

The Church at work – New Testament style!

Acts 11:19-30



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Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch,

Luke takes us back in time.
The believers had to escape from persecution.
Satan's intention was to destroy but –
God's result was to spread the seed.

Where would they go? To friends and family contacts?



They travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch,

Antioch was a large city with a estimated population at that time of 400-500 thousand inhabitants. It also had a sizeable Jewish community living there.



speaking the word to no one except Jews.

They were sharing the gospel with their Jewish contacts

– This group would be familiar with teaching about the true God

There was plenty of work to do. Perhaps they had no real contacts with gentiles.



But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene,

Some were Jewish men from Greek speaking Cyprus and north Africa (Libya)
Were they more used to contact with gentiles?



on coming to Antioch, they spoke to the Hellenists also,
preaching the Lord Jesus.

The Hellenists ie. Those also having a Greek speaking background
Gentile proselytes would already have been in the synagogues
So these were probably gentiles who had contacts with them.

They shared the heart of the message
– the Lord Jesus



A time of openness and great response

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

The Hand of the Lord is a wonderful thing - when it is with you!
God was helping them in this new outreach

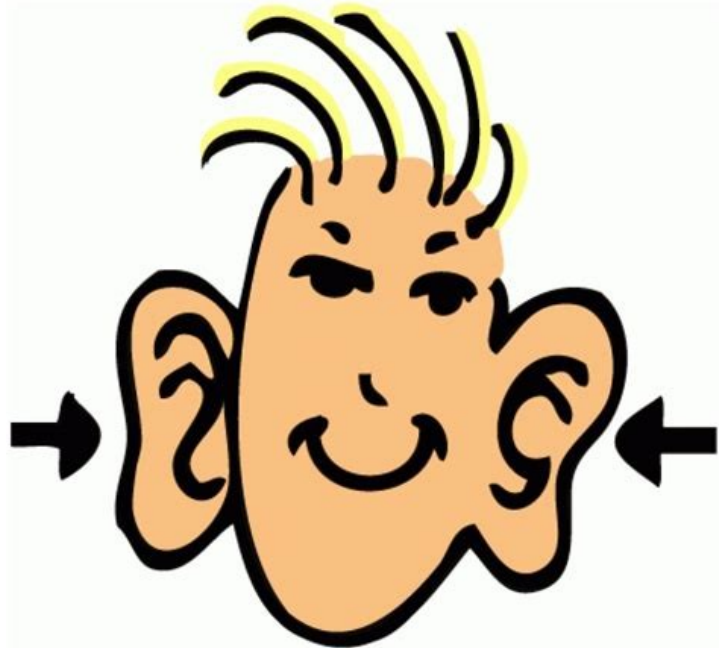


The Church was evangelistic. It wasn't just 'professionals' sharing Jesus.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem,

Word gets back to the 'mother' church

Each location is a 'church' but also a part of THE church.



A church with ears! They were aware of what is going on around them too.

and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

This was a fact finding mission
– the church commissioned Barnabas.

It was official – not just his idea
(Who paid for him to go?)



When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad,

What did he see in the people? Note his good response

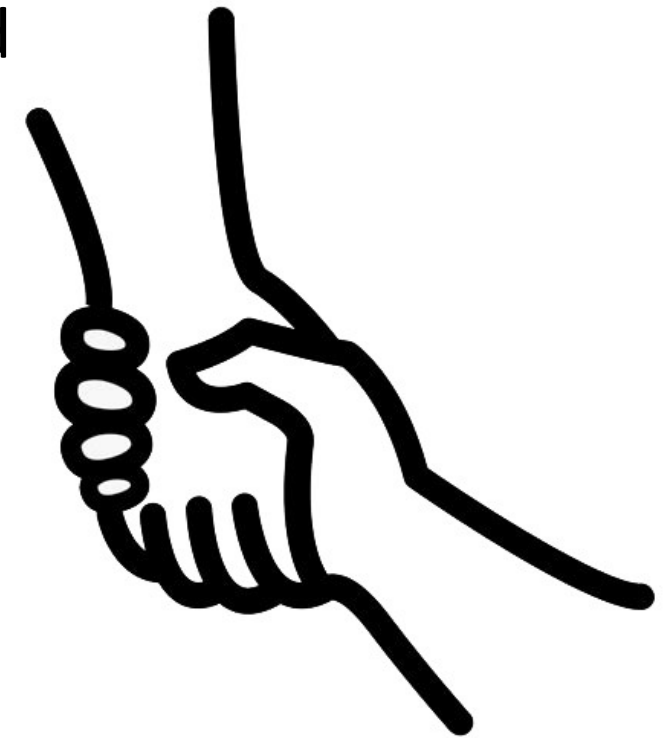


and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,

Doing what his name was – encouraging!

He found a congregation that was faithful to the Lord

Keep it up!



for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

An encourager's qualifications

A moral, helpful, kind person

Showing the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Full of faith – he believed in the God of the possible!



And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The growth continues under God's blessing
The people came to the Lord
Not to Barnabas.
They are the Lord's people.



So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,

He was a leader who was willing to call for others to help.
He recognised that the people needed teachers
And he 'knew' just the man for this work among the Jewish
and gentile believers.

Where to find Saul in Tarsus?



and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

Success! How did he persuade Saul to come?



For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.

This was a great investment of time, prayer, example, and teaching.

It shows the importance of a good biblical foundation in the churches.

People were willing to learn – a great many. Therefore, God's blessing was upon them.



And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

A new name – given by those outside the church to those believers inside it.

It was not necessarily an insult – just a way of marking them out from the other groups around, and specifically named after their founder/leader – Christ – the Messiah.

People outside could see they were different (hopefully in a good way).



Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

A visit from the church in Jerusalem. Contacts with the 'home' church were still maintained.

Prophets were men open to and gifted by the Spirit.

Preaching was the main job of prophet.

As God led they sometimes gave revelation of future events. God does this for a reason.

He doesn't just give information to satisfy our curiosity



And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world

This was a worship service open to people able to share what God gave them.

Agabus gave a word of prophecy about a coming famine.

In all the world? By this Luke means in the locality of Israel, and the Roman empire.

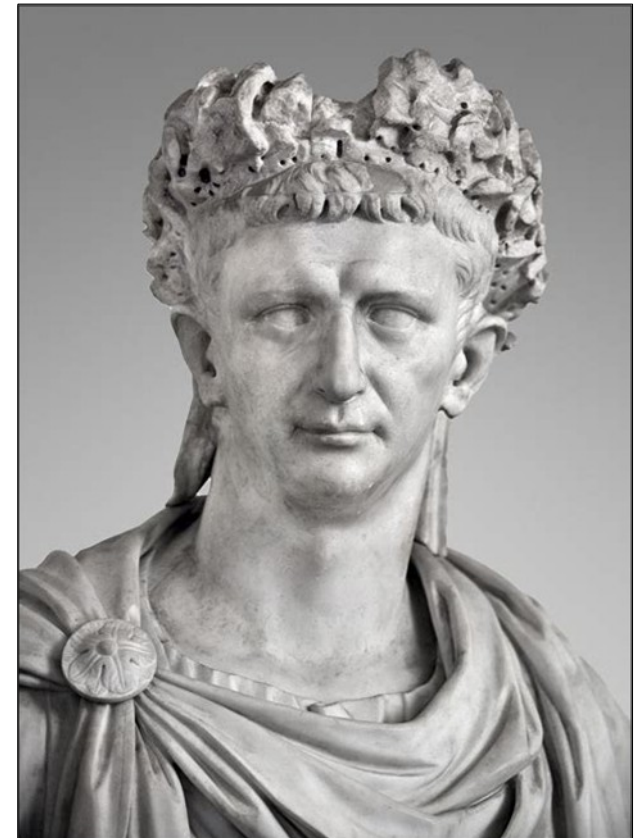


(this took place in the days of Claudius).

The Roman emperor Claudius ruled from AD 41 to 54.

During this time there were recorded at least 4 large famines
- not a good CV for an emperor!

Ultimately, even emperors are not in control!
And he didn't have a Joseph to help him.



So the disciples determined,

Here is a kind of Joseph among the believers.

The church was made up of disciples.

Determined disciples! They decided to do something about what God had shown them in the prophecy.



every one according to his ability,

Each one wanted to be involved. This was not forced.
They thought about what they could afford
– not everyone is the same.

cf. the widow's penny!



to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

They were aware of the needs of fellow believers in Judea – many were poor and had suffered challenging circumstances as a result of the persecution. And now the famine would be hitting them hard.

It was no sin on their part – troubles are part of the journey, but it was an opportunity for these gentile believers to show their love for their Jewish brothers and sisters, and also for the needy believers to see God's hand in moving these gentile brothers and sisters to help them.



And they did so, sending it to the elders

It wasn't just a good idea
– they got it organised.

They sent their gift to the leaders of the Jerusalem church – understanding that they were in the best position to see that those in need got it.

It also illustrates how the church was organised – similar to the synagogue, with a number of elders in leadership.



by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

They sent 2 of their respected leaders to make sure it got there safely.

This was a church with 'common sense'



Some 20 years later, after these events, Paul writes to the Christians in Rome – at that time a majority Gentile church about preparing aid help for the believers in Judea.

Romans 15:25-27, But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.





Something of note is that the response of the people in being open to the gospel and receiving salvation is attributed to the hand of the Lord.

There have been times in the history of the Church when there have been special seasons of 'harvesting' under God's blessing.

This is what happens in what we call 'times of revival'.

Let us pray for such times in our day as we continue to make Jesus known.