

What Barnabas Saw

Introduction. Several years ago a nationally popular denominational preacher said publicly what he thinks the church needs to be fighting, what he called 5 global giants — war, poverty, corruption, disease, and illiteracy. While I admit these are huge challenges and agree that as good citizens we ought to be concerned about them, is this the true, scriptural mission of the church?

Acts tells of the founding, growth, and work of the first century church. Following the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, the stoning of Stephen, and the scattering of Christians, we read about the gospel message coming to Antioch of Syria, a city about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, which is the modern day city of Antakya.

Because of the good being done, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to see what was happening (Acts 11:20-21). The text says, “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Have you ever wondered what Barnabas saw at Antioch? The answer to that question is incredibly helpful to New Testament churches now.

I. An Aggressive Outreach To The Lost Of Their Area

- A. They were sharing the good news. Christ was preached and hearts were touched. People were being converted. Barnabas joined in the efforts and enlisted the help of Paul.
- B. These brethren were doing what Jesus came to earth to do (Luke 19:10). They were fulfilling Jesus’ commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Whether it’s to an individual (John 4:13-14) or to a group (Acts 17:22-23), the need is tremendous for teaching Christ.
- C. it is our commission and responsibility today. In fact, it is our reason for existing. William Temple expressed it this way, “The church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its nonmembers.”
- D. When Barnabas saw the grace of God at work, he saw Christians reaching out to the lost. That is still our mandate, focus, and purpose.

II. A Grace-Focused, Spirit-Filled, God-Praising Assembly

- A. Paul and Barnabas “assembled with the church” (v. 26). This verse and others throughout the Bible express the importance of Christians assembling for worship. It is to praise God and edify one another. Their work and worship was directed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3).
- B. Too often people fail to make worship a priority (Psalm 84:8-12; 95:1-6; 100:1-5). They consider it optional and regard it as a rite or ritual. While we have activities we participate in during worship (singing, praying, preaching, partaking, and giving), it is more than the sum total of activities. “Worship,” wrote A. W. Tozer, “is man’s full reason for existence. Worship is why we are born and why we are born again.” Never take the worship assembly for granted. This is not just my time to speak, but your time to grow closer to God and be challenged to be a more holy person.

III. A Warm, Inclusive Fellowship Of Jews And Gentiles

- A. The gospel was first taken to the Jews only, then the Hellenists and to all Gentiles (Acts 11:18-21). They worshiped together, fellowshiped together, and enjoyed mutual spiritual blessings in Christ. God's grace was upon them all.
- B. We welcome everyone into our fellowship who is a baptized believer. Race is unimportant. Ethnicity is irrelevant. Social status is inconsequential. Economic standing is immaterial. Our fellowship breaks down barriers and brings us all together as one in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:11; James 2:5). And everyone is important and should be not shunned or ignored.

IV. Committed Christians Growing In Discipleship

- A. They were being taught the word. They were learning, growing, developing, and maturing spiritually.
- B. Verse 26 says "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." We might think the name "Christian" is found throughout the New Testament, but it's actually used only 3 times (cp. Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The term "disciple," however, is found over 270 times in scripture.
- C. A disciple is a learner, a follower, a pupil, and an adherent of another. It is an ongoing process. We are not to be Christians in name only, but to truly be disciples of Christ. But what does that exactly mean?
 1. Continuing in the learning of scripture (2 Timothy 3:14).
 2. Developing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
 3. Growing in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18).
 4. Devoting time to God in prayer (Acts 4:23-31).
 5. Learning to deny yourself (Luke 9:23-24).
 6. Putting God and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).
 7. Becoming a closer knit part of the body (Ephesians 4:16).

V. A Benevolent Church Serving Others' Needs

- A. It is interesting that the gospel began at Jerusalem and through their efforts, Antioch came to know the grace of God. Now they reciprocate by helping their brethren when a famine struck Judea (Acts 11:27-30). They were not isolationists. They realized they were part of the larger family of God (2 Corinthians 9:1-5).
- B. Today, we should be concerned about the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world — whether it's a disastrous famine in Africa, a devastating typhoon in the Philippines, a destructive hurricane in Houston, or a homeless person in town. When needs arise, open your hearts and pocketbooks to help (Galatians 6:10). When we do this, we show the grace of God and how it's changed us at the core (1 Peter 4:10).

Conclusion. The church at Antioch is a great example to us. They grew both in spiritual strength and in numbers. Their growth was not produced by a program, plan, or marketing strategy. They grew because of a right relationship with God, and because the grace of God manifests itself in evangelism, worship, fellowship,

discipleship, and service. What Barnabas saw at Antioch needs to be seen in our churches today.

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