

## **The Marks of a Great Church**

### **Acts 11:19-30**

#### **Introduction:**

1. There are no perfect churches. Do you know why? There are no perfect people, and people are what lead and compose a church!
  - As I have said many times, every church has its warts, and our church is no exception.
2. But having said that, I will say that I believe there are some great churches that are doing a great work. They are doing the work of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3
3. Today we are going to examine one of those great churches from God's Word. It was the church in which Paul had his first public ministry - the church at Antioch.
4. Paul knew from the beginning - at his salvation - that his life's calling would be to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. But before he could begin his ministry several things had to take place.
  - Paul had to be prepared by God.
  - The Gentiles had to be accepted in the church.
  - The memory of "Paul the Persecutor" had to diminish.
5. Finally, after years of waiting, Paul received a call to go and minister in the church at Antioch of Syria. This was an incredibly unique church:
  - It was the first Gentile church.
  - It was the apostle Paul's first ministry.
  - It was the first place where the word "Christian" was used.
  - It was the first great center of Gentile evangelism.
6. What were the characteristics that made the church at Antioch such a great church? Let's examine our text and see.

**First, this church boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ. vs. 19-21**

**Second, this church possessed Spirit-filled leaders. vs. 22-25**

**Third, this church helped believers to grow in their faith. vs. 26**

1. Once a person believes on Christ and is saved, he or she must begin to grow.  
1 Peter 2:2
  - Just as you would expect a newborn baby to grow, a new believer must also grow.
  - A baby doesn't come out of the womb full-grown and mature. It must be fed, grow, and develop. The same is true of a newborn believer.
2. What happens if new believers are **not** rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word? Like children, they are easily deceived and led astray by false doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). **Illustration:** Little children are easily sidetracked by a piece of candy or toy.

3. In verse 26 we learn that Barnabas and Paul gave themselves to instructing the people concerning the things of God. They “*taught much people*” for a year. This principle is so important. This is what I’ve given my life to do here.
  - Churches in America need desperately to return to this emphasis of Bible teaching. People need the truth of God’s Word in their lives!
  - Today, churches are doing everything **but** teaching the Bible. They are top shelf at entertainment, drama, music, stories, audio/visual effects, and even making coffee, but not real big on in-depth, solid, meaty Bible teaching that helps people to grow - something you can sink your teeth into.
  - Even in most supposed Bible-teaching churches, the messages have slick alliteration with lots of jokes, anecdotes, stories, and video clips, but you’re left asking, “Where’s the beef?” The messages lack substance and doctrinal soundness. It is like cotton candy for the soul.
4. God’s plan is for people in a local church to be taught God’s Word so that they, in turn, can teach others. 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12
5. What happens when the Bible is being taught? People understand God’s Word and begin to live out God’s Word. All the people of Antioch started calling these people “Christians.” vs. 26
  - This is a term that is overused in our culture today. People attach this word to anything and everything, and unsuspecting people think it must be okay because “it’s Christian!”
  - The word “Christian” is composed of two parts. We understand the first part – it refers to Jesus Christ. The “-ian” part means “a follower.” Hence, a Christian is one who has placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and made a decision to follow Him.
  - This phrase is only used three times in the Bible (Acts 11; Acts 26; 1 Peter 4) and it was coined by the unbelieving Gentiles. They meant it as a name of contempt, but it was actually a compliment.
6. What does this tell us? Paul and Barnabas’ Bible teaching was having an impact on lives. They were living out their faith and the sound doctrine they were being taught.
  - So many churchgoers live like undercover CIA Christians during the week. Their words and actions give no hint that they are followers of Christ.
7. The church at Antioch was such a great church. It wasn’t great because it had fancy buildings, padded pews, gold chandeliers, or big attendance figures.
  - In the 21<sup>st</sup> century American mindset, pastors think it is all about buildings, and budgets, and attendance. But it is not about those things.
  - It has never been about those issues. Did you notice in our text that none of those things are mentioned? We have no clue as to the building where this church met, or their yearly budget, or the amount of people that congregated for services.
8. It was a great church because God’s Word was being taught, and lives were being changed and transformed into Christ’s likeness. They were obviously impacting their community in a powerful way.

9. This is the first time the term “Christian” is ever used, and it is used to describe the believers of this local church.

**Fourth, this church demonstrated the giving heart of Christ.**

1. During the book of Acts, the gift of prophecy was still operative and necessary. God’s Word in the New Testament was just beginning to be given and written down.
2. Prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem with a warning. They declared that a great worldwide famine was approaching.
  - History confirms that this famine occurred just as Agabus predicted.
3. The believers at Jerusalem would be affected more than anybody else. The believers at Antioch knew this, so they immediately kicked into action. vs. 29
  - There was no hesitation. They stood ready and willing to give. This is the Spirit of Christ.
4. Notice some key insights about their giving:
  - Everyone was involved in giving.
    - It wasn’t just a few wealthy people. Everybody could help to some extent.
  - Everyone gave according to their ability.
    - God doesn’t expect us all to give the same amount. We give according to our ability. A family making \$100,000 should be giving more than a person making \$25,000. A person who has known the Lord for 20 years should be giving a higher percentage than a person who has only known the Lord for one year.
  - Everyone was determined to give.
    - I love this. They were serious about it. It was something they wanted to do.
  - Everyone followed through on their commitment and gave. vs. 30
    - They weren’t all talk; they were action.
5. What was the key to these people’s giving hearts? Verse 23 tells us that when Barnabas came to this church, he saw the grace of God.
6. This was a church that was thankful and appreciative of God’s amazing grace and they demonstrated it. Therefore, giving was a very natural and instinctive thing to do.
7. What a great church. When believers truly understand the grace of God and truly appreciate it, giving is not an issue. Giving is as natural as water flowing downstream.
8. The water of God’s grace flows out of you, and you can’t help but give. The gracious and giving heart of Christ flows through you.

**In Conclusion:**

1. This church at Antioch was a great church, but let me reiterate that it was not a perfect church. There are no perfect churches.

2. We don't know what eventually became of the church at Antioch, but you can be sure they had problems and issues just like any other church.
3. But great churches in God's eyes (not man's eyes) remember what is truly important. The church at Antioch reminds us of what is truly important for us here at CrossRoads.
  - We must boldly proclaim Jesus Christ.
  - We need Spirit-filled leaders.
  - We must emphasize spiritual growth through God's Word.
  - We must be a people with a giving heart.
4. Church, let's not get our eyes off of Christ, but let's stay focused on the things that truly matter.
5. My desire is that, like the church at Antioch, CrossRoads can be a church that truly honors and glorifies Jesus Christ.