

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

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

*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.*

Last week we were introduced to this church at Antioch. The church at Antioch stands in contrast to the church at Jerusalem. Remember that back at the end of Acts 10 and half way into Acts 11, we found both Peter and the church in Jerusalem in a rut. Yes, they were preaching the gospel. Yes, people were being saved, by and large Jewish people; and yes, things were happening by the hand of God. Yet, with all of this, the church was not fulfilling its call, its mandate to spread the gospel to the remotest part of the earth. The church at Jerusalem was growing inward to a certain extent and God, through the preaching of Peter to Cornelius, was shaking up the status quo.

But with all of this, there were some moaners and sneakers; those Jewish Christians who were wondering and complaining about Gentiles coming into the church; and more specifically, Gentiles coming into the church without first becoming Jewish. Along with this, because of the persecution on the church by Saul, some of these Jewish Christians were scattered and then being selective at best and secretive at worse in preaching the gospel to the Jews alone. In other words, they were sneaking around when it came to the gospel.

In contrast to those in the spiritual rut that came from the church in Jerusalem, there were the people in the church at Antioch. We notice that a Gentile by the name of Nicolas, who was one of the first deacons mentioned back in Acts 6:5 was from Antioch. Perhaps he found his way back to his hometown and preached the gospel. This coupled with some non-native Jews from Cyrene and Cyprus, one such man being Barnabas, saw the gospel preached to Jews and Gentiles alike, and because of the bold willingness to speak of Jesus to anyone and everyone, God was blessing the church in Antioch profoundly. The church was being effective.

And all of this calls us to examine our own hearts, as well as the generally attitude we have as a church to fulfill our Lord’s commission to take the gospel to the remotest part of the earth. May I point out, that from the perspective of these first believers that we are reading about here in

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the book of Acts, we who are in Northwest Arkansas would be considered part of the furthest reaches of the earth. In other words, we need to check our hearts and correct our thinking and then pray fervently that God would use us to reach the lost in our city and in our region because we are ready to proclaim Jesus as boldly as had these believers in Antioch.

And so, our approach to our text is focused on how to be an effective church and effective church members even as these believers were in Antioch. To this end, we have to make a choice whether to be movers and shakers for the kingdom of God, or moaners and sneakers. We looked at the first of three points that directed the believers in Antioch to be effective for Jesus Christ. These are three things that need to be true of Hope and of each of us. Let me remind you of what we covered in this first point and then finish it up as I was unable to teach on the important truths found at the end of verse 21. We will get to our second and third points in the weeks to come, but let us be reminded first of the church’s fundamentals.

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

In verses 19-21 we noted two fundamental truths about the way God works among His people to see the gospel preached and people saved. First, we noted...

### 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; scattered in order to be right where God wants us to be to share the gospel! If we believe that God is sovereign over our backgrounds and upbringings, then we know that we have our backgrounds, 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 principle we must remember is this, God dispenses His people where He will to reach the lost. But there is a second fundament 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.*

In short, we must never forget that God is sovereign in salvation; that He draws people to His Son Jesus Christ. Yet, we must also never forget that God uses His people, people like you and me; to deliver the message of hope and salvation by which He draws sinners to Jesus.

Our text tells us 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. 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.

Now all of this brings us to verse 21. I did not get to touch on these verses last week, so this is new material for us to consider. And the question I asked myself as I came to verse 21, after considering these two fundamental principles of God dispensing His people where He wants

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them and then God drawing sinners to His Son is this; what happens when the faithful do tell others about Jesus and God does draw them to His Son? Notice verse 21 what happens; then lost people believe and turn. Because the hand of the Lord was with them drawing sinners to Jesus, we see first the extent of God’s drawing followed by two evidences of salvation that were revealed.

## THE EXTENT OF GOD’S DRAWING

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

Let us first note the **extent** of God’s drawing in verse 21. Our text says that as a result of these believers who were speaking to the Greeks and preaching Jesus, that **“a large number”... “believed.”** Let us not miss the greatness of this statement, a large, a poll of people were numbered. The word “numbered” – *“arithmos”* in the Greek (from where we get our word arithmetic), speaks of a counted up number of people. This group was large. The city of Antioch and the surrounding areas were being reached for Jesus in such a way that number upon number of such people were being added up. Beloved, when our great God does something, He does it greatly! And this is Luke’s point; that because the believers in Antioch were simply committed to preaching Jesus to anyone and everyone, God’s hand; His power was working through the preaching, causing many to come to Jesus. Beloved, if we want to see God’s hand with us, working through us to be effective for the kingdom, then the action is simple: we need to, like it is said of these believers in Antioch in verse 20, be those who *“begin” speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.* To whom do you need to begin speaking and preaching the Lord Jesus? To whom can you begin speaking and preaching the Lord Jesus? Say something about Jesus to others! Share verses of salvation! Ask people what they believe about Jesus, God and the Bible. Will it make you uncomfortable? Perhaps, very likely! But how much more uncomfortable will it be to stand before God on the final day and to have Him ask you, “My child, why did you not speak of My Son and your Savior more willingly to those I sent your way?”

Let us resolve, be determined, be decided and intentional reminding ourselves, “I am a witness of Jesus, an ambassador of Christ, I will speak of my Lord’s grace and of my Savior’s glorious salvation to others.

## THE EVIDENCES OF GOD’S DRAWING

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

### BELIEVED

Having seen the extent of God’s drawing, let us now look at this word **“believed”** in verse 21. This is the first of two evidences Luke reveals of the salvation of a person; he has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Basically, the word **“believed”** means to have trusted, to have placed one’s hope and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ; both in what He said and in what He did.

I would like to pause and linger here for a moment on this important word “believe.” What did these people believe? We answer simplistically with the apostle Paul, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31). Yes, beloved, it is that simple. But believe what still remains? Believe what about Jesus? What was the content of the gospel that was preached to the people there in Antioch? Beloved, from the evidence and content of Scripture, we know that it means to believe on the Lord Jesus. Let me walk you through it:

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First, believing means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners (Romans 5:6-8<sup>1</sup>; 1 Peter 3:18<sup>2</sup>);

Second, believing on the Lord Jesus means abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace (Romans 4:4-5<sup>3</sup>; Philippians 3:10<sup>4</sup>);

Third, it is believing that there has been an exchange of your own natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of your heart by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3-7<sup>5</sup>; Romans 8:6-8<sup>6</sup>).

This is what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And let me remind you, that those to whom God grants this belief, these do not believe just once, sometime in the past, and then go on to live however they please. The act of believing is ongoing! The verb tense of **“believed”** in our verse speaks of some definite action that took place in the past but that they also continue in the state of that action; that is they continued to believe. It is not enough to say you prayed a prayer, or walked an aisle, or were catechized as a child. The question is this, do you continue to believe? Does Christ continue to change and transform your life?

But someone may ask me, “Preacher, how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if, as you say, I have no natural ability to do these things?” To such a question I reply, “Look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never again, from this time forward, stray from Him. Turn to Him and trust Him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him; watch, pray, read and hear God’s Word, worship and commune with God’s people, and so continue till

<sup>1</sup> **Romans 5:6-8** - 6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>2</sup> **1 Peter 3:18** - For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit...

<sup>3</sup> **Romans 4:4-5** - 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness...

<sup>4</sup> **Philippians 3:8-9** - 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...

<sup>5</sup> **Titus 3:3-7** - 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

<sup>6</sup> **Romans 8:6-8** - 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

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you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you.<sup>7</sup>

This is what it means to believe biblically. This is the essence of the New Testaments teaching on what it means to believe. And so, when we read that these who heard the bold preaching of those in Antioch, we can be assured that their gospel message proclaimed these things and that the people believed these things. And such a belief is the first evidence of salvation.

## TURNED TO THE LORD

But I told you there were two such evidence of salvation; the first being that they believed, and now notice the second evidence that is linked to the first, that the people **“turned to the Lord.”** The word “turned” is not a direct reference to repentance. To be sure, these believers had repented. But that is not the word Luke uses here. Rather, he used a word that speaks of turning to something as an expression of commitment. By use of this word, the idea is to turn to one thing in order to forsake something else. To turn to the Lord then implies that these people turned from something else. What is that something else? That something else is that thing or things 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, whatever it might be, 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 great 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.”** These believers in Antioch turned from their own self-will and self-directed lives to possess and practice the Lord’s will.

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. Please turn there and let us be reminded of what this passage says:

**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.**

*8 For by grace [God initiated and God drawn] you have been saved through faith [belief on the Lord Jesus Christ]; and that not of yourselves [did not ordinate within you], it is the gift of God [an expression of His grace]; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. [we have no natural ability to please God in ourselves]. 10 For we are His workmanship [we are His own*

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<sup>7</sup> This section of the sermon is based off of J.I. Packer’s Introductory Essay to John Owen’s “The Death of Death in the Death of Christ.”

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*working], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them [we get to work with and experience God's grace to bring Him glory].*

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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