

WE ARE SENT

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Growth Group Curriculum Week 5 – October 10, 2021 – Acts 11:19-30 & 13:1-3

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

The gospel message continues to expand in the book of Acts, and today we read about it reaching the city of Antioch. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria and had a population of around 500,000.

One of the features of Antioch - which made it unique - was its stance on foreigners and immigrants. Antioch had an equal citizenship policy that was extended to Jews, as well as other foreigners and immigrants. Latins, Greeks, Jews, Asians and Romans all resided there. Within the city there were internal walls built for each of the immigrant communities and archaeological digs have revealed at least 18 different ethnic quarters.

The gospel message arrives in Antioch, as men from Cyprus and Cyrene (modern day Libya) arrive and begin sharing the message of Jesus with non-Jewish people. As more and more Greeks hear the message, more and more of them believed. Barnabas, who was a Levite, and originally from Cyprus, was sent to check up on how things were going in Antioch. After being there for a while, he went to Tarsus to look for Paul and then the two of them spent over a year in Antioch.

We read that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. The believers did not come up with this name on their own. Many believe this name was related to a concept in the Roman Empire where people who made up the household of Emperor Augustus were called “augustiani.” If you represented the Emperor, or carried out business for the Emperor, or oversaw the Emperor’s interests you were called “augustiani.” People in Antioch took this idea and said, well if you say you follow and serve Christ, we will call you “christiana” or Christians.

We note several things about the church in Antioch. They were generous. They were multi-cultural. They spent time in worship and they were a church that sent people out into the world to make a difference in the name of Jesus. While the church in Jerusalem struggled, and perhaps even grew



distracted by theological arguments, the church in Antioch was committed to gathering believers and sending them out.

Exploring the Text

Acts 11:19-30 and 13:1-3

11¹⁹ 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.

²² 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.

²⁷ 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.) ²⁹ 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.

13 ¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Can you think of a time in your life when someone called you a Christian? What was the context? Was it said positively?
- 2) What made the church in Antioch unique?
- 3) The Christians in Antioch broke various cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic barriers, united by their Christian faith, and belief in the gospel. Do you think kind of unity is possible in today's world? Do you think kind of unity is possible in today's church?
- 4) The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement." Share a story of someone you know that is a great encourager. As people of faith, how can we encourage others?



- 5) The church in Antioch was a sending church. Acts 13:3 says that the church laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them out into the world to share the message of Jesus. Where do you think the church needs to be sending people?
- 6) Have you ever been “sent” or “commissioned”? Where did you go or what did you do?
- 7) When have you seen people in our church community respond to the call or work of the Holy Spirit?
- 8) Each of us are Christians because someone cared enough to share the good news with us. Therefore, we have been commissioned/sent with the same obligation and privilege to share this good news. Is there someone in your life you need to share the good news of Jesus with?

