

02.20.11 / Acts 11:19-26

Passage Insight

This passage has as its geographical context the city of Antioch, a wealthy city of trade and commerce. Hellenistic philosophy and practice dominated the city, as did the worship of Roman and Greek gods. Daphne was the most widely endorsed god, and ritual worship of this false god included acts such as prostitution. The city was corrupt morally, a result of a self-centered, self-righteous, self-serving culture. In short, the city of Antioch was ripe for and in dire need of the gospel. The church that was planted in Antioch ended up being the one from whom Paul was sent to minister to the Gentiles (non-Jews), which means that the Lord used this pagan, amoral city, as a platform to launch one of the most impactful and earth-shaking ministries of all time. This is our God. One who redeems that which is broken and then gives it purpose – HIS purpose. The cities in the Triangle today are broken and misshapen as well. We have our gods of materialism, of lifestyle, of money, of control, of children’s activities, and of course, our gods of self. As we’ll see, it is the Lord and ONLY the Lord who can transform what is broken into something redeemed and use it as a catalyst to change the world.

So, how did He do this? Our first clue is in verse 20, where we see that the men there were “. . . preaching the Lord Jesus.” This is of primary importance, and we should not take this lightly. In our current age where our gods are often many and our lives and sometimes our churches often preach these false gods, we should take note that there is but one name that must be preached in order to see the kingdom of God advance – that is the name of Jesus. Equally important is that we preach this name appropriately, which is to say that we preach the LORD Jesus, not a jesus of our creation, who fits our human desires and sinful tendencies and is devoid of authority and righteousness, but the LORD Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, with all authority, dominion, and power. This is what was preached, and in verse 21 we see both the reason for this preaching and the result of it, where we read, “. . . the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” The Lord Jesus was being preached because the hand of the Lord was in the preaching. Had the hand of the Lord not been with them, the preaching would have been misleading and destructive. We then see the result of preaching Christ as Lord while the Lord’s hand is upon those preaching: many people turn toward Him. Beautiful. This truth should inform our prayers, and we should increasingly find ourselves praying that our church would continually and faithfully preach the Lord Jesus and that the hand of the Lord would be with us as we do.

This ministry was quite effective in reaching the Hellenists, or Greeks. The Lord employed Barnabas in part for the task of encouraging and equipping those in the church of Antioch. Barnabas was a Greek himself, and the effectiveness of his leadership is evident in both the growth and the faithfulness of the church to remain centered on the Lord Jesus. Barnabas no doubt spoke the language of the people of Antioch, knew the culture, and understood what the gospel message was up against in terms of Hellenist thought and idolatry. We see in this story a strong case for planting churches with indigenous leadership, planting churches that are pastored by men those who are local to the area that the church is attempting to engage. That said, differing ethnicity in no way precludes us from being called to places where are not in the majority, whether in race, socioeconomic status, age, gender, or any other classification. At the end of the day, we must simply go where the Lord sends us, as we see with Saul, who, though a full-blooded Jew, faithfully answered the call to instruct countless Gentile churches.

Finally, we should take notice of what is said about Barnabas, namely that he was “. . . full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” It is solely by the power of God’s own Holy Spirit that we can expect to find success in our ministries, and we see in Barnabas’ actions the result of such empowerment: exhortations to remain steadfast on the purpose of God,

instruction of the people, preaching the Lord Jesus, and transformed lives. Though more subtle in this passage, we also see great humility in that while Barnabas could have continued to work alone, he sought out help from a brother in the Lord whom the Lord had both chosen and equipped to join him and to minister to the Gentiles. In short, Barnabas asked for help.

We see here that a budding church in a corrupt city was transformed into a launching pad for a ministry that would alter the course of all of humanity, and in this is seen the hand of the Lord, the committed work of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching of the Son, Christ Jesus, as Lord of all. Praise the Lord for His work among us. May he bless this church as He has chosen to bless the church of Antioch.

APPLICATION: How can we more and more become a church that sends out laborers into the harvest (Scripture) as Paul was sent to minister to the Gentiles? What role will you play in helping us become this church? How can we make sure the Spirit is the one leading this charge?

APPLICATION: Where do you seek to do the work of the Lord in isolation? What's behind this? How could you instead bring others with you as you serve the body of Christ? Where would you like to be included? What, specifically, can you do this week to include others in your walk of faith and not go it alone?

Application Questions / Prayer

Where is the Gospel Needed Here?

- 1) Where you most clearly see the need for the gospel in the Triangle (certain people groups, parts of town, etc.)?
- 2) What role are you being called to play in sharing the good news there?
- 3) What evidence have you seen that the Lord is sending you there?
- 4) What changes need to happen in your life for you to say yes to this call?
- 5) Who in your group or elsewhere can help you make those changes?

Encouraging Faithfulness with Purpose

- 1) How can we encourage one another to remain faithful to the Lord?
- 2) We are to remain steadfast in our purpose as followers of Christ. Our purpose is to love one another as Christ loves us and to also be sent out to make more disciples of Christ. Where do we lack steadfastness in this?
- 3) How should our prayers change as a result?
- 4) What does increased reliance on the Holy Spirit look like in your life?

Calling Others to the Mission

- 1) Where do you seek to do the work of the Lord in isolation?
- 2) How could you instead bring others with you as you serve the body of Christ?
- 3) Where do you see people with specific talents that are not being used (yourself as well as others)?
- 4) What needs to happen for these people to respond to God's call to be on His mission as Saul did?

Sources

- Prayer

- The Bible Exposition Commentary
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Bible Reader's Companion
- A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments