



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 11:1-30

Acts

"From Jerusalem to Antioch"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in Acts chapter 11, and I'm going to cover the whole chapter, which is verse 1-30, but I'm not going to read all of those verses. It's not necessary, because really, from verse 4-17, Peter recalls what occurred in Caesarea, which we covered last week in chapter 10. You remember that he went to Caesarea and went to the home of the Gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius. He preached the gospel and the Gentiles became Christians. They believed in the gospel. They received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jews do, and so he stayed in the home for some days. And when the Jews learned of that, they were very disturbed that a Jewish man and an apostle would be in the home of a Gentile.

They asked him to explain himself and he reviews all that took place. And we come to the end of his explanation in verse 18, and read, "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

And following that, we have a description of the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles particularly and specifically to the city of Antioch, a great of the ancient world, where a very significant church was established, and that's what we read in verse 19-30. "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there

were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church of Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

"Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the privilege, the blessing, the opportunity that we have to gather together as we do in this hour and open the text as we have and read it together. What a privilege that is, one that we can so often take for granted, because we all possess a Bible. Many of us possess many Bibles. We read it frequently, or we should.

And yet so often we can take for granted the great blessing that we have in possessing Your inherent word. It is a privilege to have the word of God in our possession. It is the standard of truth. It is Your truth, and we can know what is true and what is not true by knowing

it. And in knowing it, we know Your mind. We can learn about You. We can learn about ourselves. We learn about the way of life. We learn so much. We learn more, or we have more in this book than we can learn.

And so we count it a privilege to read it. We count it a great privilege to be able to spend some time together in this hour considering the meaning of that text, and we look to You to bless us. And fortunately we have a great teacher in that regard. We have the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who lives within our hearts, literally dwells within the heart of every believer and guides and directs his or her thinking, and we pray for that this morning.

Guide us in our thinking. Build us up in the faith and bless us. We pray for ourselves spiritually. We pray for ourselves materially. We pray for ourselves in all the various ways that we need to pray for ourselves as men and women in this world. We have physical needs, spiritual needs, and we pray for those. Bless those who are sick. Give them healing and give them encouragement. Bless those who are grieving.

We pray particularly for the Boice family. We pray that You would minister to them greatly at this time and strengthen them, and may they be encouraged that Dr. James Montgomery Boice is with You. He is enjoying the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is enjoying the fellowship of the saints. He is very much alive, just in another place. And we look forward to the day when we will be there and we will be with our Savior. And so we pray for them that You would encourage them with that truth, and that You would encourage the church, Tenth Presbyterian, and pray that You would continue to minister greatly to that assembly as You have for so many years.

And bless us now, Father, as we study Your word. Bless this church. Bless churches throughout this nation as they begin to do that. As some ministries are concluding, others have not yet begun. But throughout this country and throughout the world where Your people meet and they open the Scriptures, I pray that You'd bless greatly and

strengthen the church of Jesus Christ and bless this church and bless us now. Bless us with our final hymn. May it prepare our hearts well for our time of study together. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] One of the ancient Greek philosophers said, "There is nothing permanent except change." That's not true. God doesn't change, but change is common. Still, it doesn't come easily, particularly when it involves institutions and customs that have prevailed for centuries.

I was reading the other day about a Japanese hero, a samurai who has become an icon among the elite businessmen of Japan's high-tech industry. He helped spark one of the great events of Asian history 130 years ago when he overthrew Japan's futile government and helped modernize the nation. The change was good; it was important; it was necessary. But it didn't come easily and he was killed for his trouble at the age of 33.

Whether it's in the east or whether it's in the west, people resist change, and sometimes that's good. But change isn't always for the better. There should be good reasons for making changes. But even when there is good reason, it is often hard for some people to accept. That's true most places. That's true in the church, and it was true in the church of Jerusalem. It was a Jewish congregation, but a major change, a significant transition in the history of the church occurred when the gospel went to the Gentiles.

Jesus had told His disciples - and you'll remember this from the very beginning of the book of Acts, in 1:8 - that they were to be His witnesses in the remotest part of the earth. Now that obviously means go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel, but when the Gentiles began to hear the gospel, it shocked the Jewish Christians. It first happened at Caesarea when Peter entered the house of Cornelius and he preached, and the Gentiles there believed in Christ and they recorded the Holy Spirit.

Luke records the event in chapter 10 and then records it again here in chapter 11, and that fact that he repeats this great event

indicates the importance that he placed upon it. He doesn't merely refer to it in chapter 11. He gives a rather detailed explanation of it. In fact, he mentions things in chapter 11 that aren't mentioned in chapter 10. It was an important event. Luke recognized that, and it was important because this event signaled God's acceptance of Gentiles into the household of faith as Gentiles. Apart from their adopting the requirements of the Law of Moses.

Now that was new. Gentiles had always come to God through the door of Judaism, but no longer. At Caesarea, God made it clear that He takes people as they are. They don't have to become something they are not in order to be received into His family. They enter the full fellowship of God as Jews do, through faith alone. No one understood that better than the apostle Paul, who asked in Romans 3:29, "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also."

The cross, as the Scottish theologian James Denney wrote, is the meeting place not only of God and man, but of all races and conditions of men with each other. The cross, he said, is the basis of a universal religion. And so this change was necessary in order for the church to become universal and the worldwide missionary force Jesus commanded it to be in order for that to happen, in order for the church to do what He said, and that is go to the remotest part of the earth.

But still, when news of what had happened reached Jerusalem and the church learned that Peter entered a Gentile's house - he stayed there; he ate there - they was shock. Peter was called before the church and he was told to explain himself. We read those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

It was a violation of the strict separation between Jew and Gentile that they felt was required by the Law of Moses. And they also have felt that there were problems, perhaps, that would be the result of this in the Jewish community at large, when the Jewish people learned that one of the apostles was fraternizing with Gentiles,

that they might have feared would scandalize the church and it would cause hostility. And so everyone was alarmed and they wanted an explanation.

And Peter gives his explanation in verses 4-17. He makes his defense by simply retelling the events as they occurred. It doesn't develop some logical argument in his favor. He simply retells the story and lets the facts speak for themselves. He recalls how he was in Joppa, had had a great vision of a great sheet coming out of the sky filled with animals, and he describes them very graphically in verse 6, as "four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air." Uncleaned animals which he was then told to kill and eat. Well, he protested that. He had never eaten anything unclean, but he was told what God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.

The vision ended. At that moment, he said, three men appeared at the house from Caesarea. They were Gentiles and the Holy Spirit told him to go with them without misgivings. And so in obedience to the Spirit, Peter went to Cornelius' house and there he listened as Cornelius told him about his experience, how an angel visited him and instructed him to send for Peter, who, the angel said, "will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household."

Well, it was obviously God's will that Peter go into that house and Peter speak the gospel to these people, and so he did. And he'd barely begun to speak when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He had fallen on the Jews at Pentecost. It was the Gentiles' Pentecost, so to speak, and conclusive proof that God had welcomed believing Gentiles into His family on equal terms with believing Jews.

And so Peter welcomed them. Verse 17, "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" And in effect he was asking his Jewish ways, "Are you going to stand in God's way?" With that they all fell silent.

Salvation is independent of lawkeeping. The yoke of the Law, as Peter will call it in chapter 15, no longer applies. We are free from the Law of Moses. We live under the reign of grace. Jews and Gentiles alike are saved through faith alone, in Christ alone. Peter had witnessed that in Cornelius' house, and he wasn't alone. There were other witnesses. In verse 12, he said that there were six brethren who accompanied him. They were Jewish Christians. They were there. they were amazed by what they saw, but counting Peter, that was seven witnesses to the work of God. It was indisputable that, as Peter said, God gave to them, "gave to these Gentiles, the same gift as he gave to us also believing in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now that was spoken to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago. But that is a word for the church today, for those within the modern church, such as the Pentecostal who teach that a second work of grace is needed in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Faith in Christ is necessary, they would say, but it's not enough. A second blessing, a charismatic experience, is also necessary if one wants to receive the Holy Spirit and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But it's clear from verse 17 that there is no second work of grace. There's one work of grace and it is an eternal work of grace. We receive the Holy Spirit upon believing in Christ for salvation. At that very moment we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Ephesians 1:13. We have Him as a permanent in-dwelling presence and person in our lives.

It's an amazing blessing to have the third person of the Trinity dwelling within us, and that happens at the moment of faith. A number of things happen at the moment of faith. When the person believes in Jesus Christ, at that very moment he or she is justified, completely acceptable to God. You can never be more accepted by God than you are at the moment of faith - completely and eternally accepted by God and fully equipped for the spiritual life. We are like newborn babes at that first instant. We have all of our parts. We just need to grow.

And we do that in the same that we became children of God. We do it by grace through faith, not by seeking second blessings or putting ourselves under the rigid discipline of the Mosaic Law. It's none of those. It's through grace and grace alone. Now that's what was demonstrated very clearly, very graphically, historically in Cornelius' household, and that's what Peter is affirming here. But this was all very new for the Jewish believer and it would be awhile before they and before Peter, for that matter, would fully understand all of this and advance to the understanding that the apostle Paul had.

But church believed Peter's report that God was saving Gentiles in the same way He saved Jews. And after some moments of silence, verse 18 states "They glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to faith.'" They may not have understood everything about this, but one thing they certainly understood, and that is that salvation is all of the Lord. Salvation is all of grace. Everything is a gift, even repentance. Faith and repentance are gifts of God. God grants it, they said, and grants it even to Gentiles, which is amazing grace and which introduces us to a new phase in the history of the church, the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles and the reintroduction of Paul into the book, who was at this time still known as Saul.

Luke develops these significant events in the remainder of the chapter from 19-30, and they continue a pattern that we have seen throughout the book of Acts. From the day of Pentecost, when the church was born, the church began expanding outward, from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, and now north up into Syria to the great city of Antioch.

Luke tells us how the gospel arrived there by backing up in his story, going back to the events that occurred in chapter 8 and the persecution that broke out after the death of Stephen. It scattered the church. People went out from Jerusalem in all different directions. Some went north up the southern coast of Lebanon to Phoenicia.

Others sailed for Cyprus and others still traveled north overland to Antioch.

And as they went, they shared their faith. They spoke about Jesus Christ. But to Jews alone, Luke says, which would be expected before Peter's visit to Caesarea. But there were exceptions. F.F. Bruce called them daring spirits, who took a big step. And they thought, "Well, if this gospel is good for us Jews, why not for the Gentiles too?" Then we read in verse 20 that they began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

None of these people is named. None of them is an apostle like Peter or a deacon like Phillip, a person of authority in the church. We might have expected that for so significant a work as this became, but that's not what happened. It's instead unnamed individuals were the means of the gospel going to the Gentiles and to Antioch, which will become the headquarters of the Christian church. Antioch was a strategic city for this. It was a strategic city as the springboard for the worldwide Christian mission of evangelism.

Josephus called it the third city of the empire, after Rome and Alexandria. It was also known as Antioch the Beautiful, because of its buildings and a long paved boulevard, which was lined on either side with a double colonnade and trees and fountains, was a cosmopolitan city, in addition to its Syrian population. It had a large colony of Jews, as well as Orientals from Persia and India and China. So it was a very cosmopolitan city. Its population was Oriental, but its culture was Greek and its government was Roman. It was, as I say, a cosmopolitan city, a very worldly city, and also a very wicked city. It was a city known for its evil, for its debauchery. But it became the center of Christian activity, and what better place for Christian activity and the center of Christian activity than an evil city?

Well, it became this. It became this capital of the Christian church, this headquarters of the Christian church in the simplest way. People began speaking to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus. They just talked about the Lord, and of course there's nothing more

important than doing that, and the Lord blessed it. Verse 21, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."

They didn't do that in their own strength. They didn't labor alone. We never do labor alone. The Lord is with us. It is the Lord's work. He builds the church. Isn't that good to know? We have a monumental task to perform, to go out and proclaim the good news of salvation to the lost. And that's God's work, ultimately; it's not ours. It is a supernatural work. His hand is with us when we do that, assuring that He grants success. He does that in a number of ways. His hand is seen as being with us in His providential working by directing our steps and opening doors in unexpected ways.

We might make certain plans to do certain things and find that those plans don't work out and a door opens. It was unexpected and we have a great opportunity to present the gospel and be a testimony to others. So He works providentially as His hand is with us in preparing people's heart to receive the good news and convincing them of their need of the gospel, of Jesus Christ, and then blessing the gospel as we speak it to them. God doesn't leave us alone in this great work. His hand is with us, and ultimately it's God's work. It's ultimately His responsibility to convert souls. You and I can't do that. We'll come to that great event in chapter 16 when Lydia believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and she does so because God opened her heart. I can't open anybody's heart. I can't open your brains and make you believe the things that I'm saying, or understand them, or find them interesting. Only God can do that. It's His work.

But while it is His responsibility to convert souls, it is our responsibility to give the gospel. And it is clear from events in Antioch that God uses all kinds of people to do that. Not just apostles, not just noted evangelists, but regular Christians going about their business, talking about Christ. Now that's largely the way the early church expanded, through one person telling his or her neighbor about Jesus Christ. God has used evangelistic programs. He has used

organizations. He's used great preachers. He used Peter on the day of Pentecost and other times when he preached in the temple. He used Stephen and his eloquent and forceful preaching in the synagogues in Jerusalem. He used Phillip in Samaria.

But generally He builds His church through Christian men and women sharing their faith where they are. That's how He did it in Antioch, and simplicity of these verses, to my mind at least, is what is so significant. A major work of God was started by men and women simply talking, speaking the truth. Wherever they went, they saw that as their mission field, and so should we.

Well, it wasn't long before news of what had occurred in Antioch reached Jerusalem and the men of Jerusalem recognized that what had occurred there was novel. It was unusual. They were still adjusting to the idea of Gentile salvation, when they learned of widespread conversions among the Gentiles of Antioch. And so because they were unsure of what was happening there, they sent Barnabas to examine the situation and reassure them that all was well.

William Barclay called Barnabas the man with the biggest heart in the church. His name suggests that. It means "son of encouragement," and he lived up to that name. It was Barnabas, you'll remember, back in chapter 9, who took Paul under his wing in Jerusalem and introduced him to the apostles when everyone else was staying away from him. And again, he lived up to his name when he visited the church of Antioch. We read in verse 23, "And then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."

Barnabas wasn't troubled by Gentile salvation. He wasn't bothered by the change that had come. He rejoiced in it, and he rejoiced because he saw souls being saved. I'm sure he rejoiced greatly when Jewish men and women came to an understanding of these things and believed in Jesus Christ. But what amazing grace the Gentiles, the pagans, are now being brought into the family of God. He wasn't troubled by that. He rejoiced in it. And so he encouraged

the people there. There were young believers in a worldly city, a city filled with vice and temptation, and he urged them to remain true to the Lord.

It's an important exhortation, but we might ask how do we do that? How do we remain true to the Lord? I think the answer is found in the same way that the church did this in the early chapters of Acts, back in chapter 2. We read in verse 42 that they continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

When believers stopped doing that, they began to drift - and they can begin to drift. The author of Hebrews addresses that. That was a problem that he saw in the church to which he wrote, and he addresses it in various ways. He addresses the problem in chapter 2, but then we come to chapter 10:23-25, he urges his audience to "hold fast to the confession" of their faith. Remain true to God's word. You do that by studying it, by obeying it, and not following false ideas, and there are many false ideas in the world. Antioch was filled with false ideas - cults and different religions from all over the world. And we have the same in our day.

And how will we know what is false as opposed to what is true if we don't know the word of God? It is the standard of truth of God. And if we don't have that, we are prey to every false idea there is. And the false ideas in the world are not blatantly false, not if they're effectively presented, because they're presented as true. And generally the most effective lie is the one that's cloaked in the truth.

Satan as a minister of light and he cloaks his error as light. One of the great errors of the early church, the one that Paul addresses in the book of Galatians. I suppose it's the first great error or heresy what's addressed is the Galatians heresy. _____ gave a different gospel. And that wasn't a blatantly different gospel. It wasn't a patently false gospel, because they didn't deny the deity of Christ. They didn't deny the need of faith. They certainly didn't deny His crucifixion and His resurrection and the value of all of those things.

They said it's all true and you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, but you also must be circumcised. You have to do this one single act in addition.

And Paul said if you believe that, you destroy everything and you are lost. That one little addition tainted everything, poisoned it, turned it into a different gospel, which is no gospel at all. That's the way the error comes to us, not blatantly, but very subtly. How are we going to know what's right and what's wrong if we don't know the truth of God? And so his exhortation to them, the exhortation of the author to the Hebrews was to hold fast to the confession of their faith, and then he says, "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some."

He saw a problem. Some were finding excuses for skipping the meetings of the church. And it had become a habit, and it does so often. But it is in the fellowship of the saints. Under the instruction of the scriptures. It is by participating in the life of the church, participating in the Lord's supper and in the prayers of the saints that we grow. That's how we learn Christ, and it's as we learn Christ that we learn how to walk with Him.

Dr. Johnson said we become Christians by turning to the Lord. We remain Christians by cleaving to the Lord, by persevering in the faith, and Barnabas was concerned that they do that, that they cleave to the Lord. He was a good man, Luke tells us, full of the Holy Spirit and the faith. Good men care about lost souls, and he cared about the lost souls on not only of the Jews, but of the Gentiles. And good men care about the souls of the saints and their progress in the faith, and Barnabas cared about that. He was that kind of man.

He was a good man, Luke tells us, but he was a good man because he was full of the Holy Spirit. He was not full of the Holy Spirit because he was a good man. He was good because of the Holy Spirit. He was under the control of the Spirit. That's what full of the Holy Spirit means. It means we're under His control, and Barnabas

was under the control of the Spirit because he had faith. Full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. It all goes together.

The Holy Spirit makes us good. That is His work of sanctification. He changes us. He transforms us into the image and the likeness of Jesus Christ. It is an ongoing process. It begins at the moment of regeneration. It never ceases until we enter into the presence of our Lord. It is His supernatural work within our lives, but He does that work supernaturally through the instrumentality of faith in God's word. As we see God's word, as we understand the word of God, as we believe it and obey it, we are transformed and made like Christ.

In that way He makes us increasingly like our Lord and He makes us useful in our Lord's service, just as He did Barnabas, and Barnabas was greatly used by the Lord. He ministered by faith under the Spirit's control, and the ministry in Antioch increased. We read in verse 24 that "considerable numbers were brought to the Lord." Well, this church becomes large. It's like that church in Jerusalem did in its early days, and became so large that it soon became obvious that Barnabas couldn't carry out his responsibility singlehandedly. It was too much for him. He needed help, and he knew where to go to get it, to his friend in Tarsus. Verse 25, "And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul." He could think of no one more qualified, more suited for this ministry among the Gentiles, this ministry in the great city of Antioch than he, than Paul.

It'd been some seven or eight years earlier that Paul left Jerusalem under the threat of death due to his evangelistic activities there. He preached the gospel. The Jews threatened to kill him. It was discovered and so his new Christian friends got him out of the city down to Caesarea. They put him on a boat and he returned to his hometown of Tarsus. What followed were the silent years. We don't know what took place during that time, but we know this: They were not inactive years. He certainly ministered in that region, probably

suffered for the faith, and may even have been disinherited by his family.

If so, locating him would not have been an easy task. But Barnabas set out to do it and he did it. And when he found him, Luke says, he brought him to Antioch. He was God's choice for that ministry, appointed by God to be his apostle to the Gentiles, but God used Barnabas to make known His will and direction to Paul.

Sometimes God works in that way. He opens doors of opportunity or service by someone giving an invitation to join in the ministry. Well, I say that happens. It happened with William Ferrell, who was used in that way. Ferrell was the first reformer in Geneva, but his ministry became so great that he could not do it on his own. In fact, he was at the point of breaking down when he was informed that John Calvin was in town. Calvin was a young man, but he had already made a name for himself with the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. They were Ferrell's favorite books, and so when he learned that Calvin was just passing through and that he was leaving early in the morning, Ferrell said, "No, he's not."

He went to the inn where Calvin was staying. He met him. He told him that Geneva needed his ministry, the reformation needed his ministry. But that wasn't Calvin's plan. It wasn't his desire. He wanted to settle in to a quiet life as a scholar, study, and write books, and so he declined the offer. Ferrell was insistent. He urged him to stay, but without success. Finally Ferrell became angry. He told Calvin in the name of the Almighty that he was defying the command of God in seeking his own rest and his own interest first. Then he said, "Let God damn your rest. Let God damn your work."

That terrified Calvin and he heard the voice of God in speaking through Ferrell and he realized that he must stay, he did stay, and God blessed his ministry, preserved the reformation through it and made Geneva the model city of Europe. Sometimes God uses people to show us His will. Sometimes circumstances. He used a great storm and a great fish to get Jonah on the right path of His ministry.

But He always uses His word, and God's word and will came to Paul through Barnabas. There's no suggestion here that Paul resisted or hesitated. He responded gladly and he accompanied Barnabas back to Antioch, where they had a very important ministry. For a year new converts were added to the church and they were instructed by the two men in the word of God and in the principles of the faith. That's what Paul did from the beginning of his ministry all the way to the very end of his ministry. He preached, he taught the word of God. Some of the last words of Paul that he wrote were addressed to Timothy with the good counsel, "Preach the word." It's as though Paul was saying - in fact, this is what he was saying, "Timothy, I'm leaving. I'm about to depart this world. Here is what is important. Here is what I impart to you. Preach the word of God."

That's what God blesses. That's what changes lives and gives stability. It is what made the church of Antioch a great church, the word of God. And the remaining verses indicate that. It shows us what happened to this church, what kind of change took place in these men and women who were by nature Gentiles and pagans, the kind of transformation that took place. The city became filled with their witness, as believers continued to talk about Jesus Christ, and it made a big impression. Young converts would gather together on the streets and they would engage people in discussions about Christ or in the marketplace, so much so that the pagans began to ask, who are these people? They're always talking about this Christos. They began calling them **Christinanos**, Christ people, or Christians. And Luke tells us that it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called by that name.

They were marked out as Christians, because they were identified with Jesus Christ. And as we learn God's word and we obey God's word, we begin to reflect God's word, which means we begin to reflect the person of Jesus Christ in the things we say and in the things that we do. We become identified with Him.

The believers of Antioch did. They spoke of Him and they acted like Him. They became a giving people. That's not natural. You know

what's natural for us to do? It's to hold on to things. It's to think about ourselves first. It's to protect our own interest. It's not to be generous. But these people, these pagan people, these people who have now become Christianano, Christians. They became generous people, because they became like Christ, who is the most generous of people, who laid down His life for sinners.

And they were given the opportunity to be that and to act generously, when some prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem. One of them was named Agabus, who announced by inspiration that there would be a great famine throughout the whole of the Roman world. Luke states that it happened during the reign of Claudius, who was Caesar from the years 41 A.D. to 54. There are sources that indicate that severe famine came in Judea around the years 45 and 46.

Well, the Christians of Antioch, when they heard this, were eager to help. Luke writes in verses 29, 30, "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Sault to the elders."

The point of this last paragraph is not famine. It's not prophecy, but generosity, the generosity of the Christians of Antioch. They gave in proportion to their means. They didn't give out of their means. They could do that by giving just a little bit. They gave in proportion to what they had. They gave what they could out of gratitude for what Christ had done for them. Now that's the way that all of us should give. That's the way all of us should live. The work of Christ, the love of God, what He's done in your life.

The fact that if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, He has secured eternity for you, a life beyond imagination, an effable glory where every tear will be wiped away, what glory that is, and that should produce such joy in you that you live your life out of gratitude for Him.

Now that's what they did and it is an example of what Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2 when he speaks of the church being one new man. Jew and Gentile are united together as they are one person, and they minister to one another as though they are one person. And so the change that first worried the church of Jerusalem with the conversion of the Gentiles became a source of great blessing for that church as the Gentiles cared for it. And they would soon become a blessing to the world as the center of the worldwide mission of the church shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch and the great missionary efforts of the apostle Paul begin from that place.

One of the things that stands out in this passage is the inconspicuous way God works to build His church and provide for it. He used anonymous believers to establish the church of Antioch, people that were bold enough to give witness to Christ, and that would be repeated down through the centuries. That's how God builds His church.

We see that at Antioch. Great men like Paul and Calvin are raised up for a purpose and God used them, uses them greatly. But most of us are not like that. We don't have great gift. We don't have a great calling. We are not going to be remembered in history. But it is as we are faithful with what we have, faithful where we are, as we bear witness to Jesus Christ that God's great work occurs and the world is gradually filled with His light and He uses all of us in that. He uses us in a variety of ways. He used the contributions of these young Christians to carry the church of Jerusalem through very hard and trying times.

The world has its great philanthropists. The church doesn't have many. If it did, we might leave the giving and the helping to them. The church wouldn't need our gifts, our support. As it is, the church does need that and we have the privilege of helping in proportion to our means. It is a great privilege.

And through the faithfulness of His people, God has provided for His needs. We see that very dramatically, I think, in this assembly,

how God has met our needs through the giving of the saints here. Not only the needs of this assembly, but the ministry that goes out from this place, in this worldwide outreach and the tape ministry and the radio ministry. That is your doing. Your giving has brought that about. There's no great philanthropist someplace in New York City or some place like that putting money in this ministry. That's your work and that's how God supplies His people, His work, His ministry. He does it through you and through me and through what we contribute, and what we contribute, we contribute to a work which is of eternal and infinite value and has with it great, great reward.

So may God bless us with continued faithfulness and a desire to serve Him in what we say and do, and bless us with an overwhelming desire to be identified with Jesus Christ so that the world will truly know what we are Christians. If you're here, though, without having believed in Jesus Christ as God and Savior, you are not a Christian. You may be an American. You may have grown up in a church. You may have even been baptized. But apart from recognizing that you are a sinner in need of a savior, apart from faith in Jesus Christ as that Savior who died for sinners, you are not a Christian; you are not saved.

And so look to Him. Do what the Gentiles of Antioch did. Believe and turn to the Lord. May God help you to do that and help each of us to rejoice in the grace that we've received from Him and go out from this place well identified with Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, Your mercy to us in the salvation we have received, purchased at Calvary's cross by Your Son who knew no sin but was made sin on our behalf, that we might have the righteousness of God. We thank You for that gift received through faith alone, and it's in the name of Christ we pray.