesn't need your money. It's a privilege that God gives to us. You should never be coerced or pressured or forced. The church should never call you and say, "Where's your giving," or "How much are you giving?" That happens and it's sad and tragic. It's between you and God. Your right hand shouldn't know what your left hand is doing. You should do it in secret, and your Father that sees in secret will reward you openly. You don't do it to get your picture in the foyer, "Top Giver of the Month," you do it as unto the Lord. You do it according to the ability, so don't feel bad if you don't have the ability to give a lot because the amount doesn't matter. Remember the story of the widow's mite? Jesus said that woman had given more than all of them put together, and all she did was put like half a penny in. She gave out of her want.

These believers there in Antioch, moved by the Holy Spirit, the love of Christ filling their heart, wanted to minister back to the Jews that had blessed them. The gospel had come to them from Jerusalem, now they wanted to go back to Jerusalem and help them. Very practically, we as a

church here in America, if we hear about our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world that are suffering, what should we do? We should help them, right? We as individuals, we as a church, we as the people of God have brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering, who need our help; so we need to pray, we need to get engaged, and we need to give to help others who are in need. Amen?