

## **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**

1. Acts 11:19-21 is a turning point in church history. Until this time, the good news of Christ had been preached to the Jews only (vs. 19), with the exception of Cornelius in Acts 10.
  - Remember, God had to practically hog-tie Peter to get him there because this was not standard practice. The church was exclusively Jewish.
2. Now, believers begin to preach to Grecians, and the response is great. vs. 20-21
  - This church began by actively witnessing to Gentiles about Jesus Christ, bringing them into the local assembly, and welcoming them.
3. Notice how this church was founded:
  - They preached the Word of God and the Lord Jesus. vs. 19-20
  - God's hand (power) was upon them as they preached. vs. 21a
  - Many lost people believed the gospel and turned to the Lord. vs. 21b
4. Antioch was an unlikely place for the gospel to be well-received. It was a wicked and vile city. In fact, one author wrote, "If any city in the first century was worthy to be called the 'Heathen Queen and Metropolis of the East,' that city was Antioch."

5. But they boldly preached the Word of God and proclaimed Jesus Christ, and people turned to the Lord! This is God's plan for any church, no matter when or where: Exalt Jesus Christ and His finished work, and teach God's Word.
6. If a church does not have this as its foundation, it will not please God. It doesn't matter the number of people, the size of the buildings, or how wealthy it may be.
7. Many churches today are watering down the gospel and proclaiming everything **but** God's Word (stories, anecdotes, drama scripts, feel-good music with no message, etc.).
8. Paul warned Timothy of this temptation in 2 Timothy 4:2-4. He exhorted Timothy to stick by the stuff and keep preaching the Word. Don't compromise the gospel!

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

1. It is so easy for a church to lose its bearings and begin to drift off course. There is so much in the world that tempts a church to compromise God's Word, chase tangents, or get caught up in the latest cultural fads.
2. This is why leadership is so important. After Paul started churches, he would ordain elders in those churches (Acts 14:23). Why? God commissions church leaders with the charge of keeping the church on course and in line with His Word. Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:7
3. The church at Jerusalem heard about what was happening in Antioch. They knew that they would need leadership, so they dispatched Barnabas (vs. 22).
4. When you look at verse 24, it is obvious that Barnabas was a very wise choice. Barnabas had spiritual character and integrity. He was filled (controlled) with God's Spirit.
  - So often this is ignored today. Too often, churches look for talent, looks, personality, preaching ability, etc. Churches need to be looking for righteousness, spirituality, and doctrinal soundness in the faith.
  - This is why 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 are in the Bible.
5. Barnabas taught and exhorted this church. Because he was a man of integrity, people listened. Notice what happened in verse 24. "... *much people was added unto the Lord.*"
6. With all of these Gentiles coming to Christ, Barnabas knew he needed help. Barnabas had the spiritual wisdom to know that Paul was the right man for the job. vs. 25
7. So Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Paul, and brought him to Antioch where Paul would begin his great ministry among the Gentiles. vs. 26
8. Leadership is such a vital part of a local church. According to Acts 20:28-31, leaders have the responsibility to:
  - Feed the flock.
  - Oversee the flock.
  - Protect the flock.
9. Do you pray for the leaders here at CrossRoads? This should be a daily prayer. Pray that God will fill us with wisdom and spiritual discernment. Pray that we will be true and faithful to God's Word and not allow Satan to discourage us.

10. We learned today from this church at Antioch the first two marks of a great church. It has nothing to do with their buildings or bank accounts. It has to do with exalting Jesus Christ, teaching God's Word faithfully, and leaders who are filled with God's Spirit.