

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

“Moaners and Sneakers” or “Movers and Shakers?” (Part One)

Acts 11:19-30

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Within a 20 miles radius of our church, there are approximately 150 congregations. I don't know if that sounds like a lot of churches to you or not, but I know that this means there are a lot of signs that include the word “church” on them in our area. I could not tell you how many of these church are Protestant or not and I certainly cannot tell you how many of them would be considered Bible-believing, evangelical churches. But this much I do know – that not one of these churches would be in existence today if it were not for the tenacity, the eagerness, and the obedience of just one church in particular. The church that I am speaking of came into being some ten years after our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. The year of establishment for this church was around 40 AD. And from the first mention of this church, God's hand of providence and blessing was evident upon it.

While the church in Jerusalem, as we noted last week, was experiencing a spiritual rut through which God shook up their status quo by the preaching of Peter to the Gentile Cornelius and his family, this other church was already filled with people willing to get out of their comfort zones and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. If Acts 10 and the first half of Acts 11 were about a church in a spiritual rut, then the second half of Acts 11 is about a church experiencing the fullness of spiritual success. We need to be like the this second church as seen in our text.

What church was it that pushed itself beyond the comfort zones and the status quo? It was the church at Antioch; Antioch, Syria. So remarkable was this particular church that it gained a reputation, along with a nickname for all her members. It was at this church that the believers were first called, “Christians.” It would be this church that God would use to launch some of the most significant efforts in reaching the Gentiles, people like you and me; non-Jews, for Christ. It is because of this church that you and I are meeting today.

Let me introduce you to Antioch. The city was located, about 15 miles from the Mediterranean coast and about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the cosmopolitan metropolis

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of Syria and served for a time as the capital of the Roman province in Asia. Rome was so taken with this city that it was assigned the rank of a Roman colony. However, during the first century, if Corinth to the west was the “Las Vegas” of its day, the city of sin; then Antioch, to the east, was like the Atlantic City of its day. It would be in this booming yet grossly sinful city that the church there would become the hub of the missionary outreaches to the Gentiles. It would almost appear that the church in Jerusalem, during the 40’s of the first century, had been so taken in by the spiritual rut we looked at in Acts 10, that the most influential church at the time became the one in Antioch.

Why was the church at Antioch so successful and influential? You may not like the answer to this question. What made Antioch so influential was that they did things differently there than in Jerusalem. Obviously the message of the gospel was exactly the same, but what they did with the gospel was different. And because of this, it was God’s pleasure to work through this church to spread the good news of His Son Jesus as Lord and Savior. We need to learn and practice the attitudes and actions of this church.

By way of reminder, the book of Acts is the history of the early church during the first thirty years of its existence. In Acts 1-7 we saw the attention focused on Peter and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. In Acts 8-12, the Holy Spirit was pushing the church out of its comfort zone; out of its rut; out of the status quo. The focus was moving away from the Jewish believers and from Peter and on to Gentile believers along as upon the one who would be the apostle to the Gentiles, that is Paul.

And one of the things we need to grasp is this; if we get stuck in our spiritual ruts and remain comfortable in our status quos; then the excitement and vitality of the gospel will wane and we will not see the kind of growth the Lord desires for His church. But what happens if we are willing to break out of these ruts and shake up our comfortable patterns of existence? Beloved, all heaven may break loose! And our text reveals to us how we as a church, as well as individuals, can become “movers and shakers” for the gospel rather than moaners and sneakers!

In Acts 11:19-30 we see a church on the cutting edge of God’s purposes. As we look closely at this church we learn valuable lessons as to how to be a church that is truly effective for God; you and I need to be remembering and practicing these things. We are going to break this passage up into three parts, looking first this morning at the fundamentals of an effective church. Next week we will see the fruit of an effective church along with the fellowship of an effective church; but let us begin with this first characteristic of the church at Antioch that needs to be true for Hope CBC and each of her members.

I. We see the church’s fundamentals (19-21).

The late football strategist Vince Lombardi was a fanatic about fundamentals. Those who played under his leadership often spoke of his intensity, his drive, his endless enthusiasm for the guts of the game. Time and again he would come back to the basic techniques of blocking and tackling. On one occasion his team, the Green Bay Packers, lost to an inferior squad. It was bad enough to lose . . . but to lose to *that* team was absolutely inexcusable. Coach Lombardi called a practice the very next morning. The men sat silently, looking more like whipped puppies than a team of champions. They had no idea what to expect from the man they feared the most.

Gritting his teeth and staring holes through one athlete after another, Lombardi began:
“Okay, we go back to the basics this morning. . . .”

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Holding a football high enough for all to see, he continued to yell:

"Gentlemen, this is a football!"

How basic can you get? He's got guys sitting there who have been playing on gridirons for 15 to 20 years . . . who know offensive and defensive plays better than they know their kids' names . . . and he introduces them to a football! That's like saying, "Maestro, this is a baton." Or, "Librarian, this is a book." Or, "Marine, this is a rifle." Or, "Mother, this is a skillet." Talk about the obvious! Yet the fundamentals needed to be learned; or relearned.

Beloved, the church was first planted in Jewish ground, there in Jerusalem. But now the seed of the gospel had been broadcast about and it landed on Gentile ground. And some of that ground was good soil. One such place was Antioch, where the seed of the gospel germinated, sprouted and grew. This is not a surprise to us, for Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church..." But how does He build His church? Do you ever think about that? Out text reveals to us two fundamentals God uses to build His church. We need to remember that this is how God builds the church.

A. God dispenses His people to reach the lost (19-20).

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

How does the Lord build His church? How does God reach the lost? He dispenses, or scatters His people. The first fundamental of church growth is this, that we remember we are a scattered people. How many of you are originally from Rogers, Arkansas? Just a few. The rest of you have been dispensed here by God; perhaps because of a job; because of other family; but you have been brought here. For the early church, notice what God used to dispense His people.

1. He used adversity (19). What adversity? In verse 19, Luke takes us all the way back to Acts 8 and the persecution in connection with Stephen. Stephen had fearlessly preached the gospel to a hostile crowd that had him arrested, and eventually had him stoned to death. We read of this in Acts 8:1-3...

1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

It was a horrific time as individuals and families fled for their livelihoods and lives. However, in the providence of God, it was His means of dispensing His people to accomplish His purpose of spreading the gospel of His Son. God moved His people and turned many of them from being the persecuted into being the preachers.

Out text tells us they went to Phoenicia, which is the coastal region north of Galilee; they went to Cyprus, which is an island in the Mediterranean Sea northwest of Israel; and they went

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where? They went to Antioch. Luke names a specific city. God’s people were scattered to these places because of persecution. So is persecution bad? Yes, and God will hold accountable those who persecute His people. Yet at the same time God allows persecution and adversity to get His people out of their comfort zone in order to accomplish His greater purposes.

We know that the economy has not been good here in the States for some time; and many of us know those who have been out of work, or underpaid. But it was worse to be a Jewish Christian in the middle of the first century. Many lost their jobs, their home and some lost their freedom, being imprisoned, and others lost their lives. But because of this and through all of this, others heard the gospel and were given the hope of eternal life, including here, some in *Antioch*. So God will use adversity to scatter His people in order to reach the lost. I would suspect that most of us have been scattered here for much less hostile reasons, but we have been dispensed here nonetheless. But there is a second part to what God uses to reach the lost; and specifically to reach the lost in Antioch...

2. *He used the actions of His people (20)*. In verse 20 we note that the believers who escaped from the persecution in Jerusalem also spread the message of Jesus. There was just one problem, they spoke **“the word to no one except to Jews alone.”** There is that comfort zone thing, that spiritual rut. Some moaning about having to leave Jerusalem; some sneaking about, being careful with whom they share anything about Jesus. We are reminded that it is easy to go to those who are like us. It is much more difficult to get out of our comfort zone to reach those who are not like us.

But then we read in verse 20 of some others who were different. *“But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.”* It is interesting that the believers from Jerusalem went only to the Jews; but those who shared the gospel with the Greeks were not from Jerusalem. These were from Cyprus, the island off the Mediterranean coast and Cyrene, which is on the northern coast of Africa, modern day Libya. God used people from Gentile territories to begin this work of reaching the Gentiles. God moves His people around to accomplish His purposes. We must never forget that we are not here for ourselves, our because we were born here, or because of a job or because of a marriage. We are here in Northwest Arkansas because God has moved us here, for this time.

Now, God brought in some non-native Jews to Antioch to accomplish His purposes. But this is not to say that “native” Jews could not reach Gentiles. We already have seen Peter preaching to Cornelius and his household. And native Jews will be used yet to preach to Gentiles. But as things get started in Antioch, God raised up some people from a “non-traditional” background, one which prepared them to go where others were afraid to go. And the point we need to remember is this, that Jesus is not just the Savior of the Jews, but He is the Savior of all kinds of people. Now no one in the church at Jerusalem would disagree with this, but they were not comfortable with this. We would all agree with the statement, “Jesus can save anybody!” Right? That is not the problem. The problem is that we are not always willing to go and share the gospel with the anybodies. That is what had happened to many, if not most of the dispersed Jews. Fearful of leaving their comfort zones, they clammed up.

However, while a believer’s fear is no excuse for not being a mover and shaker, God will raise up fearless people to receive the blessing of sharing the gospel. You might want to note

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that back in Acts 6:5, where we were introduced to the seven “deacons” of the early church, one of them was named Nicolas. And do you know where he was from? He was from Antioch. He was a Gentile who had converted to Judaism and then was saved. Beloved, do you believe that God is sovereign over your background and upbringing and where you live? If you do, then you know that you have your background, seemingly good or bad, to be used by God to open doors of opportunity to reach the lost with the good news. The first fundamental we must remember is this, God dispenses His people where He will to reach the lost. But there is a second fundamental to remember...

B. God draws the lost to Himself (21).

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

These handfuls of fearless believers were speaking about Jesus to others and people were believing and turning to the Lord. Why? Was it because these movers and shakers were so charming and charismatic, was it because they could communicate so well? No, our text tells us simply that, **“the hand of the Lord was with them.”** We often get fearful to speak to others about Jesus. We think that we are inadequate for the task; that we do not know enough Scripture. All this may be true, but if you are a believer, you have everything you need to share the gospel.

Let me present you with a hypothetical – maybe it shouldn’t be a hypothetical, but let’s start here. Let’s say that we, as a church, are going to go out in pairs to share the gospel in the neighborhood here in Rogers. Two by two, we are going to go out and speak to other people about salvation through Jesus. Are any of you intimidated yet? Now, as part of this campaign, you are given first choice as to who will be your witnessing partner. Who will you choose? For many of us, the instinct would be to select the person who we think knows can best share Christ, who seems to know all the right Scriptures, who can articulate things to others, right? In fact, ideally, or so we think, this other person, whether it be the pastor, and elder, a deacon, or someone strong in the Lord, can do all the talking so that we can just sit back and watch and learn. In other words, so we can stay in our comfort zones.

But let me remind you of something. We forget the fundamental truth about being witnesses for Jesus. It is not eloquence that draws people to Jesus. It is not knowing a 1000 verses of the bible, or being able to explain the theological significance of the kenosis of Jesus Christ from Philippians 2. I sense a sigh of relief about that! These things do not draw people to Christ. God can and does use such things and so we can learn them, but they do not draw people to Jesus. When we faithfully tell others about Jesus, we need to realize that that we witness knowing that God is at work as we do. God is the ultimate witnessing partner. We tell others about Jesus, God draws people to Jesus. When we speak to others about Jesus, let us never forget what Jesus Himself said in John 6:44

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...

Our job and the job of these faithful believers in Antioch, was simply to tell people about Jesus and then to let **“the hand of the Lord”** do the rest. What a peace and comfort this is. What an incentive this is to speak to others about Jesus. All I must do is lovingly share the truth that Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of

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God; that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord; that we must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, on His sacrifice as being in my place, so that by His death, I might have eternal life. I share that God is Holy and sinless, that all of us, by nature are unholy and sinful; but that God so loved the world, all kinds and types of people, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, those trapped in the snares of Islam as well as those who are in the snare of lifeless, meaningless cultural Christianity; that He, God sent His only beloved Son so that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life. Then I call them to believe; to trust and to turn to the Lord. That is my job! But it is God’s job to take anything that I say; anything that you say, and to then draw that person to Himself.

I do not claim to understand why God has chosen to do it this way, to use often fearful, sometime rebellious children like ourselves to make the truth of the gospel known. But I do know this; God has called us to be witnesses of Jesus Christ, to cooperate with Him in preaching Jesus, so that through our witness, He might draw the lost to His Son. In short then, we share, God saves. We tell others about Jesus, and God turns people to Jesus. It is simply the way God has made it work.

But what happens when the faithful do tell others about Jesus and God does draw them to His Son? Then lost people believe and turn. And we see this in our text there at the end of verse 21. Because the hand of the Lord was with them drawing sinners to Jesus, we see two evidences of salvation that were revealed.

First, note with me that salvation means trusting in the Lord. Our text says that as a result of these believers who were speaking to the Greeks and preaching Jesus, that **“a large number”... “believed.”** The word “believed” means to trust, to place their hope and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ; in what He said and in what He did. But there is more...

Second, salvation means turning to the Lord. Our text says that those who believed **“turned to the Lord.”** To turn to the Lord implies that you turn from something else. What is that something else? Whatever it was that used to be your focus and priority in life. To turn to the Lord is to see all other things, whether it is family, work or pleasure, as secondary to knowing, loving and living for Jesus. To turn to the Lord means a radical shift from one direction to another direction. This new direction is **“to the Lord.”** Directed at the Lord; looking to the Lord; eyes fixed on what He fixed His own eyes on. Our heart’s desire in salvation is to possess what was His heart’s desire; to be able to say with Jesus, **“I have glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).** And what is my work? To be a witness for Jesus. Turning to the Lord is being able to say with Jesus, **“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).** If you might allow me to apply that verse to make it speak more pointedly to us, I might say it this way, **“My food is to do the will of Him who SAVED me to accomplish His work.”**

This very idea is wrapped up in the words of Ephesians 2:8-10, verses that you need to know, at least in principle if you would be most effective in sharing the gospel of Jesus to others. What does this passage say?

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. /10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

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I have been saved; you have been saved in order to accomplish the work of Him who saved you! This is turning to the Lord! And so, salvation is always this trusting and turning. If you are a Christian, it is because you have come to trust *in* the Lord rather than in yourself. And if you are a Christian, it is because you have turned *to* the Lord and have given Him first place in your life. Beloved, it is a "package deal" - trusting and turning always go together. And when it happens, it is the evidence that God is at work; that His hand is with us. If you are uncertain about whether you are a Christian, let me just ask you this, "Are you trusting in and turning to the Lord?" If you are not, then you are not a Christian. Call upon the Lord and ask Him to save you; to trust and turn.

And for all of us, beloved, we are witnesses of Jesus; this is a Bible, the journal of what we are to tell others about Jesus. God has you here to be a witness, to reach the lost; to tell them about Jesus. And as you do, leave the drawing of their hearts to Jesus to hand of God. Focus this week on speaking to others and preaching the Lord Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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