

10 marks of the Antioch Church

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Sermon Audio file

Acts 1:8 sets up the book, which is the story of the Holy Spirit changing hearts and minds to get it done.

Antioch changes everything - Gospel had gone to Jews in Jerusalem, ch3 unclean Jews are now welcome, ch8 Samaritans, ch8 God fearers from Ethiopia. First Gentiles in ch10.

In ch 11, the Scattered people reach Antioch - 3rd biggest Roman city start really seeing Gentiles saved and added - a model church, in many ways more so than Acts 2 Jerusalem church

Acts 11:19-30 and 13:1-3

10 marks of the Antioch Church

1 Hand of the Lord with them evangelistically

When Stephen got martyred in ch7, persecution broke out in the Jerusalem church and believers were scattered and went about sharing their faith. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, it was ordinary people filled with the Spirit scattered everywhere that shared the gospel. They get to this huge city of Antioch, massively ethnically diverse and full of the tensions that brought and shared their faith among the Gentiles. It was there in Antioch the first non Jewish background church is planted.

It was located 300 miles north of Jerusalem and was the third largest city in the Roman empire, behind Rome and Alexandria, having more than 500,000 residents. It was a center for commerce and a crossroads for travel and trade between Europe and the Orient. This made the city a melting pot of various races, including the Romans, the local Syrians, Jews, and others.

The city was proverbial for sexual immorality. Five miles outside of town was the grove of Daphne, where worshipers of Artemis and Apollo pursued their religion of pleasure with temple prostitutes. The Roman satirist Juvenal criticized the moral pollution of Rome by saying that the sewage of the Orontes (a river flowing through Antioch) had for too long been discharged into the Tiber (flowing through Rome). He "meant that Antioch was so corrupt that it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away"

In a tough place, there was huge favour on the, V21 tells us the hand of the Lord was with them.

Do you remember David Rawlings prophecy at the start of the year about the ease of the Lord being on us this year? Echoes Isa 61 and Jesus' reading of that in Luke 4 - the year of the Lords' favour.

Janet's dream lady

Last week poppy salvation

My friend Clyde Thomas challenges us to be a move of God, not just pray for a move of God.

Tell people about your faith! Be so saturated with Jesus, that you ooze Him. More on that in a moment!

Teh report gets back to the mother church in Jerusalem that lots of Gentiles are getting saved and there's this Gentile church getting planted,

You can imagine the scene. "Have you heard what's going on in Antioch?" "No, what?" "A bunch of ordinary believers are sharing Christ with the pagans, and they're all meeting together, Jews and Gentiles, as one church!" Woop Woop! Red lights started flashing! It was one thing when the God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius, had become a Christian through the preaching of the leading apostle, Peter. That's one thing. But when raw pagans from a notoriously immoral mega city started coming into the church, it's time for the mother church to check things out! So they sent Barnabas. Some of the circumcision crowd might have said, "Make sure that Barnabas gets that Antioch situation under control!" Praise God

that Barnabus is a Son of encouragement, a grace man!

2 Grace of God is visible

v23 he came and saw the grace of God.

We've just done a series on grace - it's amazing, it sets us free. It's effects are tangible! a bunch of muddy potatoes are getting cleaned up! Barnabus saw the grace of God and he rejoiced (11:23). If the apostles had sent a legalistic member of the circumcision party, he might have seen something else and had a very different response. He would have seen Jews and Gentiles eating together (Gal. 2:12), not keeping the ceremonial laws. Instead of rejoicing, he would have been horrified.

Barnabus sees God at work - sure there would be mess, people from different backgrounds rubbing up against each other is bound to be interesting to watch! But he sees the grace of God changing lives.

Favourite revival story from Ffestiniog in Wales in 1904 - some old ladies had been praying for revival for years. They come to the chapel and see a load of miners dancing on the pews waving their hankies, with tears streaming down their faces leaving white streaks on the coal blackened skin. Horrified they walk out and miss what the grace of God is doing.

Legalism looks for the outward marks of conformity - in Acts times Jews were identified by circumcision, obeying food laws and keeping the Sabbath. Those old ladies missed the grace of God because they were looking for outward confirmity - clean faces, sunday suits and sombre meetings. Barnabus could see signs of grace at work!

Barnabus has understood that the kingdom of God is growing and it's not just for religious Jews - the sick, the poor, the dirty, the Samaritans, the Gentiles are welcomed in - that's the grace of God at work.

3 Quality leadership

Barnabus immediately goes to recruit Saul (Paul) to come over and help lead the church. It will be his first church, but Barnabus has already seen the grace of God on Paul back in ch9:27 when everyone else was quaking in their boots at this former persecutor turned preacher. The church was led by leaders not by consensus and committees. Within a year there is an ethnically diverse leadership team - 5 men from as different a background as one could imagine!

Paul & Barnabus are from a Jewish background and outside of Palestine

Lucius is from Cyrene in North Africa

Maneas comes from a priveleged bacground, having grown up in Herod's household

Simon called Niger was most likely a Black African

Even the leaders show how the gospel is now for all peoples and backgrounds.

As William Barclay wrote "That little group is an example of the unifying influence of Christianity. Individuals from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered the secret of 'togetherness' because they had discovered the secret of Christ."

The leaders set en example to follow - Barnabus is noted in v24 as a good man, full of the Spirit and faith. No do as I say not as I do in that church or this one! The fact that he travelled 100 miles to go get Saul is a testament to the fact that he is not empire building but wanting the Lord to build the church and extend the kingdom. He is not looking to be a big name, he is looking for a team to glorify His name!

4 Teaching centre

The leadership and sending capacity of the church was built up because of the year Paul and Barnabus spent teaching the people. This now teaching church were people go from miles around to sit and get fat on wonderful teaching but do little with it. People were putting into practice what they heard.

5 Followers of Christ nicknamed "little Christs"

The very next verse tells us Antioch is where people were first called "Christians". There are many terms for Christ followers in the New Testament - disciple, brother/sister, saint, child of God, elect, priest, beloved. The non-Christians of Antioch came up with this term - little Christs.

F. F. Bruce imagines a group of two or three of the believers in the streets of Antioch, with a small group gathered around them, listening to the gospel. Someone watching asks another bystander, "Who are

these people?" The other answers, "O, these are the people who are always talking about Christos, the Christ-people, the Christians" (The Book of Acts [Eerdmans], p. 241). The nickname stuck, just as Jesus people or Jesus freaks was the description that came out of the Jesus movement in the 1970's. While it may have been meant as a term of derision, it really was a supreme compliment for the pagans to notice that these men were "Christ-men."

The believers were no longer like the Jews, or Arabs or the Syrians or any of the other 15 ethnic groups in the city. They were changed! No longer immoral, no longer taking part in race riots - they defied description other than they are little Christs - Christians.

6) Welcomed and lived in the good of the prophetic

In the foundation laying stage prophets came and helped shape the church in v27. The now word of the Lord very much helps shape the identity and unique call of a church.

We are living in and for many of the prophetic words of the Gateway

* A gateway for the gospel to go to the nations

* River Ouse regularly breaks its banks but it is contained in King's Lynn. God wants to break the banks and flood the presence of God that will combat a lack of expectation in a deprived town. Prepare the ground and sharpen the plough: it needs to go deep and long to break ground from previously spiritually impoverished centuries.

* And God's going to give you something of an anointing to gather different nations and put them together even as Peter did and God is really going to release that on you as an apostolic gift. All right? It's going to be built into the foundations of your Church

* God wants to give you an anointing for a big Church. All right. A Big Church. I feel like God wants to move past the 500 mark in this Church as you plant. I see God wanting to give you a sizeable percentage of the community as your inheritance. (0.2% currently!)

* I saw the Gateway Kings Lynn and was struck by how long it had been there. It was built in the era of horses and carts and now takes cars and lorries. Felt God say that The Gateway Church was to build for the long term. This is going to be a church that lasts. Build it strong so that it lasts long. Do not rush the foundations but built strong. Gateway Church is to be a gateway to the nations, but the Gateway is also a distinctive feature of the town. Many people pass through it to enter the town. God is going to give you profile that will belie your size. You will become well known very quickly, so that the entire town knows about you. Many people will pass through your Gateway, not into the town, but into the Kingdom.

* There will many colours in this place. People from many nations. Saying "Praise the Lord" in many languages. You may be thinking there aren't many colours in King's Lynn. God will carve them out of rock and build something beautiful in this place.

* I see a gathering wave. It's like the wind has got under it and it is gathering. And the Lord says that from where you to stand on the beach it looks not much more than like a ripple. But from where he stands, it is a wave that is beginning to flow. It is a wave that is going to be to flow onto this church into this church and God says that the cry of the heart of the people of this church has gone up to Heaven and has been heard. The Lord says that there is coming a time of the Holy Spirit in this church which requires you to prepare, which requires you to get ready. The scriptures say that Jesus said to the disciples "I want you to go up into the upper room and prepare a meal because I am going to eat with you" and God says there is a time of preparation for the church. God says don't just look at the wave. Get ready for the wave. Don't just say a wave is coming. Prepare for the wave. The Lord says that there will be an ingathering in this place that will cause you to be so busy that if you haven't prepared you will be swamped and overwhelmed. The Lord says: Don't try and make the wave happen. Don't try to drag the wave along. Just get in the wave as it comes. Allow the Holy Spirit to do this. There is going to be an outflow of evangelism into this community, says the Lord. I am going to stir up the gift of God that is in some of you. There is some of you that have never done anything for God and never heard anything from God and sometimes don't know whether God knows about you. I declare to you tonight that God is going to release you into active work in the kingdom of God.

In Antioch one of the prophecies that came was of a worldwide famine, so having weighed it they took action.

Prophecy needs to be weighed to see what is from the Lord and then acted upon or actively waited for.

7) Generous church

V29 They gave generously according to their ability to help the church in Judea.

It's a sign of the grace of God upon them that their wallets as well as their hearts have come under the lordship of Christ.

Over a hundred years ago a preacher called Philip Brooks was asked how he would waken up a dying church? He answered that he'd take up a missionary offering!

How we handle our money to help build the kingdom is a sign of life and the grace of God in our lives!

8) Led by prophets and teachers = fire

If a church is led by a team of teachers, you'll have a preaching centre that people come to to get their itching ears tickled, but not a lot of action and real kingdom growth will occur. If a church is led by a team of prophets, there will be fire, but not a lot of depth. Antioch's leadership team was made up of prophets and teachers - a mighty pairing.

The prophetic needs a wisdom gift alongside it to anchor it and shape it and give security.

I've often noticed a prophetic person will be married to a wisdom gift!

As someone once said - all word and no Spirit we dry up. All Spirit and no word we blow up - word and Spirit we grow up!

9) Worshipping, praying and fasting church

That great leadership team meant the church was well taught, lived in the good of the prophetic and was a worshipping, praying and fasting church.

Just like a good stew needs carrots, onions and celery - worship, prayer and fasting is so necessary for strategic mission direction.

As I read through the prophecies again for an earlier point I was challenged to read "And God saying I will give you encounters with me that will give you strategy of how to build wisely. I am going to give you times, when you will be found in my presence. Where you will be hungry for food, but you will be taken in a trance."

The last mark of the Antioch church is that it was a

10) Sending base for apostolic mission

40% of that initial leadership team were sent on apostolic mission and they kept coming back to their sending base to report, receive fresh prayer and support. Our call to come here was to open up the region for church planting, so the vision statement reflects that - sending people, resulting in church planting in the region and the re-evangelisation of Northern Europe. We are called to do all of these 10 marks to be an Antioch church and some, many even will be sent out on apostolic mission - short term and long term. There will be churches planted out from here in places like March, Wisbech, Massingham area. Team will go on mission trips to help serve and shape church plants all across Europe.

The church invested in people they knew would move on - over the first 11 years of the church we have seen many people saved, and disciples who we have said goodbye too. That's okay - we are a gateway, people come in through the gate and go out through the gate.

The investment is in terms of discipling, evangelising and money to fund the mission.

So there we have 10 marks of the church in Antioch

1. Hand of the Lord with them evangelistically
2. Grace of God is visible
3. Quality leadership
4. Teaching centre
5. Followers of Christ nicknamed "little Christs"
6. Welcomed and lived in the good of the prophetic
7. Generous church
8. Led by prophets and teachers = fire
9. Worshipping, praying and fasting church
10. Sending base for apostolic mission

How does that affect me?

Need a revelation of the local church - not just a Sunday activity.

Those early believers were gripped with the idea that the local church is the hope of the whole world. They didn't just go Sundays, find it a bit frustrating that nothing is happening and setup a parachurch organisation or charity. They had a revelation of the glorious church, the city on the hill, the family of God, the body of Christ that gripped them and that they gave their lives for.

Please no more Sunday Churchians! Allow the Spirit to give you a revelation of the glorious church that Jesus will build through us - that will be a gateway for the gospel to go to the nations, that will be a multicultural family, passionately pursuing God, drawing people in, sending people out resulting in church planting in the region and the re-evangelisation of Northern Europe.

Which of the 10 stirs or challenges you? Think about it marinate on it!

What's the next step for you?

1. Become a Christian
2. Choose to be a part of community - life group, joining day next Sunday
3. Serve the mission - get stuck in
4. Give generously
5. Invite a friend - in Antioch it was the ordinary people who shared their faith that saw the explosive growth!