

Main Idea: In Acts 11:19-30, we see the glory of Christ in the building of His church. It's the account of the church at Antioch, and by taking a close look we learn what Christ intends to do in and through us. There are three scenes in the passage.

I. The church begins...and Christ receives glory (19-21).

- A. The Lord took His people to the lost (19-20).
  - 1. He used adversity (19).
  - 2. He used people who were willing to try new things (20).
- B. The Lord brought the lost to Himself (21).
  - 1. When salvation occurs, people trust in the Lord.
  - 2. When salvation occurs, people turn to the Lord.

II. The church grows...and Christ receives glory (22-26).

- A. It takes grace.
- B. It takes people (22-24).
  - 1. Like Barnabas, we must be encouragers.
  - 2. Like Barnabas, we must overcome the barrier of criticism.
- C. It takes partnership (25-26).
  - 1. Making disciples requires the whole body.
  - 2. Making disciples requires teaching.
  - 3. Making disciples requires time.

III. The church matures...and Christ receives glory (27-30).

- A. Maturing disciples give attention to the Word of God (27).
- B. Maturing disciples give resources to help the people of God (28-29).
  - 1. We should give according to our ability.
  - 2. We should give to show we care.
  - 3. We should give in submission to the church.

The Bottom Line: Christ is putting His glory on display in the building of His church.

- 1. Pray for Christ's honor in and through His church.
- 2. Participate in Christ's work in and through His church.
- 3. Protect Christ's reputation in and through His church.

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:13-20*

A year ago Christianity Today ran an article, “How Many Churches Does America Have? More Than Expected.”<sup>2</sup> According to the article, there were 336,000 churches in America in 1998. In 2012 there were 384,000. It's also worth noting that the number of mosques grew from 1,200 in 2000 to 2,100 in 2011.

Let this sink in. There are a lot of churches in the United States of America. There are 47,000 Southern Baptist churches in our country, and 35,700 United Methodist churches. Non-denominational churches increased from 54,000 in 1998 to 84,000 in 2012.

Closer to home there are over one hundred churches listed on the Scioto County commissioners website (and it's not exhaustive; I noticed WBC isn't on the list). That's a lot of congregations, a lot of places with a sign out front that says “church.”

Jesus said, “I will build my church.” And He is keeping His word. To belong to the church is to belong to the fulfillment of Christ's promise. To cherish the church is to cherish the Bride that Christ cherishes.

\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html>

Paul loved the church, labored for it, shed tears over it. No wonder he breaks into a doxology and says in Ephesians 3:21, “To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.”

I’ve entitled this morning’s message, “*Seeing the Glory of Christ in the Building of His Church.*” There is no other institution on earth where you can see the glory of Christ as in the church.

You say, “Hold on. When I look at the church, I don’t see His glory. I see sinners and problems.”

And you’re right, to a point. When you look at the church, *any* church, you will see sinners and problems. But keep looking. There’s more to the picture. Sinners and problems? Yes. If we’re not seeing sinners and problems, we’re not being honest. But if sinners and problems are all we see, we’re afflicted with nearsightedness and in need of the Great Physician to open our eyes.

This is precisely why Jesus Christ came into the world in the first place, to manifest the glory of His grace in the salvation and transformation of sinners whose lives are filled with problems. He loves His church. It’s His laboratory where His grace-work takes place. It’s His Bride that He’s nourishing and cleansing. It’s the vine that He’s pruning so it will be fruit. It’s the building that He’s constructing one living stone at a time.

And so, by faith we say with Paul, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

So 384,000 “churches” in America, with more than 100 right around us. That’s 384,000 opportunities for the glory of Christ to be displayed.

Which raises a question. When is the glory of Christ being displayed in a local church? Sinners and problems, yes, in all 384,000 churches. In which is Christ displaying His glory?

That’s different from asking, which churches are growing, which churches are doing good things in the eyes of the world, etc. In which churches is the glory of Christ being manifest?

The answer to that question takes us back to the beginning, specifically to the text before us this morning in Acts 11.

I want us to think about something. Not one of the 384,000 churches in America today would exist were it not for the influence of one particular church. WBC would not be here today were it not for this church that was birthed into existence about ten years after the Lord Jesus returned to heaven.

I’m referring to the church in Antioch. It was at Antioch that Jesus’ followers first became known as “Christians.” This church occupied a significant place in God’s redemptive plan. We need to pay attention to it—and learn from it.

If you look at a map, you’ll discover that the city of Antioch is about 16 miles from the Mediterranean and some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Historically, it was the metropolis of Syria, and afterwards became the capital of the Roman province in Asia.<sup>3</sup> Like Philippi, it was raised to the rank of a Roman colony. It bears the modern name of Antakia, and is now a miserable, decaying Turkish town.<sup>4</sup>

That was certainly not the case in the first century. Then Antioch was a booming place (I’ll give you some details in a few moments). And the church in Antioch became

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<sup>3</sup>Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

the hub of church's missionary activity to the Gentiles. In fact, in the decade of the forties, the cutting edge of the early shifted from Jerusalem (where the Holy Spirit established the first church) to Antioch, which became the new base of operations.

What made Antioch so important? Honestly, things were different in the Antioch church. No, the message didn't change, but the methodology certainly did. And God was pleased to use this church in mighty way for the advancement of the gospel of His Son. There's much we can learn from it.

In Acts 11:19-30, we see what a church looks like when its putting the glory of Christ on display. The glory shows up in three phases.

### I. The church begins...and Christ receives glory (19-21).

Remember, the first church was planted on Jewish soil. But the seed of the gospel soon spread to Gentile turf, and it landed in Antioch.

Notice Acts 11:19-21, "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.<sup>20</sup> 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."

Luke tells us the Lord did two things to establish the church in Antioch.

**A. The Lord took His people to the lost (19-20).** Don't miss the significance of the first words of verse 19, "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch." How does the Lord build His church? In the case of reaching the lost in Antioch, He did two things.

*1. He used adversity (19).* What adversity? He used the persecution in connection with Stephen. Acts 7 tells what happened to Stephen. This man, of course, was a fearless follower of Jesus. When arrested by the Jewish leaders, he rebuked them for their rejection of Jesus the Messiah. They pummeled him with rocks and took his life from him. And then they began to attack the rest of Jesus' disciples.

Acts 8:1-3 explains what happened, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.<sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.<sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."

It was a terribly sad day, there's no escaping the fact. But at the same time it was a tremendously significant day, for on this day God moved His church into the next phase of His plan. He took the persecuted to new territory and turned them into preachers.

They went to Phoenicia—that's the coastal region north of Galilee, to Cyprus—an island in the Mediterranean Sea northwest of Israel, and to Antioch.

Every day Jesus' followers become martyrs. Is this a tragic loss? Yes, but know this. The sovereign Lord is not sleeping. He uses even the hardship of His people to bring about the fulfillment of His good redemptive plan.

In the first century, many lost their homes, businesses, and even their lives as they fled from hostility. But as a result of their loss, some new people gained an eternal home, including some new people in *Antioch*.

We learn something else about God here.

*2. He used people who were willing to try new things (20).* Verse 19 says that the believers that left Jerusalem to escape persecution spread the message of Jesus. But to whom did they preach? Luke says, "Only to Jews." Why only to Jews? They

themselves were Jews. It's natural to go to people *like yourself*. It's hard to think outside the box and reach out to people *not* like yourself.

But that's exactly what some did. Verse 20, "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."

So the disciples from Jerusalem went only to Jews. Those who shared Jesus with the Greeks were not from Jerusalem. They were from Cyprus and Cyrene, the latter is located on the north coast of Africa. The Lord used people from Gentile territory to begin His work to reach Gentiles.

Now, can Jews reach Gentiles? Sure they can, and they did, as in the case of Peter with Cornelius. And they will, as seen throughout the rest of Acts. But to get it started in Antioch God raised up some people with a distinct background which prepared them to go where others feared to go.

Jesus is not just the Jewish Savior but for all peoples. I doubt that anybody in the Jerusalem church would have disagreed with that statement. "Of course, Jesus can save anybody!" But they weren't willing to go to the *anybodies*. They were afraid of leaving the comfort zone. So God raised up others to get the job done. It's interesting that Nicolas, one of the seven 'deacons' of Acts 6:5, was from Antioch, and had been a Gentile convert to Judaism.<sup>5</sup>

My friend, God is sovereign over your background and mine. And He can use our backgrounds to open doors to reach lost people with the message of His saving love.

So God did two things to start the church at Antioch. First, He took His people to the lost.

**B. The Lord brought the lost to Himself (21).** "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." Why did people get saved in Antioch? Why were their evangelistic efforts fruitful? The same reason as today. *The Lord's hand was with them.*

Friends, if we need incentive to talk to people about Jesus, here it is. We don't witness alone. We witness with the realization that God is at work. This is the divine-human cooperation. We tell. God's hand moves. Lost people believe and turn.

In fact, the text is very specific about what happens when salvation occurs.

1. *When salvation occurs, people trust in the Lord.* Luke says a great number "believed." They placed their faith, hope, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for their sins and conquered death. But that's not all...

2. *When salvation occurs, people turn to the Lord.* Luke indicates that the people who believed also "turned to the Lord." If you turn *to* the Lord it implies that you turn *from* something, namely, what used to be the focus of your life. When you turn to the Lord He becomes more important than worldly applause, family, work, and everything else that used to be so important to us.

These are the two evidences of true conversion. Trusting and turning. To become a Christian you must trust *in* the Lord rather than in yourself. And having become a Christian, you turn *to* the Lord and make Him priority above all else. It's a "package deal," trusting and turning go together. And it's the wonderful evidence of the glorious grace of Christ at work.

This is how the church at Antioch started. God took His people to the lost and then brought the lost to Himself.

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<sup>5</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

Back in 1982, President Ronald Regan wrote a letter to his father in law. The letter appeared recently in the Washington Post. President Regan's father in law, an avowed atheist, was dying...

The church begins...and Christ receives glory.

## II. The church grows...and Christ receives glory (22-26).

Verse 22 begins, "News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem."

Wow! Christians in Antioch! The church in Jerusalem must have been thrilled, right? To be honest, not everyone was. Why not?

Because Antioch was very different from Jerusalem. As mentioned earlier the city of Antioch was 300 miles north of Jerusalem, but the people of Antioch were light-years away in mindset and lifestyle. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (behind Rome and Alexandria), with a population of over half a million people. It was a magnificent city. Main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades . It was a city known for its night life (the only city in the world at the time that had streets lighted at night).<sup>6</sup> The city was famous for its central heating, plumbing, and sanitary facilities. Cicero referred to Antioch as "a renowned and populous city, the seat of brilliant scholarship and artistic refinement."<sup>7</sup>

Know this, too. Antioch was a city known for its sensual pleasure, in wickedness, second only to Corinth. It was noted for its dancers, and actors, and chariot races. About five miles south of the city was the pleasure garden dedicated to the worship of Daphne. It was there that horrid acts of crude prostitution took place, in the name of religion.

Out of that cesspool, God saved some people. News reached the church in Jerusalem. They decided to send a representative to check things out. Guess who they chose?

Notice verse 22, "News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."

Why Barnabas? For several reasons. For starters, Barnabas was from Cyprus (4:36). Maybe he knew some of the men from Cyprus who evangelized Antioch. But he also apparently owned property and had lived in Jerusalem for some time. Barnabas knew both worlds. In Acts 4:37 he demonstrated loyalty and submission to the apostles and the Jerusalem church by selling a piece of land and giving it to the church.

What's more, Barnabas was an encourager. His name "Barnabas," actually a nickname the apostles gave him, meant "son of encouragement." He was just what these new Christians needed. And he had a track record as a peacemaker. In Acts 9:27 he is the person who introduced the newly converted Saul to the skeptics in the church in Jerusalem. He believed Saul was for real when others held him at arm's length.

Yes, Barnabas was the man for the hour. In addition to his background and ability to encourage, Barnabas possessed a rare trait. He was a man who could overcome a difficult barrier. And so must we. We'll see what that barrier is in just a moment.

But first, let's watch how the church grew. How does God grow a church? For a church to grow it takes three ingredients, each of which are seen in the growth of the Antioch church.

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<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, p. 448

<sup>7</sup> in LaSor, p. 166

**A. It takes grace.** Look ahead to verse 23 for a moment, “When he arrived and saw evidence of the grace of God, he was glad.” Why did this church grow? What Barnabas saw he could attribute only to *grace*.

As the story goes, a mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy." "But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.<sup>8</sup>

In his mercy God doesn't give us what we deserve. He gave that to His Son on the cross. But in His grace God goes even further. He chooses for His Son's sake to give us what we do not deserve.

You say, “Can you really see grace?” Luke says that Barnabas saw its *evidence*. Every changed life in the church illustrates grace. Every one of us is here for the same reason. It has nothing to do with what we did, but what God did. God did for us what we did not deserve—and still don't deserve. He gave His Son to die in our place for our sins. And through His risen Son He gives us new life. Beyond that He gives us eternal life on the merit of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did for us.

What does it take for a church to grow? First and foremost, it takes *grace*.

**B. It takes people (22-24).** Let's read the text again, starting at verse 22, “News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”

God uses people to start churches. God also uses people to grow churches. It takes people to get the job done, people like Barnabas. We can learn two lessons from Barnabas.

1. *Like Barnabas, we must be encouragers.* What did Barnabas do when he got in town? In verse 23 Luke says, “He was glad and encouraged them.” He engaged in the ministry of *encouragement*.

But encouragement is more than backslapping and telling people how nice they are. It's the common Greek term *parakaleo* which means “to call to” and can be translated by a variety of English words: admonish, beg, teach, encourage, and exhort. The KJV actually uses the latter term, stating that Barnabas “exhorted them all.” Don't miss what he exhorted these new believers to do: “to remain true [KJV ‘cleave unto’] to the Lord with all their hearts.”

Unfortunately, we don't do this enough. We fail to warn new Christians that it's going to be *hard* to live the Christian life. Sure, it's worth it, but it won't be easy! We must urge them to hang in there, to refuse to live by their feelings and to choose daily to remain true to the Lord. Indeed, the evidence of true salvation isn't a date written in the back of their Bible. No, it's not a prayer card, but a persevering life.

If we're going to be a growing church, that's what we need. New Christians need a ton of something, namely *encouragement*. So like Barnabas, we must be encouragers.

2. *Like Barnabas, we must overcome the barrier of criticism.* You say, “I don't see any criticism mentioned here. How did Barnabas overcome criticism?” Look again. Look hard at that word *Antioch*.

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<sup>8</sup> Luis Palau, Experiencing God's Forgiveness, Multnomah Press, 1984.

Antioch was very different from Jerusalem. And the new Christians in Antioch were different from their brothers in Christ down south, too. They were *Gentile*. They were saved out of pagan backgrounds. They ate meat offered to pagan idols. They fixed their hair differently. They liked different kinds of entertainment. They wore different styles of clothing.

Think about something. Is it possible for Christians with so many differences to experience unity? Some would say, “Yes, as soon as we get rid of the differences.” But is that biblical unity? Do we have to like the same music styles to have unity? Do we all have to wear the same kind of clothing to have unity? No. In biblical unity, we celebrate what we have in common (that's Christ), and accept what makes us different (styles, etc).

That's what Barnabas did. He encouraged them to remain true *to the Lord*. Not to the traditions of men, but to the *Lord*. This is critical. Does the text say that when Barnabas got to Antioch and looked at the Christians there, he said, “That's not the way we do it back in Jerusalem...”? No. It says he was glad and encouraged them. Were there differences? Certainly. But Barnabas put the focus on the Lord where it belongs.

No wonder verse 24 offers this assessment of Barnabas: “he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” A person full of faith is a person who can see what others cannot see. He doesn't get sidetracked by the externals. He sees what the Lord is doing and rejoices.

Would you have gone—to Antioch, that is? If the Jerusalem church had asked you to go to Antioch, would you have gone?

You say, “But I don't live in Jerusalem, so that question doesn't apply.” Correct, you don't live in Jerusalem in the first century. You live right here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But the question does apply because God still uses people to reach people. It takes *people* to grow churches.

Let me share a fact with you. There are a lot of people in this community who don't have a church background. They don't know about Jesus, let alone holy living. But God is interested in reaching them. Are you available? Perhaps you're thinking, “What will people say about me if they see me hanging around people like that?”

What do you think they said about Barnabas? Check out Acts 15:1-2 some time and you'll see that some of the traditionalists in Jerusalem were very critical about what was happening in Antioch. But that didn't stop Barnabas. Barnabas took a risk in behalf of the Christians in Antioch. He went to Antioch. And he stayed there, as we'll see, for quite a while. He made it home.

Friends, if we want to be biblical encouragers, we must overcome the barrier of criticism. You say, “Is it worth it?” Oh, yes!

Because Barnabas overcame the barrier he was privileged to see a thrilling sight in Antioch. Verse 24 ends, “And a great number of people were brought to the Lord.” There's nothing like seeing God work firsthand—and being a tool in His hand!

A quick sidelight: That final phrase, “brought to the Lord,” is important. In his biography, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, Chuck Swindoll offers this insight, “I want to point out that these people weren't ‘brought to the Church.’ They were ‘brought to the Lord.’ Revival isn't about enlarging the membership rolls of a church. It's about adding names to the Book of Life.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Paul*, p. 84.

Now it is true that once brought to the Lord these individuals were added to the church. Church membership is important. Coming to church and being an active participant is important. But coming to Christ comes first.

Scholar A. T. Robertson, in his work *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, writes, “These people were added to the Lord Jesus before they were added to the church. If that were always true, what a difference it would make in our churches.”

What does it take to grow a church? It takes grace. It takes people. Thirdly...

**C. It takes partnership (25-26).** “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,<sup>26</sup> 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.”

Notice the first phrase of verse 25, “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.” Think about that. Why did he recruit Saul? Verse 24 says that many people were added to the Lord in Antioch. Verse 25 says that Barnabas responded by leaving town, heading one hundred miles to the west to find Saul.

You say, “Why did he leave? The church needed him!” The actions of Barnabas teach us three important lessons about disciple-making.

1. *Making disciples requires the whole body.* Barnabas was a team player. He knew the young church in Antioch needed more than he could give. An insecure man would have bluffed his way. Not Barnabas. He admitted he needed help. So he went to find the best-suited man for the job. Saul. And the church prospered because of it (verse 26).

Not one of us has all the gifts necessary to disciple someone. If we don’t involve the rest of the church, we’ll end up developing deficient clones. Only Jesus could disciple someone one-on-one, all by Himself. He had all the spiritual gifts. We don’t. But the church does. In making disciples we need to link the young believer to the church, not just to us.

So off to Tarsus Barnabas went. Luke’s wording indicates Barnabas had difficulty locating Saul.<sup>10</sup> I can imagine Saul’s family disinherited him when he returned home to Tarsus. It’s likely that more than five years (Hughes says eight to ten years; p. 161) have passed since Saul’s conversion.

What had Saul been doing all that time? We’re not told. Knowing Saul’s zeal, my hunch is that he was spreading the news of Jesus throughout the region. And suffering for it. Some have suggested it was during this time he experienced some of the persecution he describes in 2 Corinthians letter. One thing we do know. Saul was learning to *wait* on God. It takes more than talent to be used greatly of God. It takes submission.

2. *Making disciples requires teaching.* That’s what Barnabas and Saul did in Antioch. They taught “great numbers of people.” Don’t miss an important connection. In verse 21 Luke says that a “great number of people believed.” Now we’re told that “great numbers” were taught. We must teach those we reach.

3. *Making disciples requires time.* Barnabas and Saul invested a whole year in Antioch. It takes *time* to grow Christians. A ten week course won’t cut it. Based on Paul’s practice elsewhere in Acts, the discipling process for these Antioch Christians consisted of daily involvement in God’s Word—and that with an apostle!

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<sup>10</sup>The Greek term *anazeteo* “to look for” suggests a laborious search on Barnabas’ part (MacArthur, p. 314).

How the church needs people like Barnabas! We need people who understand that growing a church requires *partnership*. J. Oswald Sanders wrote this about Barnabas, “Only a big man would have made such a selection, for to a man of Barnabas’s discernment it would be obvious that this dynamic and brilliant scholar would speedily outshine and outstrip him. He was willing to accept a subordinate role, in the interests of the Kingdom. He did not feel that it demeaned him to give place to a less experienced but more able junior...He slipped into second place with not the slightest evidence of jealousy.”<sup>11</sup>

For the good of the church in Antioch, Barnabas recruited Saul. My friends, it’s great to do ministry. It’s even better to encourage others to join you in doing ministry. It was D. L. Moody’s policy that each new Christian be given a task soon after conversion. At first, it might be only passing out hymnals or ushering people to their seats, but each convert had to be busy. He said, “It is better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men.”<sup>12</sup>

One final phase. We’ve seen how the church started and grew. Thirdly...

### III. The church matures...and Christ receives glory (27-30).

Maturing. That’s what we see happening in the church at Antioch in this scene. In verses 27-30 Luke describes one event that occurred in Antioch that gives us valuable insight into what a maturing church does. A maturing church is made up of disciples who practice two vital functions.

**A. Maturing disciples give attention to the Word of God (27).** “During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.” In New Testament times prophets were people gifted by the Holy Spirit to give special revelation from the Lord to His church. It was very kind of the Jerusalem church to send these prophets to Antioch. They knew that disciples need the Word of God.

We need to hear from God—that’s why He gave us His written Word. And we need to listen when He speaks—which is what the Antioch church did.

Verses 28-29—“One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)<sup>29</sup> The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.<sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” Here’s vital function #2...

**B. Maturing disciples give resources to help the people of God (28-29).** Agabus predicted a famine was coming (he’s the man who fifteen years later predicted that Paul would be arrested if he went to Jerusalem; Acts 21:10). When the believers heard a famine was coming, they started a benevolent fund. By the way, there’s no indication that they waited for the famine to arrive before they started giving. When the Antioch believers heard the Word from God, they did what we must do. They *believed* it, and they took action to *put it into practice*.

We can learn three lessons about giving from the church in Antioch.

1. *We should give according to our ability.* That’s what the Scriptures say they did—“each according to his ability.” That means giving will vary from person to person. If I can spend \$20,000 on a car for myself but then throw a \$20 bill in the offering plate

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<sup>11</sup> P. 171.

<sup>12</sup> Taken from Wiersbe, pp. 449-50.

as my weekly gift to God, I'm not giving according to my ability. In the Old Testament, God taught His people to give a tithe (10%) plus other offerings. The New Testament standard is to give *generously* (2 Cor 7:6-8). And though young in Christ, the Antioch believers were just that, *generous*. When it comes to giving, is that true of you?

2. *We should give to show we care.* The famine was going to hit the whole Roman world, including Antioch, but these brothers didn't think of themselves. They thought of their brothers and sisters back in Jerusalem. And they took an offering for them to show they cared.

There's an important principle here, as stated by Warren Wiersbe, "If people have been a spiritual blessing to us, we should minister to them out of our material possessions."<sup>13</sup> [see Galatians 6:6] Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

3. *We should give in submission to the church.* The Antioch gift was handled through the local church. They sent it "to the elders" of the Jerusalem church "by Barnabas and Saul." These Christians recognized the God-given role of leaders in the church. And they submitted themselves to their leaders in the administration of this gift.

We've looked at a great church today, a church on the cutting edge for God. We've examined how God started it, how it grew, and how it functioned. Now answer a question. *Are we on the cutting edge for God?* Are we as a church? Are you as an individual?

**The Bottom Line: Christ is putting His glory on display in the building of His church.**

1. *Pray for Christ's honor in and through His church.*
2. *Participate in Christ's work in and through His church.*
3. *Protect Christ's reputation in and through His church.*

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<sup>13</sup> Wiersbe, p. 450.