



19 | ACTS 11:19-30

THE ANTIOCH MODEL

Christ will build his church from every tribe and people and nation through anyone who is yielded, no matter how weak or ungifted they are.

Outline

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Multicultural Missions Movement (13:2-3)

Call to Worship

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. ⁶Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord. ⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. —Psalm 36:5-7

Songs

Living Hope

Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor

Good and Gracious King

I Stand Amazed

Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called “Life on Life Discipleship.” Our title this morning is: “The Antioch Model”.

The expansion of God’s Kingdom on earth is always the result of the mighty hand of God.

Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. —*Psalm 121:1*

I love the example of the Antioch church in Acts 11, because they teach us how to have a congregation that looks and acts like heaven. God would have his heaven full of people from all tribes, tongues, and nations. We cannot manufacture this unity amidst great diversity through human programs or mechanical rules. We’ve got to get out of the way and let God do his good work. In Antioch we see God building his church. He says,

I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. —*Matthew 16:18*

Antioch was one of the earliest centers of Christianity; it was there that the followers of Christ were first called Christians, and the city was the headquarters of the missionary the Apostle Paul about 47–55 A.D. It’s the first Jewish-Gentile church of the New Testament era. Antioch was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world, behind Rome and Alexandria. It boasted some five hundred thousand people at the time.¹ The city bore the nickname “the queen of the Eastern cities.” It was cosmopolitan and commercial. It was the capitol city of Syria, and it was also a base for the Roman military.

The city was incredibly diverse and served as a crossroads, having major highways going to the north, south, and east with the Mediterranean Sea to the west. Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Egyptians, Africans, Indians, and Asians all populated Antioch, making it remarkably diverse.

Government leaders in Antioch led a kind of sophisticated hedonism. On one side they were sophisticated and well established, providing police protection, stability, and order. All of that is impressive, especially for the ancient world. But then they would plan public events of pagan hedonism with appetites for lavish indulgences in gambling, chariot races, brothels, exotic banquets, and the like.² All of this made Antioch a great place for a church. John Stott notes,

No more appropriate place could be imagined, either as the venue for the first international church, or as the springboard for the worldwide Christian mission.³

We could say that about the location of our church here in Chicagoland. There is no better place for a church to reach the world than where we are at right now.

The church in Antioch—not the mother church in Jerusalem—changed the world. The Jerusalem church was wonderful, and it should be appreciated for its uniqueness and power, but it had its challenges when it came to evangelizing non-Jews. Antioch, by contrast, was an international church.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Antioch of Syria,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 120.

² *Ibid.*

³ Stott. *The Message of Acts*, 203.

What made the church in Antioch so powerful? What are the ingredients of a church with the New Testament mission? Luke describes at least five marks of a mission-oriented church. They are simple to understand but difficult to apply. We need to pray for “the grace of God” (11:23) as we seek to imitate the Antioch Christians. ⁴ It was a miracle church, a moldable church, and a multicultural missions church.

Key Thought: Christ will build his church from every tribe and people and nation through anyone who is yielded, no matter how weak or ungifted they are.

1. A MIRACLE CHURCH (11:19-21)

Notice that with all the persecution against this church, it really shouldn't even exist.

A MIRACLE IN THE MIDST OF PAIN

There is persecution. The church is scattered. They don't close down or give up. These Jewish believers are pushed by persecution to Antioch, and they plant the first non-Jewish church. Here you have the missions bastion of the New Testament. Paul is sent out of this church on each of his three missionary journeys. The church of Antioch was birthed by its intentional outreach to unbelievers. This is a miracle church that shouldn't exist.

Acts 11:19-20 | Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

All these believers from Jerusalem are persecuted during the time of Stephen's martyrdom. They are refugees—on the run. They are running for their lives and end up as far as Phoenicia, which is way north of Israel in modern day Lebanon. Others flee way west to the island of Cyprus. Still others go south to Africa in Cyrene. Some of these believers return to Antioch and preach the gospel there. **We don't know their names, but God used them to plant the first Gentile church.** Some of them from various areas, upon coming to Antioch, got creative and started evangelizing non-Jews, the Hellenists.

Antioch is located three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. It is the third largest city, at half a million people, as Luke is writing the book of Acts. That's a mega-city at the time when the population of the earth was so much smaller. **The church at Antioch was built on the foundation of evangelism from people who were focused on the gospel in several ways.**

A MIRACLE IN THE MIDST OF PROCLAMATION

Now notice, it is in Antioch, that instead of just preaching the gospel to Jewish people, they begin reaching out to Gentiles. There was a cultural boldness. They were crossing the lines of their comfort zone.

⁴ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, 174.

Acts 11:19-20 | Now those who were scattered [were] speaking the word to no one except Jews.²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

A Hellenist is simply a Greek speaking person. Sometimes, like Paul and Stephen and Philip, it refers to a Greek speaking Jew. But there is a contrast in verse 19. It says normally, they would preach the gospel to “no one except Jews.” But there were some who were preaching to Gentile Greek speakers there in Antioch.

As believers, we can’t be afraid to engage people of vastly different cultures. There are mosques going up around us. Be ready to share the love of Jesus with Muslims. There are people who no longer know what sin is. They no longer have any moral barriers. We are called to engage and teach the good news about Jesus, not retreat into escapism.

Acts 11:20b | ...preaching the Lord Jesus.

Notice these bold men and women were able to engage with Hellenist Gentiles, preaching the Lord Jesus Christ. They didn’t come in with some gimmick. They didn’t survey the soccer moms to see how they would like to do religion. They preached the unedited gospel. There was a commitment of each of the believers there to preach the gospel, spreading the good news through their various relationships.

A MIRACLE IN THE MIDST OF BLESSING

Acts 11:21 | And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The hand of the Lord was with them! Can we say that as a church? This is the answer if we want great gospel fruit. We need God’s hand upon us. As a result, there was a great influx of Gentile and Jewish sinners that turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. The result was a wonderful Christ centered church that was neither mainly Jewish nor mainly Gentile. It was a “Jesus-cultured” church. The church in Antioch was birthed by effective evangelism, and as a result, “in Antioch we have the first church that is made up of Jewish and Gentile believers together.”⁵

2. A MOLDABLE CHURCH (11:22-26)

They weren’t trying to be Jewish or Gentile. They were being molded into the image of Jesus. I love the reminder from the book of Isaiah. He says:

But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. —Isaiah 64:8

God is our potter; we are the clay! Here in Antioch was the first local church made up of various tribes and cultures. The goal couldn’t be about one culture or another culture, but about “Jesus” culture. We all want to be like Jesus.

⁵ David G. Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 351.

Even though Peter had a vision about a church like this with the different kinds of people mixed together, this kind of church had never existed before.

The news of what was happening at Antioch must have caused a considerable stir in Jerusalem. Though Peter had officially opened the door of the church to the Gentiles it never occurred to anyone, apparently not even Peter, to take the next logical step and begin evangelizing the Gentile population of Jerusalem and Judea.⁶ **The Jerusalem church wanted to verify what God was doing in Antioch, so they send Barnabas.**

MOLDABLE THROUGH A HUMAN INSTRUMENT

Acts 11:22 | The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

In Antioch, we have the first account of a truly new covenant church plant. We have Jews and Gentiles together, praising the Lord, reading the Word. The hand of the Lord is upon them. But they needed oversight and shepherding and love.

By sending Barnabas, the Antioch church gets a sweet and encouraging teacher as well as a good example of life-on-life discipleship.

We learn in Ephesians that the DNA of the church has to be rich with teachers who model and teach the Christian life. Pastors and teachers are called to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). That is the role that Barnabas was fulfilling. It begins with a commitment of a godly man (as in Barnabas) and other godly men (as with Paul later, 11:25 and other godly men, 13:1). It’s a huge commitment to be a teacher in the Lord’s church.

MOLDABLE THROUGH DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

God sends a true encourager from Jerusalem: Barnabas. Barnabas is the encourager, but he himself was encouraged.

Encouraged by God’s Power

Acts 11:23a | When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.

What kind of a man was Barnabas? He was an encourager. He was born with the name Joseph, and he’s from the island of Cyprus. He has the nickname of Barnabas, which means in Hebrew, “the son of encouragement). He was Jewish but he had a great love and affinity for spreading the gospel to the non-Jewish people of the nations. He was drawn to help those who were different. Remember, we are first introduced to him when he defends the great Saul of Tarsus when he becomes a Christian. His encourager is sent to Antioch.

Remember, a disciple is a learner. To learn, we need teachers who will mentor us, show us how to live the Christian life, and hold us accountable with nurture, love, and truth.

Encouraging God’s People

Acts 11:23b | And he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 11:22.

The Scripture says he exhorted the saints at Antioch to remain faithful.

Exhort (parakalēō) is a powerful discipleship word which means “to come along side of, to encourage.”⁷

Specifically, Barnabas encouraged them to be faithful to the Lord with an unrelenting purpose. Paul presents this purpose as being “conformed to the image” of Christ (Rom 8:28-30).

Barnabas exhorted them, that is, he came alongside them in that purpose of knowing Christ and becoming like him. But how? This word, parakalēō, gives us a clue. It is a title for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The Spirit is our *Paraclete*, or, our ultimate “Helper, Counselor, and Comforter”. So the essence of discipleship is to be an **instrument of the Holy Spirit**.

Parakalēō is one of the oldest and richest words in the Greek language. This word brought to mind at least five vivid pictures to the Greek imagination. Each is an application to how we are to come along side in discipleship.

To rekindle a flame. This pictures someone gently, patiently blowing on dying embers to bring a fire to life again.

To call forth comfort. This pictures the cries of a frightened child in the night calling for the comfort and reassurance of his father.

To call a physician. This pictures someone who was injured calling for a physician to set his broken bone or bind his wound.

To stabilize the troops. This pictures the military officer who, in the heat of battle, could calmly encourage, exhort, and steady the frightened soldiers in his ranks.

To plead one’s case. This pictures the counsel for the defense, making an appeal for his client before a judge.

This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and it is our ministry as we come along side one another to stir up the flame of Christ!

Encouraged by God’s Presence

This was Barnabas’s ministry as a man whose life bore visible fruit. Luke described it this way,

Acts 11:24a | For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Luke knew Barnabas and accompanied him on several missionary tours. He had witnessed firsthand his godliness and friendly disposition. It seems that Luke was saying that Barnabas was “glad” at what he saw because of his godly character. This was the kind of man he was. He was utterly genuine and sincere, and he loved the Lord with all his heart.⁸

It is worth pondering what might have happened to the shape of the New Testament church had someone less supportive been sent to Antioch, someone whose policy was to suffocate all enthusiasm and add significant restrictive policies to Gentiles contemplating conversion. Without doubt, the church would have taken a very different shape had this been the case. We might ask ourselves whether we are encouragers by temperament. Are we the

⁷ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library, “παρκαλέω” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 296.

⁸ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 321.

ones carping at the sidelines or are we earnestly seeking the growth of the church? It is easy to be the former, but it takes determination and discernment to do the latter.⁹

Encouraging the Church's Progress

Acts 11:24b | And a great many people were added to the Lord.

This shows that Barnabas's discipleship efforts apparently involved helping to equip and encourage lay evangelists to share the gospel with their friends. And while Barnabas must have been thrilled with God's grace in Antioch, he needed help to keep up the work of discipling all the new believers. This, in fact, is a common problem leaders face when their churches grow. They are concerned about how best to disciple everyone, and it's not a job that can be done without help. In the case of Barnabas and his work among the Antioch believers, another disciple maker is needed. Wisely, Barnabas enlists Saul's help.¹⁰

MOLDABLE THROUGH INSTRUCTION

Acts 11:25-26a | So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.

Barnabas goes to find Saul, with whom he had spent time previously (9:27). He knew of Saul's calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles (9:15-16). He knows of Saul's bridge-building capacity; the man could communicate to diverse groups and was well informed about Scripture. Barnabas knows Saul is just the man to instruct this world-reaching congregation.¹¹ Luke tells us that Barnabas and Paul were a great team at Antioch where they "taught a great many people." This was megachurch but it was 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

MOLDABLE THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

Acts 11:26b | And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

All believers are called to grow and change into the image of Jesus Christ. At Antioch, people from outside the church started calling them "Christians" or "little Christs". The Jews and Gentiles became one here and looked more like Christ than either their Hebrew or Gentile cultures. That's what we want: the Jesus culture! That's sanctification.

3. A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH (11:27-30)

This new multicultural church now expands greatly in three ways: mercy ministry, multicultural leadership and membership, and a missions movement from the church.

MULTICULTURAL MERCY MINISTRY (11:27-30)

In an event recorded in chapter 21, Agabus prophesies that a famine will impact the entire empire. This famine would be the result of the flooding of the Nile River in AD 45. The

⁹ Thomas, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, 179.

¹¹ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, 179-180.

harvest of Egypt, breadbasket of the region, was damaged greatly by the flood. This sent grain prices skyrocketing throughout the Roman world for years, including in Judea.¹² The prophetic word spoken by Agabus gave the Christians an opportunity to show support for those in Jerusalem. In Acts 11 the Antioch Christians give, according to each person's ability, and they send the gift with Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:27-30 | Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Their giving was selfless. The famine hasn't taken place yet when the disciples determine to send relief. They are living by faith. They are selfless. They know the famine is coming, but they don't think about themselves, hoarding their resources for selfish security, but they give it away to the saints at Jerusalem.

Their giving was generous. They "gave according to their ability" (11:29). The church doesn't ask, How much will it cost? They simply give as much as they can.

Their giving was corporate, from one church to another. The church corporately took up the offering and sent it to the Jerusalem church's elders "by the hand of Barnabas and Saul."

I've seen this at living hope. When we heard about a young believer in the Dominican Republic, you gave over \$5000 to help him have a special surgery. I'm so grateful for your incredible generosity in so many mercy ministries, including Vacation Bible School last week. We had over 40 volunteers and over 50 kids registered. That's amazing!

MULTICULTURAL MEMBERSHIP (13:1)

Jesus will build his church from every nation around the earth, and the gates of hell shall not prevail. We see this in the Antioch church.

Acts 13:1 | Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

You had *Barnabas*, a Jew and a native of Cyprus. Then there was *Simeon* who was likely from north Africa, and some think he may have been the one who carried the Lord's cross. There was *Lucius of Cyrene* (which is in Libya today), so he is also an African brother in Christ. *Manaen* is a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch: very likely an Idumean and Jewish mix. Many believe he was actually raised in the same household with Herod as a brother. He would have been considered to be a Gentile by the Jews. And then you had the great teacher and *Rabbi Saul of Tarsus*, who we know as the Apostle Paul. What a multicultural leadership team!

So you had two Jews and three Gentiles and two Jewish men on the leadership team. They were very diverse in their ethnicity. They were a multi-cultural ministry. They were an ethnically integrated church.

¹² Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles*, 368.

Do you know what else this church is? This will become the sending church of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys! A miracle has taken place and the church that becomes the very cradle of where Gentile Christianity is born and raised! The Antioch church was divinely planted. It was a miracle church.

There were Jewish believers from Cyrene, which is northern Africa—as well as the Island of Cyprus, about a hundred miles off the coast of Israel. And they come together and start evangelizing Gentiles, and a church is born!

MULTICULTURAL MISSIONARY MOVEMENT (13:2-3)

Here we have the start of the New Testament missions movement!

Acts 13:2-3 | While they were worshipping 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 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

You can't just go to seminary or Bible college and become a missionary or a pastor. Training is vital, but the call of the Gospel minister is from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit said, “Set apart” my servants. The local church at Antioch obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit. They were moldable. They were teachable. They were humble. They weren't brilliant in their plans, but they followed the plan of God!

And so began the greatest miracle in the history of missions! The first of Paul's three great missionary journeys commenced. Soon, because of the efforts of this church, people would be saying, “Those people who have turned the world upside down have now come to us!”

Conclusion

As you consider the possibilities of what God might have us do as a church, let us be ready to listen to his voice. Let us look out beyond these four walls and think of the lost people that need to hear the name of Jesus from your lips. Let us be moved to diligently seek the face of God in prayer. Let us wait on God and see him use us in ways we never imagined!

Think about what God can do through us. God has humbled us as a congregation. We know we are nothing, and yet God has sent out an Arabian Saul of Tarsus from our church in a mighty missions movement to the Islamic world. People are being saved continually, and churches are being planted.

Where will God send us next? Croatia? We have a brother from Croatia coming next week. What if God wants to send revival to Croatia?

What about right here. Aren't you ready for God to do great and mighty things among us? Let's keep surrendering to the Spirit, and we too will be a miracle church, a moldable church, and a multicultural missions church!