

## **ACTS 11:19-30**

### **A View into Practical Christianity.**

I have a question for you this morning...**What does it mean to be a "Christian?"** – While it would seem the answer to that is apparent, trust me, it is not.

- Especially in our day and age.
- **What is the *Affect and Effect* of Christianity to me?**
  - (Yes, there is a difference!)
  - The Affect was that I was changed – the Effect was the results those changes had on me.

And if we can conclude that being a Christian changes us, the next question becomes, **"How does being a Christian impact my life?"**

I am sure these same questions were asked in the First Century as the Church was finding its foundations. And God provided both instruction and example to equip His saints for the task.

Join me in **Acts 11:19-30** as we seek to define and find application for **Practical Christianity.**

Last week, we read in Acts 11 where Peter brought the good, and amazing, report that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had gone out from Jerusalem – to Samaria – and spread through Judea.

The report was the Gospel had been shared – heard – believed – and the Holy Spirit of God had descended on ALL who had believed. Jew and Gentile alike.

This week we join in the building up of the church on the foundation of the truth of Christ as the number of the redeemed increases and the reach of the Gospel goes beyond Judea and into the world beyond the borders of Israel!

## **ACTS 11:19-21**

*<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*

Today we come to a great circle back to story lines began earlier in the book of Acts.

We have seen some amazing examples of faithful followers of the truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth as The Christ – **One of these was Stephen, who we met in Acts 6 and 7.**

The failure of the religious leaders to silence the Gospel of Jesus Christ was vented full force on Stephen as they with their own hands cast stone at him until he was dead.

We recall meeting that day also a young Pharisee named Saul, who held the coats of the elder Pharisees as they murdered the disciple, Stephen.

Because of the harsh persecution, arrests and murdering of the faithful at the hands of the religious leaders, many fled the city. Some even fleeing Judea but taking the message and the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

Because of this, the word of the Gospel spread as far as *Cyrene, Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.*

This is a **BIG jump** for the Gospel into the world! These regions were hundreds of miles away along trade routes around the Mediterranean Sea!

The focus location of our passage today is in the city of **Antioch.**

While there are several cities with this name in Asia Minor and mentioned in scripture, **this Antioch was the capital city Syria.**

At the time it was reported to be the **third largest city** in the Roman empire following Rome itself and Alexandria in Egypt.

The city was known for its luxuriousness and magnificence with its main street paved in marble and boasting streetlights at night that showcased marble colonnades along its path.

Temples to all the common Greek, Roman, and Syrian gods could be found there, making the city a prime location to share the Gospel of the One, True God.

**It's a true statement that where God is known least, exists an opportunity to share Him best.**

Initially the Jews who had fled Judea focused first on their fellow Jews with the Good News.

- As we have seen, it took some time for the Jewish believers to come to understand that the message of the Gospel was for ALL nations.

Large Jewish communities existed outside the borders of Israel following the exile from the land in ages past by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

These were referred to as **Hellenistic Jews** – by the Judean Jews.

- Hellenistic period- A period of Greek history identified by its language and culture that spanned roughly from the time of Alexander the Great (323BC) to the Roman conquest of Egypt (30 AD)

Hellenistic Jews held to varying degrees of Judaism while existing in very Gentile cultures.

In those days, many Hellenistic Jews remained devout to Jewish customs- The man pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus in **Matthew 27:32** was a Hellenistic Jew, Simon, a man from Cyrene who was likely in Jerusalem at that time for the Passover.

**Cyprus was then as it is now** – a Mediterranean island off the coast west of Syria.

**Cyrene was a city in Libya in North Africa** – All of these places were connected by trade and commerce along established routes by land and sea.

- See how the Gospel was going out!
- See how the Gospel was being received!

This is the outcome when people are truly in awe of God and humbled by their salvation.

**We have to ask ourselves,**

- Why is the spread of Christianity slowed nearly to a stand-still?
- Why are more churches closing each year than opening?

As we have seen in recent passages – the excitement, the zeal, the **REALITY** of Who God Is – and what HE has done for us – Motivates YOU – Controls You – such that proclaiming the excellencies of God and proclaiming Christ to others simply becomes part of our language, attitude and conduct.

This was true of these first-generation receivers and believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we saw in recent passages, this led to many Jews and Gentiles alike, living outside of Judea, to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, believe the Gospel of Jesus

Christ, and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit just as the first believers in Jerusalem had.

### **ACTS 11:22-24**

*<sup>22</sup> The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.*

Up to this point the headquarters for the new church as it developed was in Jerusalem. One of the new challenges for the Apostles in church leadership was **the explosive growth of the church not just in numbers but geographically.**

Jesus had left Peter and the others with the task of **shepherding the church**, but that was becoming increasingly difficult with believers now spreading into Samaria, throughout Judea and beyond.

Because of this, trusted men were being selected and being sent out to affirm and support the work of the ministry.

- Barnabas was one of those selected to go to.

### **We first met Barnabas in Acts 4:35-37**

In those foundational days of the church after the first indwelling of the Holy Spirit, some of the new believers elected to sell their possessions, including tracts of land, and were giving the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute as was needed among other church members.

One of these was a man named Joseph/Barnabas

**Acts 4:36-37** *Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

Joseph was of Jewish descent, of the tribe of Levi, whose family had at some point relocated to Cyprus. He had been in Jerusalem when the Gospel was presented by the Apostles.

He had heard the words – and they had connected with his heart.

He had considered these things, found them to be true, and had committed his life and his resources to serving Jesus of Nazareth as Christ and Lord.

Joseph had demonstrated a consistent and sacrificial love for Jesus and the church.

Such was Joseph's character that although his given name was Joseph, the Apostles referred to him as "**Barnabas**" – **which is translated as "Son of Encouragement."**

The presence of Barnabas in scripture is provided to us as an example of **Christian Character.**

Character: Is more than just 'personality.' → It speaks to your core values which drive the way you think, the things you prioritize and the actions you take.

As a Disciple of Jesus Christ, look at the character traits attributed to and demonstrated by Barnabas:

- He was committed to his faith, dedicated to the saints.
- Generous with his wealth and blessings
- Humble with a servant's heart toward the leadership of the Apostles
- Faithful in sharing the Gospel.
- Possessing a heart of worship and rejoicing
- An encourager to those seeking the Lord.
- Possessing a resolute heart – standing firm and true in the Lord.
- Having a good reputation – being known as a good man.
- His life and his testimony were evidence that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and a man of Faith.

Friends, the character of Barnabas is both worth looking at and striving for.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he found a church body earnestly seeking the Lord. Not only was HE encouraged, but through his teaching and testimony was an encouragement to them as well!

Such that "considerable numbers" were coming to the Lord.

Jesus once declared to His apostles-

*Matthew 9:37-38*

*"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

Christians with a Barnabas-like attitude are laborers ready for use by the Lord to send into His harvest to reap a reward for the Kingdom of Heaven!

No doubt the genuine character of Barnabas drew people to his teaching.

His sincerity was observable and his love for God and Christ were apparent.

His heart-felt love for people and his passion to see them come to know Jesus as he did could not be denied.

Again – the proof of these things was the Holy Spirit working through Barnabas to lead “considerable numbers” to the Lord.

Seeing the potential for even more growth, He considered the resources available to him and, being the encourager that he was, decided to enlist the help of nearby brother in Christ.

Paul of Tarsus – the man who had formerly been known as Saul the Sadducee who had persecuted the church!

Where Barnabas is the model of Christian Character – Paul is the model of life reborn, renewed, and recommissioned by the Holy Spirit to serve Him!

We remember that earlier, **in Acts 9**, we saw the dramatic redeeming of Saul as Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

The self-righteous Pharisee Saul who thought he saw it all, was blinded by the glory of Christ who proclaimed to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Saul had a great love for God and a great zeal for righteousness – what he lacked was complete revelation and understanding of who Jesus of Nazareth was!

Jesus had a special plan Saul’s passion – but He first had to be shown the way.

Therefore, Christ appeared to Him – and commissioned this once Jewish Pharisee to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. And so, he would begin to go by his Greek name, Paul.

But the church in Jerusalem was wary of Paul – His history with them was savage and bloody.

We read in Acts 9:27 that true to his character as an encourager, it was Barnabas that accepted at face value the work the Holy Spirit had done in redeeming Paul.

We see that it was Barnabas who vouched for Paul and came alongside him to bring Paul before the Apostles and present to them the message of Saul's conversion.

But afterward and from the beginning there had been problems because of the manner of Paul's unrelenting and unapologetic passion.

*Acts 9:28-30*

*And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.*

As Barnabas considered who might aid him in sharing the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch – it was Paul who the Lord laid on his heart.

A few years had passed since the newly converted Paul had been sent from Jerusalem back to Tarsus. Given Paul's character, I am sure he had spent the time spreading the gospel in the region in some manner -

But Barnabas – the Christian coach we all wish we had – went to get Paul and put him back in the game in a way that would place him front and center in the future growth of the church and as a resource God would use in producing the works that are part of our bible today.

### **ACTS 11:25-26**

*<sup>25</sup> And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; <sup>26</sup> and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

Not only is it exceedingly biblical, but what a blessing it is to partner with brothers and sisters in Christ in ministry!

Jesus chose 12 to mentor and build up.

Barnabas chose Paul – and later John Mark - Paul chose Timothy and Titus – These are listed in scripture, but I am sure there were others as well.

Can you imagine what a blessing this time had been for everyone involved?!

I am so thankful for the brothers and sisters who I get to stand and serve with.

My challenge to you today is that if you cannot think of at LEAST ONE person you are PARTNERING in ministry with – you are missing out on an incredible blessing.

Not only for you – but for them – and to the people that you as a team would bless through your ministry.

Find a partner – or partners. → Find a ministry – a way to serve Christ by serving others – and fulfill your role in the Body of Christ and watch your spiritual blessings GROW!

As for Barnabas and Paul – What a powerful team this made in Antioch!

Barnabas' compassion and leadership as an encourager and Paul's bold and zealous preaching strengthened and built up the church. Equipping new leaders, growing them to become elders of that church.

The Church at Antioch would go on to become the FIRST of the FIVE prominent churches of the region.

Leading men in ministry and prophecy would come from its ranks. The corrective writings of Antiochian church leader, Ignatius, in the Second Century, still today provide valuable insight to the struggles of the church and false teachings.

Several missionary journeys to further the reach of the Gospel would be launched from here.

We recall that from the onset the followers of the teachings of Jesus Christ had referred to themselves as, **"The Way."** (Acts 9:2)

And it is here, in the days of Barnabas and Paul that for the FIRST time the disciples of Jesus Christ came to be known as **"Christians."**

Today this identifier is commonplace.

## **Practical Christianity**

***What does it mean to be a "Christian." Is the term grammatically, correct?***

***And speaking "Practically"- Beyond the theory and ideas associated with Christianity – how does being a Christian affect one's behavior, actions, and speech?***

**When considering these things it begs the questions:**

- **WHY WAS THIS TERM APPLIED?**



- **TO WHOM WAS IT APPLIED?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A "CHRISTIAN?"**
- **AM "I" A CHRISTIAN?**
- **IF I AM, HOW WOULD ANYONE ELSE KNOW?**

### **Let's begin with WHY the term was applied.**

Simply put, the term Christian is label used to identify a group of people.

Like any such application – it is a title given to label a distinct people group based on some parameters.

It may be due to nationality → We label people who live in the United States of America as "Americans."

It may be due to culture → We label people with a heightened love of the outdoors, hunting, fishing, survival skills and a 'fix-it-yourself' attitude as "Rednecks."

All police officers are "Cops." -- All instructors are "Teachers." - - And so on...

### **As to whom the title was applied-**

In these early days of the church, it was becoming apparent that there was a new group of people – and their numbers and the regions they inhabited were growing rapidly.

The term "Christian" is found THREE TIMES in scripture. We find it in Acts 11:26, 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16 and always used to describe the people we would recognize as members of the church.

### **What does it mean to be a "Christian?"**

For years I have used the simple explanation that to be a Christian means to be "Christ-like." - - While not technically wrong - - there should be much more to our understanding of our identity.

The word itself is rooted in the Latin word *Christos* – From where we get the English word Christ - Meaning "Anointed one."

- Jesus of Nazareth Himself being the Christ

In the Greek, as in the Latin, the suffix "-ianos" is placed to indicate a possessive genitive.

Therefore, in its most pure form the term "*Cristianos*" would indicate a person "belonging to the anointed One."

**Our next question then is: AM "I" A CHRISTIAN?**

In the historical context, the term was applied to students or followers of various teachings or even political movements. – and still is today.

Members of the church in Antioch had demonstrated by their behavior, speech, and activity.

By this they demonstrated their affiliation with "The Party of Christ" or that they were "Followers of the teachings of Christ"

**Our final question is this: If I am a Christian, how would anyone else know?**

To begin to answer that question let's look at the last of our passages from our text today.

**ACTS 11:27-30**

*<sup>27</sup> Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.*

Luke records for us a unique opportunity the Antiochian church had to support the home church of Jerusalem.

So let me just acknowledge that yes, during the time of the Apostles there were still some who had the gift of Prophecy.

A time where God would reveal His perfect will and intentions directly to a person for the purpose of declaring those things to others.

It has been said one purpose of prophecy is to stir up the people's hearts to do the will of God.

While we do not see the gift of Prophecy as a matter of FORETELLING extending beyond the Apostolic age – we do see the gift of FORTHTELLING does.

- Foretelling – to declare in advance (Predict) the things that come to pass later as revealed immediately by the Holy Spirit.
- Forthtelling– To speak, teach and declare truths medially from the word of God revealed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Agabus**, the only named prophet of this group, travels from Jerusalem to the church in Antioch, presumably under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

There to stir up the hearts of the Antiochian church to prepare them to be a blessing to the believers in Jerusalem in the coming days.

As “Christians” the followers of Jesus had been cut-off from the temple by the Pharisees and would be on their own during the hard times the prophets were predicting.

It is also telling that the forthtelling from the Lord came to Christ's church and not the temple leaders!

Historians, including Josephus, record a severe famine in that region during the reign of Claudius Caesar that lasted several years. The death toll due to starvation was said to be great.

In the midst of this – God prepared His people – and He provided those who were identified as Christians – with an opportunity to be a blessing to others and example to the world of what Practical Christianity looks like.

It also demonstrates the church was not a matter of "Jew first then Gentile" but that all were one for the common good and needs of the church as a whole.

Paul would later write in **Galatians 6:10**

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to the family of faith.

[illegible]

**IN CLOSING –**

## What does Practicing Practical Christianity like?

It really comes down to Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

**Orthodoxy** refers to what we believe.

**Orthopraxy** refers to how those belief's shape our lives. How we practice what we believe.

As we saw earlier – those who can **rightly** claim the title “Christian” are those who belong to Christ.

To belong to Christ, we must **believe** in His teachings and the things taught about Him.

- The Christ **IS** Jesus of Nazareth – He alone is the Son of God and equal with God within the Trinity – Being fully God and fully man He was born of a virgin that God might become flesh and dwell among men.
- He lived a perfect life and died on the cross for the forgiveness of the sins of man. He was placed in a tomb and rose again on the third day to become the firstborn of the resurrection, having overcome both sin and the grave.
- Those who believe these things are saved by God's grace through faith in Him.

If we have truly believed these things – those beliefs **MUST** and **WILL** shape our lives.

That belief results in Repentance – where I despise the sin that led me to fall short of the glory of God.

That belief results in a deep desire to learn know and understand deeper the teachings of Jesus Christ **AND** the desire to apply those things to my life.

That belief results in acts of selflessness where I am both willing and desire to prioritize the needs of others.

In its purest state – that belief **MUST** and **WILL** result in my desire to be obedient and pleasing to God.

Sadly, the term “Christian” today has lost a great deal of accuracy in describing those who follow the teachings of Christ Jesus and have a **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** with Him.

Today the term is casually applied to anyone claiming even loosely the values of scriptural teachings.

They claim Christianity because they come from a “Christian family” – or because they live in a “Christian nation.”

Friends, the proof of these things is not in trusting a title, or a family history, or self-proclaimed identity – those things will lead only to false sense of security and judgement before God.

Salvation is in the identity of being a follower of Jesus Christ – Which will and must result in an attitude, and works, and speech, that honor Jesus Christ.

Because HE is the way, the Truth and the Life- and that no one would come before God the Father except through a RELATIONSHIP with Him.

And if you truly have that – the world will know it – because you are not of the world. → and in so believing – you will place yourself in a position where God can and will work through you also – to encourage and grow HIS church.

Pray the Lord will lead you rightly in this.