

# The Lord's Hand in Antioch

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 11. Acts chapter 11, we're going to be reading verses 19 through 30. Acts chapter 11, verse 19.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen! traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks, also telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

[ 1 : 06 ] Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. During this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and through the spirit predicted a severe famine would spread through the entire Roman world.

This happened during the reign of Claudius. The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Antioch. It's a familiar name to us who are familiar with the New Testament.

It was the capital city of the Roman province of Syria, some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was one of the most important cities of the day, half a million people.

[ 2 : 17 ] That's three times the number living in South Bend and Mishawaka combined. We're told it ranked next to Rome and Alexandria in size, wealth, power, and vice.

It was third in population and full not only of wealth and power but vice. Sexual immorality was encouraged in Antioch by the worship of their goddess Astarte and her temple prostitutes.

And the whole religion had a degrading influence upon the moral climate of Antioch. And yet, the Lord Jesus Christ was determined to plant a church in just such soil as this.

This church in Antioch, comprised mostly of pagan Gentile converts, was to grow and become a new center of Christianity and of missions to the world.

In fact, they would be the sending church for none other than the Apostle Paul in taking the gospel to the nations. This was the church at Antioch. And in our text today, we learn how the gospel of Christ came to this city and how this important church came into existence.

[ 3 : 38 ] Luke will attribute it all to the hand of God, the hand of the Lord, or the grace of God. And as we follow Luke's account, there are helpful lessons for us who are also involved in the greatest building project of the ages, the building of Christ's church.

You remember the Lord Jesus said, I will build my church. And Luke's been telling us how the Lord Jesus did that, starting in Jerusalem, the very city where he had been crucified just months earlier.

And there were many Jewish converts in Jerusalem, but Jesus meant for his church to extend beyond Jerusalem and to go beyond just Jews.

They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, yes, but then in all Judea and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. So in chapter 8, you remember how Luke told us the way that the Lord Jesus got his witnesses outside of Jerusalem?

They were all still in Jerusalem. How did he get them out of Jerusalem? Well, he sent a persecution that arose over the stoning of Stephen with Saul as the chief instigator of it.

[ 4 : 59 ] And we were told back in Acts 8 that all the believers in Jerusalem, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

And everywhere they went, they told people about Jesus. We followed that account of Luke and we saw Philip going up to Samaria and there many Samaritans, half-breed Jews, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized into the church.

We then saw Philip go and meet that Ethiopian eunuch and we saw that man put his trust in the suffering servant of the Lord and was baptized into the church.

And then Peter was sent by the Lord Jesus to preach to Gentiles when he went to Cornelius and his household and all who heard the gospel believed and were baptized.

And so what we're seeing is Gentiles as Gentiles being welcomed into the church by way of repentance and faith. They don't have to become Jews and keep the Jewish laws.

[ 6 : 05 ] Just repent and believe the gospel. And when Peter got back to Jerusalem, he was criticized, you remember, for going into the house of a Gentile and his defense persuaded the Jewish believers there in Jerusalem and they concluded.

And here's their conclusion in verse 18 of our text. When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, so then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

Well, at verse 19, Luke hits the rewind button and he takes us right back to what happened in chapter 8 when the believers were scattered by the persecution.

And we saw that they were scattered into all Judea and Samaria. And what we now learn is that they got a whole lot further than just Judea and Samaria.

And we learned that what we've been reading for the last four chapters was not all that was happening in the way of gospel and church expansion. Rather, what we've been reading was a very selective telling of God's work, tracing it mainly through Philip and Peter.

[ 7 : 25 ] But now we're told that this important church in Antioch was planted not by Philip, not by Peter, or not by any apostle, but rather through the faithful witness of the gospel by ordinary rank-and-file believers.

You know, church history is a wonderful thing. And we profit by reading it. But you know, it only skims the surface of Christ building his church. There are lots of unnamed followers of Jesus who did exploits unknown to the world, unknown to church historians, but known and precious to Jesus Christ, who will be rewarded for their work by him.

Well, some of these unnamed believers in Jerusalem were scattered far beyond Judea and Samaria. Some of them went north all the way to Phoenicia with the great cities of Tyre and Sidon, just going straight up along the Mediterranean coast.

Others went even further and a hundred miles out into sea to the island of Cyprus. And some went even further north, 300 miles from Jerusalem to the city of Antioch.

They were indeed going into the ends of the earth. And yet, even in these foreign places, they found Jews living there.

[ 8 : 50 ] And that's who these witnesses told about the Savior Jesus. They told it only to the Jews. Only to the Jews.

Now, it seems they thought that the great commission of Christ to bear witness to him to the ends of the earth meant simply to find any Jews of the dispersion.

You remember that centuries before, God, in judging Israel, had brought the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, and he had scattered them throughout the then-known world. And so wherever these Christians now are being scattered in Acts chapter 8, they're finding Jews out here in these foreign lands.

And they think that, evidently, they're thinking, well, what God means by what Jesus' great commission meant was that we're to go out to the ends of the earth and see if there's any Jews out there to invite home to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And at any rate, they were only telling it to the Jews. They were not giving the gospel to any but the Jews. But there are some glorious exceptions to that rule, we're told in verse 20.

[ 10 : 04 ] That some of them, however, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. Perhaps concluding, we're not sure how they did that.

That was a huge step. You remember how huge it was for the apostle Peter to go into the house of a Gentile and to give the gospel. And here are these, 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

It could have been even before Peter went into Cornelius' house. We don't know the exact timing, but here they are far away from the apostles in Jerusalem. And these people perhaps just thought, you know, if Jesus Christ saved a wretch like me, why couldn't he save a Gentile?

And they started to tell Gentiles about the life and death and resurrection and promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ to all who believed.

Well, were they right to do so? The result of their witness was mass conversions, instantaneous success. Verse 21 says, a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

[ 11 : 18 ] And notice there, both aspects of conversion are found. They believed and they turned to the Lord. That's faith and repentance. Faith is believing the gospel promise that whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross for sinners and rising from the dead will not perish but have everlasting life.

They believed the promise of the gospel and they trusted in the Lord Jesus to save them. But that wasn't all. They also repented. You notice it says they turned.

They turned to the Lord. They were going away from the Lord. We're all born going away from the Lord. As I held little Gia this past week, I had to remember that.

She too has been given by her mother and father and her grandpa a heart that goes away from God. We all, like sheep, have gone astray.

Each one has turned to his own way. And so what happens when you're driving and you've gone past your turn and you suddenly realize you're going the wrong way.

[ 12 : 33 ] Well, you stop and you turn around and you get back on the right way. And that's what they did in Antioch. They came to hear the message and they came to realize we've been going the wrong way.

We've turned our backs to God and we've been living for ourselves. And they stopped and they turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. And came to him and trusted in him to save them.

And it wasn't just one or two. It wasn't just an Ethiopian eunuch on the way to Gaza or even a household of Cornelius. This was mass conversions.

And God was showing and the Lord Jesus was putting his stamp of approval on what these witnesses did. Were we right to share the gospel with the Gentiles? Gentiles. Bang!

All kinds of Gentiles believing and turning to the Lord. A great number of people.

[ 13 : 37 ] Now Luke does not want us to miss the effective cause. We've seen the result of their witness. Well, what was the effective cause of these conversions? Notice verse 21 tells us right up front, the Lord's hand was with them.

You see, that's why a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. Because the Lord's hand was with them, with these witnesses, blessing their witness, powerfully working to convert these sinners, giving repentance and faith.

faith. And this leads us to our first lesson from the text, that conversions are always the work of the Lord's hand. The Lord's hand.

Sometimes the right hand of the Lord. Sometimes the arm of the Lord. Here it's the Lord's hand. It speaks of his power by which he works. Now you all did some work this week.

And I'll bet that your hands had a part in that work. Whether it was washing dishes or washing the car, sweeping, folding laundry, driving truck, working on an assembly line, working on your computer, whatever you were doing, you used your hands.

[ 14 : 55 ] Hands are key instruments of accomplishing work. That's why the Bible sometimes refers to the work of your hands. And so in the Bible, it also speaks of the hand of the Lord as the power of the Lord doing his work.

And that's the way it's spoken of here. Conversions are always the work of the Lord's hand, of his power. We miss the most important point in Antioch if we miss the invisible hand of the Lord, actively converting.

If we assign the success of the gospel to the lives and witnesses of these amazing believers, we've missed it. Yes, they were instruments, but it was the Lord's hand alone that gave their witness success.

So we dare not look for the effective cause in the witnesses. Neither should we look for it in those who are witnessed too, in the Gentile sinners themselves.

As if they were so smart to see a good deal when a good deal comes along and so they believed. The gospel has always been offensive to the natural mind.

[ 16 : 16 ] It's always been foolishness, foolishness, nonsense. The greatest irrelevance. And neither is it that it was within these Gentiles to have the power to repent and believe.

No, not at all. The sinner is the willing slave to his sin. He is without strength. He's without love to God, without love to Christ, without faith and repentance.

So whenever you see a sinner turning from his way and trusting in the Lord Jesus, you can know for of a certain that the Lord's hand was the effective cause.

It was the Lord putting forth divine power to save. Now the hand of the Lord was mightily working here in Antioch and also in the ministry and preaching of George Whitefield in the 18th century.

Tens of thousands would gather in the open fields to hear him preach the gospel and Whitefield preached a message that humbled man and lifted up the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 17 : 23 ] Well, he was preaching one day and in the crowd was a man wanting to know what all the fuss was about. Why is everyone going to hear this guy? And so like Zacchaeus of old, he climbed up in a tree where he could both see and hear Whitefield preach.

Well, he wasn't in his perch for long before he realized he didn't like the message. He was quite offended by it because, you see, the gospel points out our sin.

The gospel doesn't take a shortcut around the need for Christ. It goes right to the chase. And the reason you need Christ is because you're lost without him.

You're damned without him. Your only hope is that God would damn his one and only son in your place and thereby take away the offensiveness of your sin against him.

He's just that holy. And oh, yet he's just that loving that he loved the world and sent his son into the world that he might become the substitute in the place of sinners.

[ 18 : 29 ] And you must turn from your own way and come and receive this Jesus and you will be saved. He didn't like that message.

And so he did this. He put his hands over his ears so he wouldn't have to hear it anymore. Oh, but then a fly landed on his face.

And now he's in a predicament, you see, because he's only got two hands and he's got two ears, doesn't he? So what did he do? Well, he took one hand off of his ear and shooed the fly away.

And that was that. But the hand of the Lord directed that fly right back on his face. And it pestered him like one of those deer fly on a hot summer day and you're out mowing and for all your flailing and waving, he still sticks on your trail.

and you see, while he was swatting flies, the gospel got into the ear gate and the hand of the Lord shoved it down into his heart where it stabbed him like a sword and convicted him of his sin and he saw his need for Christ and he saw how perfectly Christ met his need and he trusted in the Lord and was saved swatting flies up in a tree.

[ 20 : 00 ] That's the power of the hand of the Lord both to get a man to listen to his word and then to do the inner work. You know, God has many ways to get people to listen to the word who don't want to listen to it.

I've even heard of using children, little children as ways that God brings parents to listen to the word of God.

many ways and instruments that God gets an audience before people that don't want him. They're going the way they like, they've chosen it, and yet he causes them to hear.

But then the hand of the Lord doesn't stop there. He goes even further and he overcomes the resistance in our hearts. He overcomes the love of sin and the hatred of God and holiness in his way.

and he shows us and convicts us of sin and shows us the loveliness of Jesus so that we come most willingly and gladly to embrace Jesus Christ and receive him as he's offered to us in the gospel as a savior and Lord.

[ 21 : 13 ] And we want him more than anything else. You see, that's the hand of the Lord. And it was that hand that sent that fly to pester that man as much as it was the hand of the Lord that sent a whole plague of flies in Egypt.

The hand of the Lord doing his work. You see, what we need to be saved is not just a little help from our friends. It's not just a little boost. We're dead in trespasses and sins.

We're dead toward God. We just like to live without God. And that same power that created the universe out of nothing, that same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead must be put forth and operate in the hearts of the sinner if he is to come to life and embrace Jesus by faith.

Sinner friend, come to this Jesus. He's mighty to save. And he saves all who come to him. And brothers and sisters, thank him for putting forth his mighty hand in your life that finds you a new creature, Christ Jesus today.

And pray on for those unconverted people in your life. There is a hand of the Lord that none can resist. Pray for it. That's what we see in Antioch.

[ 22 : 37 ] Well, the news of these Gentile converts clear up in Antioch made its way 300 miles down to Jerusalem all before emails and phones and texts and all that.

It made its way down to Jerusalem and they decided to send a representative to Antioch to check this out and confirm what is going on there. Gentiles receiving the gospel and believing and repenting.

Much like Peter and John did when the Samaritans first received the word in Acts chapter 8 from Philip's preaching. They sent John and Peter out to check it out.

Well, who are they going to send this time? 300 miles away. Well, Barnabas. I trust you can see the wisdom in that. I can't think of a man more suited for the job.

Remember his name? What does it mean? Son of encouragement. Why does he have it? It wasn't his birth name. No, it was a name given by the apostles because they watched him in church at Jerusalem and they saw that wherever he went, he left behind people encouraged.

[ 23 : 47 ] Maybe they were discouraged and sad, but after Barnabas had been around, they were encouraged, lifted up. Remember how he did it? He did it with his wealth. He sold land and gave his money to help the poor in the congregation.

You remember how he did it with Saul? When he was first converted, nobody believed him in the Jerusalem church. They held him at arm's length.

They thought he's a fraud. He just wanted to come in and wreak havoc among us. So Barnabas took him in, didn't he? And he heard out his story. He says, he's legitimate. He went to the church and went to bat for him.

He said, this guy's real. He's truly been saved. He's already been preaching the gospel. Here's a man who knows how to encourage new believers. What a man to send to Antioch.

Furthermore, he's a Greek-speaking Jew from Cyprus. Just like some of those who were witnessing to the Gentiles in Antioch. They were Jews from Cyprus. He might have even known some of them by name.

[ 24 : 51 ] Furthermore, verse 24 tells us he was a good man. Who do you send for the job? You need a good man. He wasn't born good. There's none good.

No, not one. None righteous. Oh, but he was made good by the almighty hand of the Savior. Savior. We sing, he died that we might be forgiven.

He died to make us good. That we might go at last to heaven saved by his precious blood. You see, this bad man was made good by the mighty hand of the Lord.

And now the goodness and kindness of God spilled right out of his life to others. He's the man to send. Furthermore, verse 24 says he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Spirit. And this is not describing an experience or an event that he had. It's describing a general characteristic of his life.

[ 25 : 50 ] He was a Spirit-controlled man. His life was marked by the Spirit of God. His fruits.

Furthermore, he was full of faith. Oh, this is the kind of man you need. Not a man full of unbelieving fear, ever trembling and wanting to play it safe. He'd have stayed down in Jerusalem.

Always held back for fear of what could happen. But rather, he's a man living by faith in God's almighty power and taking him at his words of promise and expecting great things from this God and therefore attempting great things for God.

A man full of faith is a man of activity, isn't he? A man of adventure. One who ventures upon the Lord. He's a can-do man. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

If Christ calls me to it, I can do it through his strength. And so when this church sent him and called him to go to Antioch, he willingly went.

[ 26 : 59 ] We need such people in the world today, in the church today, and the Lord Jesus knows how to make them. he's able to fit his servants for the task to which he calls them.

Well, we see this Barnabas, his gifts and graces in action once he got to Antioch. Verse 23 says, when he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God.

Now, those three words, the evidence of, you could put parentheses around, they're not in the text. They were just supplied by the translators to give the sense of the meaning. What it literally says is, when he arrived and saw the grace of God.

Now, that's a rather unusual expression, isn't it? Because the grace of God is invisible. The grace of God as it's being used here is God's influence and power working inside the heart.

That grace, kids, is like the wind. You can't see the wind, can you? But you can sure see its evidence and its effects.

[ 28 : 11 ] Look at the trees and how the leaves are rustling. Look at the kite and how it's soaring high. Look at the eagle swelling up into the heavens.

Obviously, the wind is there, even though you cannot see it. You can see its effects wherever it is. And that's what Barnabas saw.

He saw the effects, the evidence of the invisible grace of God in these people. And that's our second lesson, that God's saving grace is invisible but its effects are clearly seen.

And that's because the grace of God is an active thing. It changes a man from the inside out. It never leaves him as it finds him. And so the grace of God cannot remain hidden for long.

So think with me a bit. What was it actually that Barnabas saw? He saw the grace of God. He saw the evidence, the effects.

[ 29 : 16 ] What did he see? Well, first of all, he saw the fruit of their repentance, didn't he? They turned. They turned. They turned to the Lord from their idols and their old way of life.

And he saw them confessing their sins with grief and forsaking them. They quit going to the shrine prostitutes. They abandoned their pagan lifestyle. And he saw them hungering and thirsting for righteousness and seeking and pursuing a pure heart and wanting to please the Lord.

He saw the fruit of their repentance. But that's not all. He saw the fruit of their faith. He saw their faith in action and it was a faith that worked by love. Faith always is something that works and it works by love, Galatians tells us.

And he saw this love for Jesus, this love for his word, his law, his gospel, his commands, his promises, his worship, his day, his people, his church.

A love for Christ showing itself by willing obedience to his commands. He sees this love for God but he also sees a love for neighbor.

[ 30 : 33 ] Instead of the bitterness and the revenge toward those that mistreat, he sees a forgiving spirit, a merciful spirit towards others. He sees a peace loving spirit rather than seeking strife, he seeks peace.

He longs for others to know the Lord Jesus and his great salvation and he sees that by his prayers for him, for the lost and their witness to them.

You see, he's seeing these changes. He sees them loving their neighbor, loving the brethren, love, love.

You know, it's the first of the fruit of the spirit. It's like the crocus in the spring. The first sign of new life, love.

Love for God, love for neighbor, love for the brethren. And Barnabas saw it, couldn't deny it. Not all at once, they didn't immediately become perfected, no, they were far from perfect.

[ 31 : 43 ] But there was the undeniable new life of Christ within them that could not be missed. Titus 2, 11 and 12, for the grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present world.

How do you miss that? Barnabas didn't miss it. He saw it. He saw it. And his response to what he saw shows us just what a good man he was.

He had a two-fold response. First of all, he was glad. No critical nitpicking fault-finding spirit with these imperfectly sanctified converts. He was glad for what he saw, the reality of grace in these lives.

No petty prejudices against these non-Jews who were far different from him. No, he saw a true work of the Lord, and that's all it took to make this man happy.

What does it take to make you happy? What makes you glad is a window on your heart, you see. Are you made glad when you hear of someone's conversion?

[ 33 : 04 ] When you read the testimony of someone that's become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, does that make you happy? when you hear of a new church being planted, a new church planter being sent, does that thrill you?

That's where Barnabas' heart was at, and he sees the grace of God in action, and he's happy, he's glad, but not only glad, he also encouraged them.

Now, here he is, it's what he is, he's Barnabas, the son of encouragement, and now he's at it, again, not in Jerusalem, but now 300 miles away, and he's doing what he always does, and now he's encouraging them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

Y'all have begun well, now endure to the end, looking unto Jesus, and you'll never regret it. You've turned to the Lord, now cling to the Lord, and don't let go of him.

Go on loving and obeying him with all your heart. There was much yet within them and within Antioch to discourage them. There was much within them to hinder them from remaining true to the Lord.

[ 34 : 14 ] There were temptations to pull them back to their old life. There were pressures to forsake the Lord, just to walk with him for a mile, and then to go back to their old life, to compromise his commands.

And so Barnabas comes alongside of them to encourage them to hold on, hold on to the Lord, with all your heart. He's worth holding on to, you know. You'll see him face to face one day, and he'll be a faithful friend to you all the way to the end.

He never leaves or forsakes his own. He's all you need. He's the supply that you need for every day. The supply of grace is endless in him, and he's going to continue this good work in you that he's begun.

they no doubt were encouraged just to see this man from Jerusalem, glad to see them saved. And then his words were the icing on the cake, and they were encouraged.

But that's not all that happened there through Barnabas. Verse 24 says, a great number of people were brought to the Lord. That's the second time we've been told that. It's not the same people.



[ 35 : 31 ] This is a new batch under Barnabas' preaching. There's another mass conversion of many people who were brought to the Lord.

So you've got this mass, this huge nursery of baby Christians. And Barnabas says, I need help. I need help.

The birth of a baby is not the end, but the beginning of labor for parents. There's a lot more to be done. There's a whole lifetime ahead. And even so, conversion is not the last step.

It's just the first step in a whole lifetime of walking with Christ and living for Him. And this brings us to our third lesson that baptized disciples need a lifetime of teaching the Word from the Word of God.

What are we to think? And what are we to make of these who as soon as they make profession of faith and are baptized? That's it. No more interest.

[ 36 : 38 ] No more hungering and thirsting for the Word of God. I've got all I wanted. I just wanted a ticket into heaven. And suddenly there's no interest. Well, it certainly is not the teaching of Christ in the Great Commission.

You remember Jesus commanded the church to make disciples from all the nations, and after baptizing them, what are they to do? They're to teach them. And to teach them what?

To obey everything that I have commanded you. Folks, that's a lifetime. It doesn't say teach them what I have commanded.

You can memorize the Ten Commandments in 15 minutes. It's not just knowing the commands that God has given. Teach them to obey. And that's why every one of you who are disciples of Jesus need the lifetime ministry of the Word of God to your life.

And we see it happening here. That's the task given by the Lord Jesus to his church, and Barnabas knows it, and so he is committed to it. There's more work here to be done than he can do alone, and he's humble enough to know his own limitations and to seek help, and he's humble enough to recognize the gifts that God has given to others and to employ them even though he might be outshined by those gifts.

[ 38 : 01 ] So, where does he go for help? Where does Barnabas go to get a helper? He doesn't go back to Jerusalem. That's 300 miles away. He doesn't go back there to get an apostle.

He's got just the guy in mind for the job, and he's just 100 miles north and west in Tarsus. That's where his hometown is. His name's Saul.

Remember, he's already met Saul and spent time with Saul. And he's even watched Saul preach and seen how he's reasoned from the scriptures and taught people from the word of God.

And he knew that he was called to take the gospel at his conversion. He was called to take the gospel to the Gentiles as well as Jews. And he knew that Saul was able to speak Greek and was familiar with Greek culture since he was living outside of Judea in Tarsus.

When they had tried to kill Saul in Jerusalem, remember the brothers had sent him back home to Tarsus. Well, that had been several years earlier. And so Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for him.

[ 39 : 14 ] The word used there suggests some difficulty in finding him. He went there to seek up and down for him. He knows that Paul doesn't stand still for long and he knows it was years ago we sent him back home to Tarsus.

Now he goes to Tarsus to find him and after finding him he brings him back to Antioch. And there for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

Are you present when the word of God is being taught to the church? These in Antioch were. And that's the way God grew them up in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and prepared them to become a mighty force in the Gentile world sending out missionaries to the ends of the earth.

Then almost as an aside we're told oh yes the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. Did you ever wonder where that name came from Christian?

Well this is telling us. They referred to themselves as disciples as saints as the believers in Christ but for the first time this word Christian became a label placed upon them and it stuck probably given by unbelievers in Antioch trying to identify them trying to come up with a term how do you talk about these people they're not just Jews they're different from the Jews that well all they ever do is talk about Christ and they're baptized in the name of Christ and they pray in the name of Christ and it's Christ Christ Christ they're Christians and they coin a new word they're followers of Jesus followers of Christ and it seems to have been a term of contempt!

[ 41 : 27 ] as we'll see later on in the book of Acts but Christians took this term of contempt contempt and humiliation and they gloried in it to be called by the name of their Savior and this is the fourth lesson Christian is a name to live up to you know what I mean by that to live up to we've taken his name upon us now we need to live like Christians does Christ define your life it was Saul who could write to the Philippians that for me life is Christ to live is Christ Christ is so much a part of my life that you can't separate my life and Christ Christ is our lives as Christians my life is all about him morning to evening

Sunday through Saturday and it's a glory to be called by his name it's one of our highest privileges believers and responsibilities to bear the name it's it's a most sobering reality that wherever we go we take the name the reputation of Christ are you doing anything that brings disgrace to the name Christian this is an application of the third commandment that I don't think we often think about we are not to misuse the name of the Lord our God and we not only do that with our lips we do it with our lives when we live in a way that brings the name of Christ down oh so many take the name of Christian on the lips today even evangelical

Christian sadly their lives drag the Savior through the mud no hold his name high live so as to bring honor to Christ and show what a great Savior he is are you a Christian then be like Christ love like Christ live like Christ he lives within you to help you do that very thing it was here in Antioch that Christian became the name for the first time for the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and then the chapter ends and as it ends we see the grace of God in action we see them living up to the name some prophets were told came down from Jerusalem to Antioch the canon the scriptures were not yet completed so they had prophets still receiving direct communications from God and one of them Agabus through the Holy Spirit predicted a severe famine that would cover the entire

Roman Empire and were told he was no false prophet because it happened just as he said it would under the reign of Emperor Claudius now what did these new Christians in Antioch do with this information now well each disciple of Jesus according to their ability decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea and they followed through with it and sent a gift to the elders in Jerusalem through the hands of Saul and Barnabas now you say well why did they send money down to Jerusalem it could be that the famine had already begun there the prophecy was that it was going to spread over all the earth or it could be that the saints in Jerusalem were just that close to poverty and it didn't take much to send them below the line for one reason or another they sent money to help now this love of the brethren is evidence of the grace of

God in their heart remember I said when Barnabas got there he saw the grace of God this is the kind of thing that he saw you see and it's noteworthy their love is noteworthy for at least two reasons first of all it crossed ethnic barriers these are new Gentile disciples and I remind you Jews and Gentiles did not flatter one another and here they are willing to sacrifice for their Jewish brethren and Jewish brethren that they've never seen never seen them just heard about but if they belong to Jesus they're a brother of mine and their need is like my need and they sent them help isn't it wonderful to see the love of Christ crossing over ethnic barriers and every other kind of barrier is your love crossing over to people that are not like you and secondly they sacrificed in giving to others even when they've just heard of difficult times that are ahead for themselves this famine is going to reach you at Antioch now I don't know about you but that coming famine could have been used as an excuse to hoard everything to themselves out of fear but no not here trusting in the Lord and moved by his love they look not only to their own interests but to the interests of others and they sent money to help them this is the grace of God this is living up to the name

[ 47 : 21 ] Christian there's something of Christ in that love isn't there becoming poor to enrich others for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that through his poverty you might become rich and these had received such grace and now they show the same to their brethren in Jerusalem well what have we seen today we've seen the gospel going to the Gentiles and Antioch we've seen the hand of the Lord going with that gospel converting many we've seen the grace of God visible in the changed lives of his people we've seen them hungrily taking in the teaching of God's word which is the lifetime school of the disciples of Jesus and we've seen them living up to the name Christian and evidencing the grace of God in their love for the brethren well let's glory in such a savior let's rejoice in him and his great salvation we sing number 133 oh for a thousand tongues to sing the triumphs of his grace well we've seen the triumphs of his grace at

Antioch and brothers and sisters such triumphs have happened in our lives and in this place as well let's stand and sing his praises 133 as well Amen.