

# Catford Lectures 2014-2015

## Part 5

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*Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.*

[00:00:01] I would like this afternoon to speak about the Christians at Antioch.

And I call them Christians because that was where the disciples were first called Christians. And if the timing of these events that we have in our Bibles and our Bible dictionaries is correct, that's now 1975 years ago.

The people in this world have been known as Christians.

And I suppose it's always good to look back to the beginning of something and to contrast with it where we are today.

That we might be brought to a sense of our needs because we haven't been able to practice things just as we should have done. But also that we might cast ourselves upon the One, the Lord.

The One who loves us, who gave Himself for us to help us [00:01:04] to be what we should be in this world for Him until He comes to take us to be with Himself. Which I'm sure most of us realize is not very far off at all.

So let's look at the first scripture which mentions this place, this church.

And of course we're looking at the Book of Acts. And the first scripture I would like to read is in Acts chapter 6.

And verse 5.

[00:02:01] And the same pleased the whole multitude.

And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles.

And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them, and the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and the great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

We'll read the other scriptures as we come to them. Just a brief introduction to the subject of Antioch.

It is a town which exists today, or a city. It's right up in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean.

[00:03:04] So it's really virtually on the border of Turkey and Syria, in the place where there's so much conflict at the moment. But the Antioch of old was a very great city.

In fact, for some time, it was the third city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria.

It was a city that was considered to be very beautiful, in a very beautiful location.

But, of course, all those details are not really so important for us this afternoon. We want to see what the scripture says about the believers who lived in Antioch. And the first one that's brought before us is someone who had lived in Antioch, and now lived in Jerusalem, and it's Nicholas.

Now, Antioch means to drive against, [00:04:01] and it may be linked with the thought of a chariot rushing into war.

And certainly we're going to find that Antioch was a place from which the gospel, the truth of God, spread rapidly throughout this world.

And Nicholas, well I should know this, shouldn't I? The meaning of Nicholas' name is conqueror of the people.

And yet here in this scripture we find this particular Nicholas, someone who had embraced the Jewish faith.

He was originally probably a Gentile, but he had embraced the truth of God as it's revealed in the Old Testament, come to Jerusalem, and then he had trusted the Lord Jesus as his savior.

And when a murmuring arose between various parts of the members of Christ's body in Jerusalem, [00:05:01] in the early church there, sadly there was dissension. We haven't got enough time to go into all the details of it, but he was one of seven men who was chosen to help resolve the problem.

And so this man, whose name means conqueror of the people, became a servant of the people of God.

He waited on tables in the sense that he looked after the distribution of funds to help meet the needs of the poor among the saints of that city.

Well, we're going to see in an even more wonderful way how God was able to use believers from and in Antioch for the blessing of his people worldwide.

We haven't got enough time to spend any further time on Nicholas from Antioch.

So we'll move on now to chapter 11.

[00:06:08] Verse 19.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phoenice and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church, and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, [00:07:02] was glad and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul.

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch, and it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people, and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch, and there stood up one of them, named Acabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders [00:08:03] by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Now we know, or we should know, that back in chapter 10, the apostle Peter used one of the keys of the kingdom which the Lord Jesus gave to him.

I'm thinking of what the Lord Jesus says to him in Matthew chapter 16, in connection with his confession of the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And the Lord Jesus speaks to him about the fact that he was going to build his church, the future, the church didn't exist at that time, upon this rock, the rock of Peter's confession, not Peter himself.

Peter's name doesn't mean rock, it means a stone, a part of a rock. But his confession of the Lord Jesus as the Christ, [00:09:04] the Son of the living God is the foundation upon which the church is built.

The Lord Jesus said he was going to build his church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it.

And then he went on to speak to Peter about a personal responsibility Peter would have.

Peter gave to him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens.

And you could say that Peter used one of those keys on the day of Pentecost when he made known the gospel based on the work of the Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary and his resurrection and his ascension to the glory of heaven. From whence he sent down the gift of the Holy Spirit, he presented the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem.

As we all know in that day 3,000 were saved, more than 3,000 were saved.

[00:10:07] But for a time the church was made up only of those who were Jews by birth.

But of course Christianity as we learn from Ephesians chapter 2 which of course hadn't been written at this time breaks down that middle wall of partition, that enclosure between Jew and Gentile. It deals with the greatest difference there is between men and women.

That's not black and white, that's not young and old, that's not educated and ill-educated or rich or poor. All these divisions that men see as the big divisions in society. No, the biggest division there has ever been is between the chosen earthly people of God and the nations, the Gentiles.

And in the cross of Christ that is removed.

[00:11:03] And in this present day of grace the gospel goes out to all.

And God or the Lord Jesus through his work has made of Jew and Gentile one new man.

This is the wonderful proof, isn't it, of the wonder of the mystery of the church that it does away with these national distinctions. It deals with this particular one that God has placed in this world.

But in these early days of the church there were simply those who were born Jews who were Christians. And the day came when, as we all know, Peter was instructed to go to Cornelius. We haven't got enough time to go into all this detail. And he was able to present the gospel to a man who clearly God had been working in already. We could say that Cornelius was already a subject of God's grace.

[00:12:09] God was already working in his heart.

No doubt we could say he was born again already.

No doubt we could say he was quickened. But he didn't know the gospel of salvation.

And until he could be brought into the knowledge of that, he was not yet a Christian.

And it was when the gospel was presented to him, he heard the truth of God.

We hear that not just Cornelius, but those who were with him, they suddenly spoke with tongues.

They were shown to be those upon whom the Holy Spirit had come. They had been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Because they had believed in their hearts, in the message that Peter had presented to them.

[00:13:06] But when we come to these verses we've just read, we find that there were others who were preaching to Gentiles too. It doesn't say that they had heard what had happened in Caesarea 300 miles south. And had decided, well yes, now that that's happened, we can do this. No, it's not presented like that in scripture at all. This is God working in grace.

What he does through Peter establishes the principle. Gentiles may receive the gospel too.

God's going out to every man in his love, despite what has happened to the Lord Jesus upon the cross. It's just, we might say, the opportunity for God to spread his word to each and every person who will receive it.

Such is our God, the God of grace and love.

But here these ones are doing it because they are motivated by love.

[00:14:07] They want to bring the good news that they've got to others.

Now Satan had tried to stop this. A man full of the Holy Spirit and faith, one of the seven of whom Nicholas was one.

Stephen had preached and he had done great works in Jerusalem.

And the devil wanted him out of the way. And as we all know in chapter 7, Stephen is stoned to death.

A great persecution arises.

And the believers, except for the apostles, are scattered outside of Jerusalem.

And this works completely in the opposite direction of what the devil was intending.

The gospel is spread abroad and it's these ones who are preaching it. And when they come to Antioch, no doubt motivated by the Holy Spirit. [00:15:02] It says that up until then they were preaching to none but unto the Jews only. Some of them from Cyprus.

Now in the course of this spreading out, Cyprus had been evangelized. So maybe this speaks of more recent converts who were going further up the coast.

And Cyrene, well perhaps that speaks of those who had heard the gospel first. As a result of it being preached by Peter in Jerusalem. Because he speaks about the different kinds of people that were there in Jerusalem. Or we should say the Holy Spirit speaks about those people who heard what Peter said. And they list the very places they were from. And one of the places was near to Cyrene, North Africa.

Maybe through what was preached on the day of Pentecost, the word had got back to Cyrene. As a result of those who have been there. And now there were some involved in this spreading of the gospel. [00:16:01] I'm only supposing, but it doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit is simply showing there were a variety of believers together. And when they came to Antioch, they speak unto the Grecians.

These were Gentiles preaching the Lord Jesus.

One thing that's very distinct about these verses is the presentation of the Lord. What did these ones speak about? The Lord Jesus.

We're very familiar with hearing people say Jesus.

But in scripture, we find his full name is Lord Jesus Christ.

And the importance of saying Lord gives him that rightful place he has.

As the one who has rights over us.

And the one who we acknowledge as our Lord.

Certainly here, they preached the Lord Jesus.

[00:17:06] The one who had not simply died for those who are sinners.

But the one who those believing on him should obey in their lives.

Now that they trusted him as their savior.

The Lord Jesus.

Then it says the hand of the Lord was with them.

We're faithful to the Lord in our service for him as these ones were. We can be sure that the hand of the Lord will be with us. May not be with us in the way we expect, but it will be there. Working with the word of the Lord.

And as these ones preach the Lord Jesus, it says the hand of the Lord was with them.

And in this particular case, a great number believed. They heard the gospel and they believed.  
[00:18:02] And they turned unto the Lord.

So there are three mentions here of the Lord. These ones preached the Lord Jesus.

Then the hand of the Lord was with them.

And the result was a great number believed.

And turned unto the Lord.

And if there's anyone here who hasn't yet trusted the Lord Jesus as their savior. That's what you need to do. You need to turn to the Lord.

If you can hear and understand what I'm saying, that's not difficult. We all know about when we're

young.

When we're going somewhere. And our mom and dad has told us not to go there.

We'll hear them say, hey, come back.

And we have to turn. We have to turn back from where we're going. Well, that's a thought here. Turning from a wicked way of life.

[00:19:01] We may not think our ways of living are wicked.

But they are if they are not taking God into consideration. If we're doing our own will. We need to turn and go in another direction.

That's what these people did when they heard the Lord Jesus presented to them. Not merely turning away from a wicked way of life. But turning to a beautiful way of life.

Because there's nothing more wonderful than to follow the Lord Jesus. As our savior and Lord.

So these three characteristics are very important.

Preaching the Lord Jesus.

The hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Now, when this was heard about in Jerusalem.

We're told that the assembly there.

The Christians gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem. Sent forth Barnabas.

That he should go as far as Antioch. [00:20:02] That was quite a long journey. I mentioned, I think, 300 miles.

Where Peter spoke to Cornelius was about 300 miles away.

And Jerusalem's not that different.

And news had got back.

Because this gospel preaching had gone on. As these people had spread out from Jerusalem.

So there were all sorts of links in the chain, if you like. In the lines of communication. They didn't have Facebook and email in those days.

But the Christian testimony was such.

That there was a living communication of this wonderful news.

Between the various believers.

Who were living in this part of the world. And it got back to Jerusalem. Now, if we turn to Acts chapter 11.

We haven't got enough time to do that. Peter was upbraided by various.

Believers in the church at Jerusalem for going in.

[00:21:04] And preaching to Cornelius in his own house. But Peter was able to show to them. That it was the will of the Lord. That prepared the way for those in Jerusalem to realize.

Yes, this is a true work of God. And so here in this verse.

We don't see them in any way. Seeking to censure the work in Antioch.

Or to try and control it.

No, they send Barnabas because they want to encourage it. That's a beautiful thought. Here was the assembly in Jerusalem.

From where the Christian message had first gone out. They hear about the way in which it's getting results. In this Gentile city of Antioch.

And they send Barnabas.

To go and see how things were getting on.

We know it's not an effort to try and censure it. Or to try and control it.

Because they just send Barnabas. [00:22:01] One man.

When it was necessary for there to be a certain authority.

Placed upon what was being done in Samaria by Philip. And this was according to God. They sent Peter and John.

Both of them apostles.

Two apostles. To, as it were, put their hand upon the work as being of God.

Then the Holy Spirit came down upon those new converts in Samaria. And it could be seen that this was one complete work. And there was unity between what had happened at Jerusalem. And what was happening in Samaria.

And similarly, it was Peter the Apostle with six other brethren. Who had gone from Joppa to Caesarea.



To speak to Cornelius.

It became clear through the signs that God gave.

It was a work of God.

Now, none of that is necessary here. Just one man can go.

A good man, as we're told later on in these verses. [00:23:01] And encourage the work in Antioch.

And he must have tracked the work.

Because it says, when he had arrived.

When he got there.

Following up all that had been happening.

He got to Antioch. He saw all these people who had believed the gospel. And what does he do?

It says, he was glad.

He exhorted them all.

When he saw the grace of God.

When he saw the effect of God's active love.

And the way in which it was included in all these ones in Antioch. These Grecians, these Gentiles.

Who had never been in any kind of relationship with God.

Imbibing God's word.

And treating the Lord Jesus as their Lord too.

He was glad.

And what did he do? He exhorted them all.

[00:24:01] That with purpose of heart. And this is our fourth mention of the word Lord. They should cleave unto the Lord.

And if there's one thing that we need to do. As believers. Those of us who turn to the Lord. As we had in verse 21.

We too.

Need to keep doing this.

With purpose of heart.

This isn't lackadaisical laid back Christianity. This is real purposeful Christianity.

I belong to the Lord Jesus. Therefore I'm going to abide with him. I'm going to cleave to him. I'm going to stay close to him. I'm going to go with him where he shows me I should go. And that was what.

That was what Barnabas encouraged these ones to do.

With purpose of heart.

There's.

There is with us sometimes a lack of conviction. A lack of purpose. To how we live our lives for the Lord. [00:25:03] But. This didn't mark these believers here. That with purpose of heart. They would cleave unto the Lord. Something mentioned in the prayer meeting just before this meeting. We're starting a new year. Well of course we are. 2015. A new year.

Perhaps as we look back on 2014. We might be regretful that. Perhaps we've wasted our opportunities. We've not always been as faithful as we should have been. As we start a new year. It's not that we make a new year's resolution of course. That's not something the Bible at all teaches us to do. But as we go into this new year.

May we be marked by this characteristic. With purpose of heart.

To cleave.

Unto the Lord. The Lord.

He's a person. The fact that we believe. A series of doctrines.

The truth of God's a wonderful thing. But in Christianity we have a person. A person.

Of the Lord Jesus.

And it says of Barnabas. He was a good man.

[00:26:02] And full of the Holy Ghost. And of faith.

Good man.

Good in the scriptures. In the New Testament. At any rate.

It's used in two ways. Can mean beautiful. Attractive.

Or it can mean useful.

Beneficial.

It's in that second sense. That this word is used here.

He was beneficial.

No doubt this was one of the reasons why the assembly had sent him. Full of the Holy Ghost.

Now we often hear about filling of the Holy Ghost.

People often say. Have you been filled with the Holy Ghost? But really that's not the sense in which. This expression is used in the New Testament.

He was full of the Holy Ghost. He kept nothing back in his life.

From the Lord.

Therefore the Holy Spirit was able to fill every nook and cranny. Of Barnabas's life.

Often the trouble with me. Perhaps with you is that we keep bits of our lives back. [00:27:03] From the Lord.

And consequently the Holy Spirit can't fill us. In John chapter 3.

We're told that God doesn't give the Spirit by measure. He's not filling one person more than he's filling another. It's a fact that some of us allow the Holy Spirit to.

Occupy every aspect of our lives and some of us don't. Barnabas was in the first category.

And consequently he could be used in this wonderful way here. And he was marked by faith. We're going to see an example of the faith he had later on. But when we look at Barnabas in this way.

We can see why he had such a wonderful effect on the believers in Antioch.

They saw what he said worked out in his life.

And they followed his example.

[00:28:01] And it says much people was added unto the Lord.

And this is a characteristic. In Acts.

Add in.

We read about it in chapter 2.

And in one or two of the other early chapters. Before this one. In Acts.

People were added. They were added. And this is one of the important things of Christianity of course. We come to the Lord Jesus individually. But when we've come we find we're part of something else. We've been added to the Lord. We belong to him. And it's a very closely allied thought to the one in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Where the Apostle Paul tells us about the fact that. The Lord Jesus and his people are one.

One body.

The Christ often is an expression.

Which doesn't just mean the Lord Jesus. If I may say so.

But the Lord Jesus and his people with him. And they were added.

They were now part of the body of Christ.

[00:29:04] They were.

We may even go as far as saying. They were part of the Lord. They were added to the Lord. Do we realize that as believers on the Lord Jesus. We're not just individuals. We are part of something that's very wonderful indeed.

Which maybe we'll have something to say about later on. But then a strange thing happened.

Barnabas.

Barnabas went off.

Why did he do that? He went off to seek Saul.

And this is another aspect of Barnabas' character.

He was a good man.

And one good aspect of him was he realized that he wasn't. Able to meet the needs.

All the needs of these people he was helping. He thought I have somebody I know.

Who can really teach them. Saul. Now where is he? [00:30:01] He's in Tarsus. Back at home. I'll go and seek him.

And it says when he had found him. Obviously it took a bit of effort to do this. He then brought him back.

He got faith to believe this was God's will. And he went as far as Tarsus. I know Tarsus isn't on our maps. Very far away from Antioch. But in those days it would have been quite a journey to make.

Perhaps he didn't know exactly where Saul was. But he found him. And he brought him back. Because he knew Saul had this ability to teach the people.

And it says that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church.

And taught much people.

There are three aspects here of church life.

Which should characterize our gatherings. Or our Christian lives.

First of all, continued.

Continued for one year.

These weren't here today, gone tomorrow believers.

[00:31:05] They were believers who met together in a sustained way.

They encouraged one another. They helped one another.

Those who taught, taught. Those who needed teaching, listened.

And this went on in a sustained way. We need to be committed to the Christian life.

But secondly, we're told it was assembling themselves.

In fact, in the new translation it says in the assembly. And it may be as well just to briefly remind ourselves that when we become believers. We are members of the body of Christ.

And we should in our localities gather to the name of the Lord Jesus where we live. And there are certain characteristics of gatherings to the name of the Lord Jesus.

[00:32:01] We read about them in Acts chapter 2 verse 42. They continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship. In breaking of bread and prayers.

And there should be in our gatherings evidence of this.

And indeed we find in the New Testament quite clearly for instance in Matthew chapter 18. The prayer meeting where the Lord Jesus speaking of those. Who gather to his name and find him in his midst.

He says in Matthew in their midst.

He says in Matthew chapter 18. Verse 19.

Again I say unto you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything. Well that's what we do when one prays and another says Amen. Anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of

my father which is in heaven. [00:33:06] Calling upon the name of the Lord should characterize every gathering of God's people.

We should be regularly at the prayer meeting. It's not a one-off I'll do it every so often type thing.

Where we are gathering with saints to the name of the Lord Jesus wherever it may be. We should seek to be at the prayer meeting.

And that verse about calling upon the name of the Lord just in case anybody doesn't know where it is. It's at the very beginning of Corinthians 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 2.

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus called to be saints. With all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. [00:34:03] Or Jesus Christ our Lord both theirs and ours. There should also be ministry. The ministry of God's Word. And we have that in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Where in assembly we allow the Holy Spirit to direct his ministry to be given.

By two or three at the most the Apostle says. Sometimes difficult for us to do this today when we're in such small numbers. But is there an opportunity at some point in our local gathering.

Because 1 Corinthians 14 isn't about a meeting which occurs at conferences. It's about a meeting which should occur in the local gathering. Is there an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to direct one here or another there.

I know it can be difficult to work out. But this should be a meeting that's characteristic of a gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus. [00:35:05] Because the whole point about gathering in assembly is the Lord is in the midst. We're not gathered in assembly here today. This isn't an assembly meeting. An assembly meeting is where the Lord Jesus is in the midst. And he is doing the directing of everything that happens.

Where two or three are gathered together unto my name. There am I in the midst.

And when he's there in the midst he presides. He takes control. There's nothing more beautiful than the Lord Jesus being in the midst of his own. And they simply act according to his mind and will. And then there's of course the meeting that we all love to talk about. And I've left it to the last of these three. The breaking of bread. That's what the early disciples did. And that's what we do today. A golden thread connects us with the upper room. [00:36:03] Because the Lord Jesus gave that wonderful word to the Apostle Paul. To pass on the Lord's request. Not merely as we read about it in the Gospels. But from heaven itself. Do this in remembrance of me. When we gather about the Lord Jesus on the Lord's Day morning to break bread. We remember him in his death. There's no organization.

He is in the center. Our eyes, our hearts are directed to him. One prays, one gives out to him.

We sing together. We pray with each other. Even if one is praying audibly. And then we break the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of him. And there should be. There should be an overflow of worship. To him and to his father.

At such a gathering. And then of course there is the meeting in 1 Corinthians 5 for discipline. And there's a meeting we don't like to talk about too much. [00:37:02] But it's there in 1 Corinthians 5. And indeed it's spoken about in Matthew chapter 18. Where the Lord says.

In verse 18 of that chapter. The verse before the verse we quoted. Verily I say unto you. Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth. Shall be bound in heaven. And whatsoever ye shall loose on earth. Shall be loosed in heaven. And whatsoever ye shall loose on earth. Shall be loosed in heaven. This should.

These things should characterize Mr. Rosier in his book. What is a meeting of the local assembly. Says that perhaps there should be more meetings. Of that character among us for humiliation. So these were the characteristics of an assembly of a gathering. And it wasn't though just something that was inward. It was something that was outward. And we've seen that in that verse from Acts chapter 11. [00:38:01] Which tells us that they taught much people. I think that goes beyond the assembly. I think many people came in to hear the word of God. And they heard it. And there's another outward aspect isn't there. Isn't there to this assembly here in Antioch. It says that when prophets came down and told them. Notably Agabus about a forthcoming famine. That every man verse 29 according to his ability. Determined to send relief unto the brethren. Which dwelt in Judea.

There was a blessing. For those from whom the gospel had first come. Echoing the words of the Apostle Paul. I think it's in Romans chapter 15. Where he speaks about giving. Giving those from whom the gospels come. It may be a slightly different emphasis. Giving them practical help.

In verse 27.

It has pleased them verily and their debtors they are. [00:39:03] For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things. Their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. That's what these people did without the need for the Apostle Paul to tell them. It seems they did it. Of their own love. For their fellow brethren in Jerusalem. There was an outward effect. For others.

Both unbelievers who came to hear the gospel. And fellow believers who needed their help. And support.

We move on then to chapter 13. When Paul and Barnabas had done their work. Or Barnabas and Saul as they're still named. The end of chapter 12.

It says that they had fulfilled their ministry. Characteristic of these two men. They fulfilled their ministry. And this isn't the only reference to them doing that. They could be given something to do and they did it. They fulfilled their ministry. [00:40:03] They fulfilled it. Then in verse 1 of chapter 13 it says. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers. As Barnabas and Simeon. That was called Niger. And Lucius of Cyrene and Manan. Which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch and Saul. And they ministered to the Lord. And fasted.

The Holy Ghost said. Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them. They sent them away.

Now. Here we see that the assembly at Antioch has made progress. Up until now we haven't known the names of anyone there. It was unnamed believers who spoke to unnamed Gentiles and shared the gospel with them. But now we find five men named.

[00:41:03] At Antioch.

And if you look at the names of them. Two are very familiar to us of course. Barnabas at the start. Saul at the end. But look at the others and you'll see that. There's every indication that they weren't really from Antioch. They had.

Been born and brought up elsewhere. But. In the Lord's will they had come to that city. And they were.

Prophets and teachers they had a gift. And that gift was acceptable. Wherever they were because gifts are given for the whole body. These weren't elders. These were gifts to the whole church. And they were able to exercise their gift. In Antioch.

So real progress has been made in the assembly here. And it seems that these five had gathered together because they had a real exercise. [00:42:04] They had a real sense. Of. The fact that the Lord. The fact that the Lord. Might.

Be minded to use them in a particular way. Because we're told that.

They. Minister to the Lord. And they fasted. Fasting.

There was an element of self-sacrifice to what they were doing. They wanted to be wholly. Opened up.

To the Lord to show them his will. Ministering to the Lord. As prophets and teachers they were used to ministering to men. But now they were given something to the Lord. And this spirit this exercise is spiritual.

Energy that they had the Lord. The Lord was able to bless it. And it's often when. We are occupied with the Lord as these men were. [00:43:01] That we find the will of the Lord. Sometimes we say I don't know the Lord's will but then we're not praying. We're not reading the word of God. So how are we going to know the Lord's will. These five men are an example to us. Of how we find out the Lord's will they were occupied with the Lord. And they were occupied with him to the extent they fasted. And as a result. The Holy Spirit was able to convey to them. All five of them. All five of them. The mind of the Lord. And the Lord said.

Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. It's wonderful to see the wisdom of the Lord here. Five men that were perhaps others but these five were particularly engaged in this. Ministering to the Lord and fasting. Two were to be separated. Three were to be left in Antioch. Three were to be left in Antioch. The Lord in using Saul and Barnabas to go out with his word. [00:44:04] Because really this is a new departure in the book of Acts. The Lord in using Saul and Barnabas to go out with his word. He doesn't denude Antioch. Of the gift that they need. Those of us who serve the Lord should always be careful that when we serve the Lord. I mean serving the Lord in perhaps traveling elsewhere. Because we all serve the Lord really. But those who serve the Lord should always be careful to maintain a concern for our gatherings from which we go.

The Lord has that concern here. He keeps three back and sends two. And they're led by the Holy Spirit to go. They don't go independently and yet it's very clear from this passage that when



somebody is a servant of the Lord. They need to know the direction of the Lord. The Lord needs to be free to direct them. But they go forth in fellowship. [00:45:02] Not here with the assembly so much. But just the other prophets and teachers that were engaged in this exercise. It's as if the Holy Spirit is emphasizing that the servant must have a direct line with the Lord. Not via the assembly. But there should still be that degree of fellowship with other brethren in what we do. May we seek to practice this ourselves in our lives.

And as they got this sense of the Lord's will through the Holy Spirit.

Says they fasted and prayed. Instead of ministry now they prayed. They laid their hands on them. They identified with them. This is not ordination. This is not laying the hand on them to say yes you can go. It's laying the hand on them to say yes we're in fellowship with what the Holy Spirit wants you to do. And they sent them away. They were obedient to the word that had been given to them. [00:46:05] And this is Paul's first ministry, first missionary journey as we all know. And he went forth and what wonderful results occurred as a result of the obedience of these ones to the Lord's leading.

And when we turn to chapter 14. When it tells us very briefly in verse 26 that they had concluded their work.

They had concluded their work. Thence from Perga that is and Artalia.

They sailed to Antioch from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God. So this does confirm the local gathering at Antioch was in fellowship with what they had done. For the work which they had fulfilled. Notice this word fulfilled to being entrusted to them. And they had done what the Lord had asked them to do. And when they were come and had gathered the church together. [00:47:03] They rehearsed all that God had done with them. And now he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

That's beautiful isn't it? The sharing of these servants. Of what the Lord had done through them with their fellow brethren. Who had had fellowship with them in them going to serve the Lord. And it must have been a wonderful occasion for Barnabas and Saul to come back to Antioch.

And to be able to do that. We haven't got enough time to go into the next incident really. Except to just mention it briefly. Certain men came down as we read at the beginning of chapter 15. And they taught something which wasn't right. Verse 1.

Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved. [00:48:01] Now in the new translation it tells us a commotion occurred.

A commotion will always occur among the people of God when wrong doctrine is taught. And Paul and Barnabas had no little discussion with them. We read in the new translation. That's the way it's put there. Now Paul and Barnabas could have said look. What you're saying is wrong. You can believe that in Jerusalem if you want to. But you're not going to teach it here. But they didn't say that.

The brethren at Antioch determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem. Unto the apostles and elders about this question. This is evidence isn't it? Living evidence from the book of Acts. That the gatherings that were formed. As a result of the preaching of the gospel. In the early days of the church. Regarding themselves as in fellowship with each other.

[00:49:01] As moving on together. As being connected vitally with each other. As having a common testimony. And it was crucial that this matter should be dealt with. At the point. Where the departure in the doctrine had occurred. And it occurred in Jerusalem. So Paul and Barnabas and others went up to Jerusalem. To talk to the apostles and elders about this. Now as I say we haven't got enough time to go into the detail. About how they resolved this problem. But it's wonderful to see the way in which they were received in Jerusalem. We're told that in verse 4. When they would come to Jerusalem they were received of the church. And of the apostles and elders. And they declared all the things that God had done with them. They were from the assembly in Antioch. And they were received by the assembly at Jerusalem. There was that inter-assembly relationship.

Between Jerusalem and Antioch. [00:50:02] Now there were problems. Issues were raised as we can see from verse 5. And as we read from Galatians chapters 1 and 2. There were inner exercises going on.

Paul met with the apostles and elders separately.

To make sure he had not run in vain. Or was not running in vain. Sometimes when issues like this come up. It's important that those with most responsibility. Deal with the matter among themselves first of all. To get the mind of the Lord. So that there's not open dissension among them. In front of all the believers. But eventually as we read in this chapter, chapter 15. When they were all settled on what they believed was the mind of the Lord. Though these problems were brought up by those. That we read about in verse 5 of the sect of the Pharisees. [00:51:03] It could be dealt with. Before everyone in the assembly. And a proper assembly decision could be made. That's what happened in the later verses. And it was done publicly. It was done in a united way as we go down these verses. There's nothing done in a corner or privately here. It's a matter of fellowship. So it has to be done openly and unitedly.

Even to the extent that a very important thing is done. A letter is written. Which details everything that they've decided. Of course the matter of putting the law on the Gentiles could not be accepted. But it was important. The Gentile believers realized there were certain things. They shouldn't do as Christians. And we can read about them later on in these verses. If we have more time we could do that. And then they were able to send Barnabas and Saul. Back to Antioch. [00:52:01] And the matter had been dealt with. Fellowship could be maintained. And the work of the Lord could continue. It's a beautiful comment that's made in verse 25. It seemed good unto us being assembled with one accord. To send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent them therefore. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas. Who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us. To lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. Which are then described.

So when they were dismissed they came to Antioch. When they had gathered the multitude together. They delivered the epistle. Which when they had read. They rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas being prophets also themselves. Exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them. [00:53:01] What a wonderful conclusion it was to a very difficult event. But it was important because the gospel was now going out from Antioch. And it was important that everybody understood the truth of the gospel. So it could be proclaimed in a way which left no one in any doubt. As to the wonderful basis of our salvation in the Lord Jesus. May we learn from this history of the church in Antioch. And seek to practice it in our lives too. And be known as Christians. As we saw in those

verses. From chapter 11. The disciples were first called Christians. In Antioch.

We're singing closing 264.