

The Gospel Centred Church

Acts 11:19-30

This church at Antioch played a crucial role in the history of the world-wide church. In fact, you are here because of what happened in Antioch.

Speaking the Word

Cornelius, a Gentile Roman has been converted. But his life had been shaped by the Bible. Up to this point, the gospel has not yet gone to total pagans. All that changes at Antioch.

Antioch was a melting-pot of the nations, and it was here that Jewish Christians – scattered by persecution – started talking to these pagans. But what was it they talked about? The Lord Jesus. But not, ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ because the fact that Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, was meaningless to these pagans. But they knew all about lords. So they told them that Jesus was the Lord they needed, who had come, not to take from them, but to give himself for them.

But we don’t know the names of the men who did this. They were ordinary, unknown people. That tells us we don’t need a title, or to be famous to make our lives count. We just need to be obedient, and live for Jesus’ glory, not our own.

Seeing Grace

Barnabas was a great encourager, and he saw what was going on as evidence of God’s grace. That takes a certain mind-set, because churches can be messy places. But Barnabas sees all the mess, and he sees through it to the grace of God. He could have seen everything that was wrong, but he doesn’t. He sees what God *is* doing and it makes him glad. If instead you concentrate on what is still wrong, it makes you miserable and frustrated. But seeing grace makes you glad.

And Barnabas pours in encouragement. A true encourager tells you the hard things as well as the easy things, but they do it with love. We all need encouragers in our lives, but we also need to be encouragers for those around us.

Barnabas could be an encourager because he was a good man – a man of integrity, because he was full of the Spirit – the gospel was changing the way he saw others, and because he was full of faith: faith in the power of God and of grace.

Seizing opportunities

Because Barnabas believed in the power of the gospel, he went and got Paul. He saw the possibility for further advance. The church at Antioch also saw and seized the possibility and became a missionary powerhouse.

Standing out

The church in Antioch so successfully bridged the divides of race that they stood out, and the people of Antioch had to invent a new name for them: Christians. Because it was Christ who united them. When you know Jesus’ love for you, and for your black brother or sister, you will love them.

And their love was more than talk. They gave to the poor in Jerusalem. When you understand how generous God has been to you, it will open your hands in acts of generosity to others.