

## Acts Chapter 11

We will be looking at the church of Antioch and how the church came to be, what kind of people they were and what kind of ministries that they had. Many people when they look at the Antioch church, they would say ‘the blue print for a growing and vibrant church’. That is the church that we want to be, the Antioch kind of church.

### **The Scattering:**

How the church in Antioch kind of became the church at Antioch?

<sup>19</sup> Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Acts 11:19-21

It said here that because of the scattering and the persecution that rose over Stephen people travelled all around and they were sharing the word with the Jews. We see the cause of scattering in chapter 8

1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Acts 8:1-4

So this is kind of connection to what we are reading here in Chapter 11.

One thing that happened there is that people went around and they were first only speaking to the Jews and then later on some of them actually Cyprus and Cyrene, they were speaking to everybody at that point of time. The creative thing is that we know that later on Antioch becomes the church that sends Paul on his missionary journeys.

How did the Antioch church become established?

Because Paul allowed an execution to happen and because of his persecution people scattered and that scattering became the church that eventually will take Paul and send him on missions. That is how God works. He eventually builds that church with them as well but it is a bit crazy first to think why do people get scattered, it is because of persecution.

So people went around speaking the gospel because they were being persecuted. So it is sometimes strange for us to understand how does suffering actually progress the gospel. Because they were being persecuted, they went to different places and the gospel was being proclaimed to different areas.

When we are suffering and being persecuted on behalf of Christ, suddenly it is when the gospel becomes very easy. It is not difficult because if your lifestyle is such a way that you are running away because you are persecution and persevering on people will think that you are crazy and they want to hear your story.

It is one of the reasons that suffering is the agent of the gospel. There are many reasons why suffering is the agent of the gospel.

### **Why is suffering the agent of the gospel?**

Suffering is the ultimate expression of love; suffering is the ultimate expression of faith and is the ultimate expression of hope.

There is a connection between suffering and love. Imagine you hear this from two parents. I have two children, I can't really afford to put them through school but I am not willing to take on a second job. I am not willing to work hard; I am not willing to suffer for them. Anybody who hears that will say that the parent does not love his children.

Every parent is willing to suffer and take on extra job and work a bit harder because they love their children. So the expression of being willing to suffer is a sign that you love somebody. Now you would do a lot of things for a lot of people but you are only willing to suffer for a few. The people you really love you are willing to suffer for and the Bible teaches us God so loved the world that he sent his only son to die for. God declares his love that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. The ultimate expression of love points us to the death of Christ, which was the ultimate expression of that love, that suffering for love that we experience here on earth. Now how is suffering the ultimate expression of faith. Of course we have many stories in the Old Testament as well from Joseph who was thrown into and sold off as a slave and eventually persevered on and through his faith became the prime minister of Egypt.

*Suffering gives perseverance and perseverance gives character and character produces hope.*

When we have hard times in our lives and we have faith and we persevere on than that faith is being shown. So suffering is the greatest expression of faith. Again the greatest example of this in Peter, it says that the greatest example of this is Jesus's life itself. How he was persecuted and how he suffered but never spoke up against it and how he continued living his life. So it points us to the life of Jesus.

### **Hope:**

The Bible teaches us that these momentary afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory, whatever pain and suffering that we have are creating, our making glory for us in some mysterious way. So ultimately it is through suffering that we can express that hope. It means if while we are suffering and we continue to persevere on it is because we have hope in a glory that is being produced and that hope we can have guarantee on because we know that Christ has risen again. Because when he died he rose again from the grave. So

ultimately, hope and suffering and the hope that we have in suffering points us to the resurrection of Christ.

Putting this together, love points us to the death of Christ, the faith points us to the life of Christ and the hope points us to resurrection of Christ which ultimately means that through suffering which is the expression of love we get to experience God's grace and through faith we experience his presence because it is in the deepest darkest moments of our lives when we get on our knees and pray the most and we experience God's presence and ultimately we will experience God's glory in a time to come which is the hope that we have. In other words it means that our suffering saves because it gives us grace. It renews because it gives us his presence and changes us and it delivers us into a glory. Putting this in theological terms, *it justifies and it sanctifies and it glorifies*.

Christ suffering is the cause that causes us to respond which will bring out a result of no more suffering. The Bible teaches us that the last tear will be wiped away and that cause because we had a suffering savior makes that we will be suffering servants which will be that result that a body will come together and have no more suffering in the future.

How suffering is the agent of the gospel and how suffering was always used to proclaim the gospel and how God ordain suffering to make his gospel be known?

We can see that in Acts 11 here, because of the scattering that happened, because of the persecution that happened people were going out and proclaiming and they were able to share the gospel so easily because there were people who were suffering and people who expressed their faith in Christ because of the love of Christ and their hope in Christ.

St. Patrick was a great missionary who was born about 385 AD and he lived mainly through the fifth century and what happened was he as a young kid when he was 16 years old he was in Britain, he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and he was sold off into slavery in Ireland and he was sold into slavery to a Drewett family, and he had to work in slavery there and he was farming animals that was part of his job duty and then after about six or seven years he found an escape and he escaped back to England but in his time that he was there he started to learn language, he started to understand the culture of the Irish people and then when he came back to England he actually studied, he became a minister, he became a preacher and then he went back as a missionary back to Ireland and he evangelized to whole of Ireland. It is because he was captured as a slave and because he was suffering for six years, living as a slave that he was able to go back there understand the culture, understand the people and share the gospel with them. God sometimes ordain suffering for the proclamation of his gospel. It is a beautiful story of a slave returning back to captors and setting them free from the sin of slavery and he goes back and he did that and he was able to do that because of the persecution he faced and how God ordained Ireland to be saved for God.

### **Early Church Planters**

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

So there were these two other guys who did something completely extraordinary. They didn't just go to the Jews, they went to everybody. They went to the Hellenist, they went to the Greek people as well and they started spreading the gospel to everybody and because of that effect. And it says

<sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Somehow they were preaching and many people were coming and it was a sign that God was with them.

Statistics show that if I go out and I handout a thousand flyers for an event, I can expect 20 people to come. But if I had about thousand flayers and 50-100 people come, I know the hand of the Lord is with me.

God was doing something right then in there and that is what was happening at that moment. They were going out, they were sharing the gospel with people that nobody was sharing with. So that was happening in Antioch, so people were there, so people were sharing, people were coming to faith. There was a great happening.

From the scattering of the going it becomes now the growing and the discipleship happens.

<sup>22</sup> The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Now this is what happened church in Jerusalem was hearing great things that were happening, people are coming to faith over there. Instead of being jealous, they were excited and they took Barnabas. Barnabas was always the guy when Mark messes up, he says okay I will take Mark with me. He was always the encourager. He is besides people and builds. So they sent Barnabas, the encourager to go down there and be with the people and see what is happening there. Of course to give a report, are people really spreading the gospel there, is this really happening but also to encourage the church continue doing the great work and it is exactly what we read here.

<sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The question is what was that purpose?

The purpose was evangelizing. The purpose was going out and sharing the gospel. As the church was being built as people were coming there the first encouragement that was given is continue going out and sharing the gospel, continue being steadfast, continue being faithful in

doing that. As people were sharing going out, therefore many more people started to get to know people.

<sup>25</sup> So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> 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.

He might have thought, they are so many people I don't have the skill sets, I don't have the ability to equip all of them, so I am going and get that master equipper. Barnabas could have been like, no Antioch is my place, this is where I am going to grow my church, they are all my people, and I don't want to get anybody else's name. It is going to be church of Barnabas. He was not about making his name known. He was about making God's name known. So he went down to get somebody else to assist him with the ministry.

So ultimately they were discipling people in such a way that everybody recognized them to be different. Suddenly these people were living a kind of lifestyle that was so unique that they needed to have an identifier. They did not come up with a branding name and a logo. They were just acting in their lives so much that people say they are uniquely different. I am going to call them Christians. They were no longer this sect of Jews or these weird Romans. They had a unique identifier because of how they behaved and how they live their lives.

Do we go in our offices and schools and people look at us as a Christian but we call ourselves Christian, but it is no longer other people looking at us and calling us a specific name. How wonderful would it be when we go into this world and people say they are Christians because they are living their lives so differently.

The beautiful thing about that church we can read in chapter 13 is that they are multicultural church. There are people from everywhere, people from Africa, there were people from Middle East, they were rich people and there were poor people. So that is like the effect of heavy discipleship. You have people from all nations being equipped to be prophets and teachers. So today when we look at discipleship, I looked at some good terms where we can look at it.

What does it mean nowadays to be a disciple?

*"Disciples follow Jesus, form their lives around Jesus, and faithfully join the mission of Jesus."* Bobby Harrington & Josh Patrick

- Worship Christ
- Walk With Christ
- Work For Christ

In Antioch here we saw this great where people were going and sharing the gospel. We call it the winning part. We are winning people for the lord and as people were being warned the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas and then he got Paul to build the church, to mature to people, to disciple them and to eventually have the picture of sending which is multiplication. So that is what discipleship is. We win or we make Christians, we build the church or mature

Christians and then we multiply and then we send people into the field to win, to mature and to multiple. Going growing and sending.

## **The Sending**

There are two kinds of sending. The first kind is

<sup>27</sup> Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.<sup>28</sup> 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).<sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.<sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

So the first kind of sending was social aid. So they were sending money to help out their brothers somewhere else. They were having famine. They were not having good times, so people were sending financial aids. So doing social care. That was the first kind of sending by providing to their ability. It is kind of picture that we have in Acts 2, people coming together and sharing all things together so that nobody may lack.

The second sending that we see is in Chapter 13

<sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.<sup>4</sup> So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

So we can see here the second sending that they did is they sent their missionaries, their people off to go and do missions. So the church was established, after the church was established they got the people, the Holy Spirit spoke to some people and then they did, and they have lay hands and sent the people.

## **Who is that they send?**

When the scattering happened everybody was doing the preaching and teaching except for the apostles. The apostles stayed back in Jerusalem. Here as the people came together and became the church then Paul and Barnabas were building up, maturing them and as the church was a function church, it is about six years later they send out their teachers.

## **If we send our best in the field, will you come to church?**

The church sent out the people that were building them up. How ready are we to do such things? If we are not ready how are we equipping ourselves to be ready for that? What are

we doing about this? Are we getting ourselves ready so that we could send our teachers somewhere else? Are we part of that movement? Are we an ascending type church, because Antioch surely was?

*So often we are worried about our seating capacity rather than about our sending capacity.*

The interesting thing is where were they going? Where was the missionary journey is heading to and that is interesting.

They went from Antioch to the big cities. They did not go to the rural areas and plant churches. They went into the big cities because the culture of the city will affect the culture of the places around the city. It has always been like this and it will always be that way. If we want to win this country for Jesus, we are going to win this city for Jesus, because the culture of the city will influence the culture of all the areas around it. So from beginning the missionary journey was always to go into the city and share the gospel in the city.

### **Stats about Kuala Lumpur:**

We have 7.9 million people living in Metro Kuala Lumpur - Maybe 10 million by 2020. People are moving into the city. That is what is happening and it always has been and people will continue always to move into the city.

We have about 3% Christianity in the city right now. About different sources will give different statistics, everything from 3% to 9.4% depending on which Christians groups you include or not include and which statistics you are getting.

If we have 3% Christianity right now, to maintain a 3% Christianity and not to drop from a 3% Christianity. With an influx of 2 million people coming here in the next three years, we need to build churches that can house 60,000 people in just the next three years. If we fail to do that the Christianity in Kuala Lumpur will drop. That is the urgency of our city that is how much this city needs the gospel.

There are 7.6 million people in this city who will die and go to hell that are the facts of our city right now. If we don't go out and share the gospel and build churches.

### **How about reaching the unreached people groups?**

An unreached people group is a people group when less than 2% of their overall population worldwide is now Christian.

We don't have to go on far-far away mission trips to reach the nations for Jesus. They are right here with us. How are we living our lives so distinct that people might come to us and call us Christians in such a way that we will go out and share the gospel and save people lives. Are we these kinds of disciples?

John Wesley once said

*“Give me one hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergyman or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon the earth.” - John Wesley*

Are we these 100 man?

Thabiti Anyabwile recently in one of his gospel coalition conference said this

*“Dare we be so in love with our lives in this world that we will stand back while billions lose their souls and their lives in the world to come?” Thabiti Anyabwile*

Because of wrath of God will cause people their lives. It will cost 7.6 million people who are not saved in KL their eternal life or it will cost us our earthly life to let them know about Jesus, because the gospel is only good news when it gets there on time.

Are we going to be people who try to be disciples, who help the gospel get there on time? The Antioch church surely was a church like this. I pray we will be too.