

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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FOUR WAYS TO BRING PEOPLE TO CHRIST

Acts 11:19-30

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There are four points to today's message:

1. Believers spread the gospel.
2. Barnabas offered encouragement.
3. Agabus gave a warning.
4. The Church of Antioch shared gifts.

INTRODUCTION: Last week we talked about how Peter shared the gospel with Cornelius and his family. This was important because Cornelius was a Gentile, and Peter finally realized that God was extending his grace and the gift of salvation to the Gentiles. After Peter stayed with Cornelius a few days, he went back to Jerusalem where the Jewish Christians criticized and interrogated him for staying in the home of Gentiles and for eating with them. However, after explaining God's message to him and how the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians seemed to come around. We read in Acts 11:18, "*When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.'*" Let's pick up the story in verse 19.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:19-21

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. 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. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

1-BELIEVERS SPREAD THE GOSPEL

As believers in Jerusalem fled from persecution, they traveled, and as they traveled, they took the gospel message with them. Unfortunately, however, they did not take it to the Gentiles.

Cornelius may or may not have been the first Gentile to hear and respond to the Gospel.

- Some people believe that Luke, the physician, was a Gentile.
- In addition, we have already read about the Ethiopian eunuch who was witnessed to and baptized by Philip. He was possibly a Gentile.
- In Acts 6, the disciples chose 7 men to oversee the work of the church. One of those men was Nicolas who was a Gentile from Antioch. Nicolas, however, had converted to Judaism before becoming a Christian.

So, Gentile Christians were not completely unheard of. However, generally speaking, these instances were few and far between.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem rejoiced at the conversion of Cornelius, but they still weren't willing to personally share the gospel with Gentiles. They were so wrapped up in their unique identity as God's chosen that they couldn't get their heads around this fact. They may have believed God was extending his message of salvation to all people, but they weren't willing to act upon that belief.

ILLUSTRATION: David was born and raised on the mission field in Africa. As a missionary's son, David's family never had a lot of money, and he decided at a young age that when he grew up, he was going to do something with his life to earn some money. David knew the Lord, and he knew the gospel, but he also knew that he did not want to be a poor preacher. In his late teens or early twenties, however, David found himself hospitalized for several months. In severe pain, unable to get out of bed, he prayed for healing and promised the Lord that he would do whatever God wanted him to do. God healed him, and David committed to go to the mission field, but not as preacher. He did not like public speaking. This past January, 87-year-old David passed away. Guess what? He did go to the mission field, and he did

wind up a preacher. In fact, he spent most of his adult life serving as a preacher and evangelist on the mission field and in the States.

Like the Jewish Christians, David knew what was right all along, but it took him a while to do it. Thankfully, some men from Cyprus and Cyrene weren't so reluctant.

EXPLANATION:

- Cyrene was a Greek colonial city in North Africa that was about 783 miles from Jerusalem.
- Matthew tells us that Simon, the man who was commanded to carry the cross of Jesus, was from Cyrene. We don't know, but it's possible that Simon was the first one to take the gospel message to his hometown.
- Cyprus was a large Mediterranean island that was given its name by the Greeks.

So, both these places had a strong Greek influence. Maybe that's why these men were quicker to respond to God's call to witness to the Gentiles. Perhaps they felt more comfortable around them. Because of their association with Greeks, they may have also been more concerned about their salvation. We don't know what their motivation might have been, but we do know what they did. They shared the gospel with the Gentiles, and the Gentiles believed.

APPLICATION: Many Christians today want to leave all the preaching and witnessing to the pastor. But that's not how it's supposed to be.

- To our knowledge, the believers who shared the gospel with the Greeks in Antioch were not part of the original 12.
- They were not professional pastors.
- They wouldn't have even been called missionaries (although that's really what they were).
- First and foremost, they were ordinary people who for some reason felt a burden for another group of people who needed the Lord. God has called each of us to share the salvation message, and he gives each of us a unique audience.

Listen to this:

- There are people who you will meet and talk to who I will never meet.
- There are people who will listen to you who might not ever listen to me.
- You love people who I don't even know and don't have any deep affection for.
- Your circle of influence is different than mine.

God wants you to share the gospel with them. You don't have to be a Bible theologian or an eloquent speaker. Just tell them about Jesus and how he made a difference in your life. In the early church, **believers shared the gospel**. We should too.

2-BARNABAS OFFERED ENCOURAGEMENT

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:22-26

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ 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.

EXPLANATION: The church in Jerusalem heard about what was happening among the Gentiles in Antioch. The same Jewish Christians who had listened to Peter's testimony about Cornelius's salvation now heard that a revival was taking place among the Gentiles. They were curious. So, they sent a representative to check it out.

- The name Barnabas was kind of like a nickname. It means "encourager."
- Barnabas's "real" name was Joseph.
- We first read about Barnabas in Acts 4 when he sold a piece of property and gave the money to the disciples.
- In Acts 9, when other Christians did not trust Saul, it was Barnabas who stuck his neck out and befriended him.

It's no wonder that the disciples decided to rename. Interestingly, Barnabas was also from Cyprus. Is it possible he may have even known some of the missionaries from Cyprus who traveled to Antioch to witness to the Greeks? We don't know. Regardless, Barnabas was the perfect man for the job.

- In his gift to the church, he had shown his generosity.
- By befriending Saul, he had already demonstrated his courage and his lack of prejudice.
- Barnabas went to Antioch with an open heart and an open mind.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever not fit in? Have you ever been the last to be picked for a team or stood alone at a crowded party? Do you know the blessing of having that one person reach out to you, to accept you, to make you feel welcome?

I do my best to remember names, but I am not as good at it as I used to be. When someone calls you by name, it means something. It makes you feel important, welcomed, maybe even loved. This kind of greeting is often even more special when it comes from someone in a position of authority.

Barnabas was sent to Antioch as a representative of the Church of Jerusalem, what was then considered the founding church or first church because that's where the disciples were first gathered and anointed by the Holy Spirit. As a representative of the Church of Jerusalem, Barnabas was in a position to do one of two things. He could judge, or he could encourage.

- He could have looked at this Gentile revival with criticism.
- He could have nit-picked all the things they weren't doing "right."
- He could have taken back a skeptical report to the Jewish Christians waiting to hear from him. But he did not.

Barnabas, true to his nature, cheered these new believers on to a greater faith. Then, knowing that they would need special instruction to grow in the faith, he recruited Saul to help him teach these new believers.

APPLICATION: Encouragement may be one of the most underutilized tools in the arsenal of a Christian. It's a shame because it's so easy to do.

- Offer a word of praise for a job well done.

- Give thanks when someone blesses you.
- Smile.
- Say “hello.”
- Lend a helping hand.
- Be a friend.
- If you are joyful even when circumstances are unfavorable, people will take notice.
- If you are kind even when someone else doesn’t deserve it, people will begin to wonder.
- If you are consistently friendly and genuinely loving, people will start to ask questions.

They will want to know why you are different, and the door will be opened for you to tell them about Christ.

The flame was ignited when **believers spread the gospel. Barnabas offered encouragement**, and more people came to know Christ.

3-AGABUS GAVE A WARNING

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:27-28

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ 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.)

EXPLANATION: The Church of Jerusalem began to get the picture. While there would still be issues among the Jewish and Gentile Christians, they finally seemed to get on board. Some prophets from Jerusalem came to visit. One of them was a man named Agabus.

A prophet was a person who spoke on behalf of God expressing God’s will for the people or giving messages from God about things that were going to happen. Unfortunately, a prophet’s message was usually not good, and prophets were not always well-received. Still, Agabus did not shy away from the task. He told the believers in Antioch that bad times were headed their way. A severe famine was

coming. There would be a lack of food. People would go hungry. I'm sure it was a difficult message, but it needed to be given because people don't always have the luxury of time.

APPLICATION:

You've heard many warnings in life, haven't you?

- Your children are going to grow up fast.
- Your doctor says you need to lose weight or you need to control your cholesterol.

You've even passed on plenty of warnings, I'm sure.

- You've told someone they are headed down a dangerous path.
- You've warned people of coming trouble.

There are times when we can't shrink away from the hard truth. Like Agabus, there are times when we have to give warnings. The church can grow from warnings. We have to tell them about sin. We have to explain that hell is real.

Let's review:

- Believers shared the gospel and people believed.
- Barnabas offered encouragement, and the Gentile church grew.
- Agabus gave a warning so that they would not be taken unaware.

4-THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH SHARED GIFTS.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:29-30

The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

EXPLANATION: Verse 26 told us that it was here, in Antioch, that the Jesus-followers were first called Christians. As Barnabas and Paul preached and taught the Gentile believers, it did not take long for the fledgling congregation to grow into a thriving church.

Agabus warned the church that a famine was coming that would affect the entire Roman empire. As the third largest city in the Roman empire, this famine was very likely to affect them.

Now, what would you do if you received a divine warning that something really bad was going to happen? Like me, you'd probably do your best to either avoid it or prepare for it. However, these Christians did not do either of those things. Instead, they took up a love offering and sent it with Barnabas and Saul to give to other Christians who might struggle more. Their actions were a good indication that they were growing more Christlike every day.

APPLICATION: There is a children's song called "JOY." (*sung to "Jingle Bells" tune*) "J-O-Y, J-O-Y. This is what it means. Jesus first. Yourself last. Others in between." Jesus called his followers to love one another. Jesus told his followers to even love their enemies. Jesus expects his followers to love like he loves, to think about the well-being of others, to sacrifice for the benefit of others.

- Believers shared the gospel and people believed.
- Barnabas offered encouragement, and the Gentile church grew.
- Agabus gave a warning so that they would not be taken unaware.
- The Church of Antioch shared gifts with those in need.

The result was that more and more people came to know Christ.

Today, the objective of the modern church should be the same as it was then. Jesus wants us to bring people to Christ. He wants us to fulfill the Great Commission to go and tell and make more disciples. He wants us to live up to our name, to be Christ-like. We can learn a lot from the examples set forth in this chapter of Acts. If you want to know how you can bring people to Christ, here are four simple ways.

- Like the men from Cyprus and Cyrene, share the gospel.
- Like Barnabas, encourage others.
- Like Agabus, warn about the impending danger.
- Like the Church of Antioch, share the gifts that God has given you.

Then sit back and watch the Holy Spirit work in the hearts of those you've touched.
This is how we will see the church grow.

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