

MISSION TO THE
GENTILES:
ACTS 11



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Mission to the Gentiles: Acts 11
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Introduction to Acts 11

For centuries – as long as anyone could remember – a dividing wall, or, a middle wall of separation, had kept Jewish and Gentile communities apart. That wall consisted of the various religious statutes of Hebrew Law that Jews applied uniquely to themselves, and that, in their minds, marked them off as alone God's special people.

Jesus abolished that dividing wall by fulfilling all the requirements of the Law of God in His perfect life and sacrificial death (Eph. 2.14-18). But it would take the Holy Spirit, working through Peter, to break that wall down and open the breach through which the grace of God would flow to the Gentile world (Acts 10).

It's understandable that some Jewish believers would be reluctant to accept this change. But Peter calmly and lovingly explained the workings of the Lord, to the satisfaction (for now) of all.

And it's a good thing he did, for while he was making his case back in Jerusalem, Gentiles were hearing the Gospel and coming to faith in Jesus Christ as far away as Antioch in Syria. With the dividing wall down, the Spirit began flowing freely and fruitfully into the once-despised Gentile world.

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Opposition in the Ranks

Pray Psalm 66.1-4.

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God,
“How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
All the earth shall worship You
And sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises to Your name.”
Selah

Sing Psalm 66.1-4.

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)
Shout for joy to God, all people, sing the glory of His Name!
Give Him glorious praise and say, “How great Your pow’r and great Your fame!
All the earth shall worship gladly as they praise Your glorious Name!”

Read and meditate on Acts 11.1-3.

Preparation

1. Who contended with Peter in Jerusalem?
2. To what did they object?

Meditation

It’s still early in the progress of the Gospel, so we can perhaps understand why some were reluctant to accept that God’s promised Kingdom was being extended to the Gentiles. It’s neither sinful nor uncommon for believers to disagree about matters. We all come to the Gospel and are reared in the faith within particular contexts and traditions, and we can be reluctant to accept perspectives, points of view, or developments that don’t comply with our familiar take on things.

So before Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the news of events in Caesarea had already preceded him, and some folks were not happy about what they’d heard. But if we look carefully, the problem surfacing here seems to have very little to do with the Gospel. Instead, this is a *racial* issue: “You went to uncircumcised men [i.e., Gentiles] and ate with them.”

Peter’s transgression, according to these men, was not that he had preached the Gospel to Gentiles, but that he had accorded them what amounts to an *equal standing* with Jews in the Kingdom of God. He had gone into the home of a Gentile and shared a meal with him!

With the conversion of Cornelius and his household, it looked as if a major watershed had been crossed, and a great season of Gospel expansion was about to begin. But opposition arose from within the ranks of the household of faith. When personal agendas get in the way of the Lord’s, problems arise. But the Lord knows how to use even these apparent difficulties to further His ongoing work.

Believers remain sinners even after they have been redeemed. The law of sin operates within us still (Rom.

7.21-25), and if we're not careful and prayerful, it can cause us to value our own agendas more than the Lord's.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard...” (Acts 11. 1). Indeed, they did.

It seems they heard this news second-hand, as it arrived to them before Peter did. Far be it from me to judge Peter or his friends, but this was Big News, and it might have been wise to share the whole story before it was told piecemeal. And heard selectively.

“An unreliable messenger can cause a lot of trouble. Reliable communication permits progress” (Prov. 13.17 TLB).

In this day and age of news flying around in seconds, not days or weeks, it is imperative that we carefully communicate the Good News of the Gospel every time we speak it. And. That we are very circumspect about everything that we say, so that our Personal Mission Field does not get muddled in the mire of our personal opinions about anything and everything.

What we should say will be given to us...for it is not we who speak, “but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” (Matt. 10.19, 20)

What happened to Peter, happened. Peter was full of the Holy Spirit and His power. And I am sure that the experience with Cornelius was overwhelming and exhausting and exciting. And perhaps he did exactly the right thing. But still, maybe there is something we can learn from this that will help us preclude having “opposition in the ranks”.

As Paul wrote, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12.3, 18).

And communicate carefully.

For reflection

1. Why was Peter's work in Caesarea such a problem for these people back in Jerusalem?
2. How can you know when prejudice or bias is affecting your view of others? What should you do then?
3. The problem raised in verses 1-3 will be resolved shortly, but not entirely. It will crop up again in Acts 15. How can you keep deep-seated attitudes or opinions in you from becoming a problem in the believing community?

The imperfect state of human nature strongly appears, when godly persons are displeased even to bear that the word of God has been received, because their own system has not been attended to. And we are too apt to despair of doing good to those who yet, when tried, prove very teachable. It is the bane and damage of the church, to shut out those from it, and from the benefit of the means of grace, who are not in every thing as we are. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 11.1-18

Pray Psalm 66.5-9.

Thank God for His saving work in your life, for bringing you to salvation and helping you grow in it. Pray for the peoples of the earth, that they, too, might come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 66.5-9.

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

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Great and awesome is our Savior in the works which He has done.
He the sea and river dried to let His people cross as one.
Then our joy was great to worship Him our mighty, sovereign One.

He the nations watches ever – all you rebels, humbled be.
Bless our God, all men and nations, praise His Name eternally!
He preserves our souls, and He will keep His paths beneath our feet.

2 Here's the Deal

Pray Psalm 81.13, 14, 8.

“Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries...
Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!”

Sing Psalm 81.13, 14, 8.

(St. Petersburg: [My Hope is Built on Nothing Less](#))

Now let us all abandon our ways and listen to God, and offer Him praise!
Our foes He will so quickly subdue, extending His hand to save and renew.
“O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!”

Read Acts 11.1-18; meditate on verses 4-18.

Preparation

1. How did Peter respond to his challengers?
2. How did they respond to his report?

Meditation

Peter, giving his opponents credit for being reasonable men, took no offense at their objection; he simply “explained to them in order” what had happened (vv. 4-17).

Peter’s concluding point is most important. John had promised the baptism of the Spirit (v. 16); likewise, Jesus (Acts 1.8). Peter and his challengers had experienced what John and Jesus promised (Acts 2). They were convinced by this that salvation and the Kingdom had come to them. Peter explained that the same thing happened to Cornelius and his household (v. 15). Who was he, even the chief of the apostles, to stand in the way of what God was doing (v. 17)?

What followed is important: The NKJV exactly captures the meaning of the Greek, *edoxazon*: They began glorifying God (v.18). Or they repeatedly glorified God or continued to glorify Him. Those who heard Peter’s report processed it in silence, then affirmed it with praise, celebrating this wonderful work of God, and expressing glad surprise at what He had done through Peter’s witness.

This passage reminds us that even the most respected leaders in the Church are not free to act alone. All believers are accountable to the Spirit of God working within the Body of Christ. There is no human “head” of the Church, nor of any local church. Christ is the Head, His Word is the Touchstone, and His Spirit is the animating power for the church’s work as sign and outpost of the Kingdom.

Peter spoke the truth in love. Even when disputes arise within the household of faith, this is no call to arms for a rhetorical punching match, filled with exaggerated claims, *ad hominem* swipes, and “So’s your old man” snide remarks. Rather, patiently, thoughtfully, and in love, believers must seek to discern and embrace the will of God, working to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Peter’s challengers may have been all worked up about this situation. But he was calm, patient, and persuasive in relating his experience and observations. The result was glory and rejoicing.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“...who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11.17)

This question should guide our hearts in all that we believe, think, and do.

God has told us what we must do to be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16.31).

God has told us how to behave. Keep My commandments (Ex. 20. 1-17; Jn. 14.15).

God has told us how to deal with sin. Repent and turn away from it (Ezek. 14.6; Prov.4.14, 15; 1 Jn.1.9).

God has told us how to live powerfully. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.8).

God has told us how to treat our fellowman. Be just, merciful, humble, kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, and loving (Mic. 6.8; Jn.13.35; Eph.4.32).

God has told us who we are. We are His chosen people (Is. 43.1; 1 Pet. 2.9, 10).

God has told us what to do daily. Work your Personal Mission Field (Lk. 9.23; Eph. 2.8-10).

Here's the Deal: Who are we to withstand God?

For reflection

1. What are some ways believers might try to “withstand God”?
2. Why is it important that we always speak the truth in love?
3. How will you glorify God with your words today?

We should at all times bear with the infirmities of our brethren; and instead of taking offense, or answering with warmth, we should explain our motives, and show the nature of our proceedings. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 11.1-18*

Pray Psalm 81.3-8, 15, 16.

Praise God for His saving mercy. Call on Him to bring you into more of His saving grace and power, that you might live fully for Him in your Personal Mission Field – blessed to be a blessing to others!

Pray Psalm 81.3-8, 15, 16.

(St. Petersburg: [*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

Let every kind of instrument play to celebrate God’s deliverance today.

It is His statute and His command to worship and praise all over the land.

“O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!”

Declare His mercy, tell of His grace; our enemies flee the look of His face.

In mighty deeds strong witness He gave, and powerPly did His chosen ones save.

“O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!”

God set us free from bondage to sin and graciously brought us near Him again;

He rescued us whenever we cried and often our falt’ring confidence tried:

“O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!”

Then even those despising the Lord would falsely obey and follow His Word;

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In vain they seem to follow His way, yet judgment awaits on God's chosen day.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

The finest foods for us He will buy, and furnish us an abundant supply.
How sweet our lives can be in the Lord, when only we heed His glorious Word.
"O Israel, hear, admonished now be; My people, repent, return to Me!"

3 The Gospel to Antioch

Pray Psalm 67.1-3.

God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us, *Selah*
That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations.
Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.

Sing Psalm 67.1-3.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

O bless us, Savior, by Your grace, and shine upon us with Your face,
that we Your way may loud proclaim and tell to all the earth Your fame!

Refrain v. 3 (5)

Let all the peoples praise You, Lord, rejoicing in Your holy Word!
Rejoicing in Your holy Word!

Read Acts 11.1-21; meditate on verses 19-21.

Preparation

1. What did those who were scattered do?
2. To whom did they preach in Antioch?

Meditation

Peter's ministry in Caesarea, and his report to the elders in Jerusalem, cleared the decks for what was already going on elsewhere and would, beginning in chapter 13, become the focus of the ongoing work of Christ. The Kingdom had broken out and was loose in the world.

People who were persecuted in Jerusalem went to other cities, perhaps seeking relatives or friends with whom to start their new lives. And wherever they went, they evangelized the Good News of Jesus – at first to Jews only, but increasingly, to Gentiles as well (vv. 19, 20). Here, unlike in Acts 6, the “Hellenists” are distinguished from the Jews. In Antioch the Gospel began to bear fruit among the Gentiles, as “the hand of the Lord” (v. 21) carried forward the work begun by Peter in this next stage of the Gospel's expansion.

Notice the focus of the evangelizing: “preaching the Lord Jesus” (v. 20). The Good News is not so much about going to heaven when you die as it is that Jesus is Lord and King and Savior. Preach that, and the hand of the Lord will be with you to carry forward the ongoing work of Christ! Our salvation is as great (Heb. 2.3) as the reach of Christ's Lordship.

Believing in and turning to the Lord – faith *and* repentance – is one complete action. Not *believing* in Jesus as Savior now, then *turning* to Him as Lord maybe later (maybe not?). It's believing and turning to Jesus as Lord and Christ, just like Peter preached on that first Christian Pentecost.

The Good News is that Jesus the Lord and Christ has gained salvation for us, and calls us to repent and believe this Gospel, so that the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom might be ours as surely as it was for the first believers.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

As sad and difficult as it must have been for the early Christians to be dispersed and displaced, they knew they had a calling, and they fulfilled it. Their joy in knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord took precedence even in their grievous situation.

How commendable. Really, how amazing.

They believed that they would face difficulties. Difficulties of dispersion and homelessness; death and destruction; overwhelming persecution. And yet, they still gossiped the gospel and did not lose hope.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Rom. 8.31)

“When I cry out *to You*, then my enemies will turn back;
this I know, because God *is* for me” (Ps. 56.9).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Rom. 8.35)

“Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps. 44.22).

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8.37).

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” (Is. 43.1).

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8.38, 39).

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Ps. 139.7)

As we are daily dispersed into our own Personal Mission Field, let us go with the same courage, enthusiasm, hope, and determination, that these early Christians did.

After all, we embrace the same beliefs. We have the same Spirit. And we cling to the same promises.

And the hand of the Lord will be with us, and great numbers will believe and turn to the Lord! (Acts 11.21)

For reflection

1. How should the example of these first Christians encourage us in our walk with and work for the Lord?
2. Are you prepared, ready, and eager to tell someone in your Personal Mission Field about the hope you have in Jesus (1 Pet. 3.15)? Explain.
3. Whom can you encourage today – by your example and words – to be bolder and more consistent in living as a witness for Christ?

The gospel proclaimed in Antioch would have had tremendous potential for reaching other areas of the world. Moreover, because the city was culturally diverse, it was not controlled by one religious group, making the people there more open to hearing the truth of the gospel message. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 11.22, 23

Pray Psalm 67.4-7.

Pray for missionaries and pastors in other countries, that God might use them mightily to proclaim the Good News of His Kingdom. Pray for revival and a great awakening in our country and around the world.

Sing Psalm 67.4-7.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

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Let all the nations gladly sing and joyous praise before You bring.
You judge them by Your holy worth and guide the nations of the earth.

Refrain v. 3 (5)

Let all the peoples praise You, Lord, rejoicing in Your holy Word!
Rejoicing in Your holy Word!

The earth in full its bounty yields – the blessed harvest of the fields.
We gather blessings from Your Word that all the earth may fear You, Lord.
Refrain

4 Grace Visible

Psalm 125.1, 2.

Those who trust in the LORD
Are like Mount Zion,
Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.

Sing Psalm 125.1, 2.

(St. Gertrude: [*Onward, Christian Soldiers*](#))

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!
Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,
Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Read Acts 11.1-24; meditate on verses 22-24.

Preparation

1. Whom did the leaders in Jerusalem send to Antioch? Why him?
2. What did he observe there?

Meditation

Again we note that the first believers felt it necessary to confirm the work of God in Antioch. So they dispatched Barnabas to have a look-see (v. 22). I always find that phrase striking: “When he came and had seen the grace of God...” What did he see?

It’s not spelled out here, but we know it from previous chapters: People hungry for the Word. People in prayer together, publicly and house to house. Folks sharing with one another of their material possessions and resources. New people coming to Lord. People talking about Jesus and “gossiping the Gospel” all over the city. The whole gamut of what Barnabas was familiar with in Jerusalem was on display here in Antioch as well! Grace is not just a squishy, feel-good experience; it’s power at work for transformed lives.

God is consistent in how He makes Himself known. So Barnabas, true to his nickname, ladled on the good word of encouragement (v. 23), doubtless affirming their work, enlarging their vision, and urging them on in the grace of the Lord Jesus. As a result, “a great many people were added to the Lord” (v. 24). Note again the emphasis on Jesus: “added to *the Lord*” – not to “the church.” The call is that people must come to Jesus, not to our church.

The presence of the Kingdom was visible in Antioch. The promise of it was becoming the possession of increasing numbers of people. And the power of the Kingdom was winning souls, transforming lives, and turning the world rightside-up for Jesus. What will it take for us to begin realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom in our day?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch. They didn't send just any old guy who happened to have a free weekend. Or someone that maybe had relatives there and was visiting anyway. Or send someone who had a religious father or grandfather. Or maybe someone that could really engage a group and make them laugh. Or someone who was clever or smart.

No.

Here are the job requirements for the man sent to Antioch. Needed:

1. A good man. (A law-keeper. One who loves properly.)
2. A man full of the Holy Spirit.
3. A man full of faith.
4. A man with the ability to encourage.

Nominal Christians need not apply.

From the very beginning, the Scriptures have been very clear about the qualities needed for church leaders. God said, "Hear now My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Num. 12.6-8)

I understand that God speaks now to His servants through the Word and prayer; but there is a special bond between church leaders and the Lord God that needs to be evident in someone who is called to tend God's flock encouragingly and carefully.

Here are the current job requirements for church leaders:

If a man desires the position of an overseer, he desires a good work. He must be: blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well; not a novice; have a good testimony, humble; reverent, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience; just, holy, and self-controlled. And let these first be tested; then let them serve, being found blameless. (1 Tim. 3.1-10; Titus 1.8)

"What will it take for us to begin realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom in our day?" Perhaps more men like Barnabas would be a good start.

For reflection

1. Why is it so important that church leaders be men like Barnabas?
2. How should you pray for the leaders of your church? How can you encourage them?
3. How do you expect the grace of God to be visible in your life today?

They believed; they were convinced of the truth of the gospel. They turned from a careless, carnal way of living, to live a holy, heavenly, spiritual life. They turned from worshipping God in show and ceremony, to worship him in the Spirit and in truth. They turned to the Lord Jesus, and he became all in all with them. This was the work of conversion wrought upon them, and it must be wrought upon every one of us. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 11.19-24

Pray Psalm 125.3-5.

Pray that God will shed His peace abroad among His people, to unite us in common witness for our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that His grace will be visible to the world through His people everywhere.

Sing Psalm 125.3-5.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

Wickedness shall rest not on this holy land.
Sinfulness shall never come forth from their hand.
Trusting in the Savior, firm in His caress,
ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Lord, do good and care for those upright in heart.
All who turn to evil shall from You depart.
Sinful men may increase, on their way to hell!
Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!

Refrain

5 The First “Christians”

Pray Psalm 9.1, 2.

I will praise *You*, O LORD, with my whole heart;
I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
I will be glad and rejoice in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

Sing Psalm 9.1, 2.

(Diademata: [*Crown Him with Many Crowns*](#))

I will give thanks, O Lord, with all my heart to You!
I'll tell the wonders of Your Word, so many and so true!
With joy to You I cry; Your glory I will raise;
Your matchless Name, O Lord on High, will I forever praise!

Read Acts 11.1-26; meditate on verses 25, 26.

Preparation

1. What did Barnabas do?
2. What were the believers in Antioch called?

Meditation

The church in Antioch was growing, and the need was great for excellent teaching, greater than Barnabas could fulfill by himself. How humble is that? A megachurch has sprung into life under his encouragement, and he heads off to find someone more capable than himself to continue this great work.

Whatever Saul had been doing in Tarsus prepared him for this ministry among the Christians in Antioch, which would become Saul's – Paul's – “home base” for nearly the remainder of his ministry.

We note that teaching was the focus of this whole year of ministry (v. 26). The Church can never receive too much excellent teaching. Nothing substitutes for good teaching to ground people in the faith and help them get on the growth curve with the Lord.

But good teaching alone won't get the job done. Each believer needs time with the Lord in prayer and in His Word. Such discipline is part of what we must be taught. The great outreach to the Gentile world that will begin in chapter 13 would be the result of solid grounding in the Word of God. And we know that it took, because the believers in Antioch soon became so identified with Christ – by their words and works – that their neighbors took to calling them the “Christ-ones” – Christians. The people of Antioch observed the same grace of Christ that Barnabas did. These days, alas, many people have a different view of Christians.

Saul and Barnabas were doing the ongoing work of Christ, along with the believers in Antioch. But they were also preparing together for a great expansion of the work, which we will follow beginning in Acts 13. In the Kingdom of God, we're always *preparing* for the ongoing work of Christ at the same time we're *doing* the ongoing work of Christ. That work takes place in our individual lives, our churches, our communities, and our world. And it is a work that is *noticeable* by others.

Or should be.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11.26).

Sharing a name brings with it the responsibility not to defame it: “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold” (Prov. 22.1).

People like to have a good name; but even more so, does God. He said, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Ex. 20.7; Deut. 5.11). “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I AM the LORD” (Lev. 19.12).

There is another way to profane God’s Name besides cursing and swearing. It is to go by His Name, Christian, then besmirch it with bad behavior.

I would rather have someone call out my name in a fit of rage, than to have them impugn my character by acting poorly and then blaming it on me. Or saying that I had made them do it. Or that I had taught them to be that way.

How many people do you know, or have heard or read about, who turned away from the saving Good News of Jesus Christ because one of His followers had behaved badly?

How many unjust wars have been fought in His Name?

How much judgment has been dished out by hypocrites in the name of religion?

How many people have left the church because of a lack of love shown there?

All these are ways the Name of the LORD is taken in vain. The name Christian worn poorly.

When we are wearing that name correctly, here is what happens: “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you” (Deut. 28.9, 10).

Better yet, they will gladly hear the message that we have to share with them of God’s love and goodness, because we have not turned them away from Him by our hypocrisy.

God says to us His children, “I have called you by your name, you are Mine.” (Is. 43.1)

And in turn, He wants us to bear His good Name in a loving and responsible way.

His very own Christ-ones.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to take the Lord’s Name “in vain”? Can we take the name “Christian” in vain? Explain.
2. What should we expect to see in the lives and communities of those who are known as “Christ-ones”?
3. How would you counsel new believers to make sure they live up to their new name?

Hitherto the followers of Christ were called disciples, that is, learners, scholars; but from that time they were called Christians. The proper meaning of this name is, a follower of Christ; it denotes one who, from serious thought, embraces the religion of Christ, believes his promises, and makes it his chief care to shape his life by Christ’s precepts and example. Hence it is plain that multitudes take the name of Christian to whom it does not rightly belong. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 11.25-30

Pray Psalm 9.7-16.

Rejoice in the Lord for your salvation. Call on Him to revive His Church, to embolden Christians everywhere to live and speak for Jesus. And ask God to send a great awakening of faith among lost people over all the earth.

Sing Psalm 9.7-16.

(Diademata: [*Crown Him with Many Crowns*](#))

Lord, You forever reign in judgment on Your throne.
The world in bitter wrath and pain Your righteousness will own.
All those who know Your Name, though in this life oppressed,
You shelter from the storms of shame and keep them ever blessed.

Praise then the Lord of Zion; declare His deeds abroad!
Praise Judah's mighty saving Lion, the ever-blessèd God!
Whose blood has washed us clean, Who hears our plaintive cries,
Who good to us has ever been and lifts us to the skies!

Lift up your voice in praise before glad Zion's gate!
Rejoice in Jesus' saving ways; His glory celebrate!
The nations fail and fall, condemned by their own hands;
The Lord Who showed Himself to all o'er them in judgment stands.

6 One Church

Pray Psalm 133.1.

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

Sing Psalm 133.1, 3.

(Tryggare Kan Ingen Vara: [*Children of the Heavenly Father*](#))

Behold, how sweet, how pleasant, when the brethren dwell together.
All in unity abiding find God's blessing there presiding.

Read Acts 11.1-30; meditate on verses 27-30.

Preparation

1. What did Agabus prophesy?
2. How did the church in Antioch respond?

Meditation

Barnabas had been gone for over a year, so the church in Jerusalem decided to send a team up to help (v. 27). These men are described as “prophets.” Their work appears to have consisted in traveling about to teach the Word, supplementing whatever ministries and teaching existed in places like Antioch. But at least one of them also had the gift of prophetic foresight, given by the Spirit to prophets, and not to everyone (v. 28).

What Agabus prophesied, Luke tells us, came to pass a bit later (v. 28). But receiving his message as the Word of God, the church in Antioch was not going to wait for disaster to come upon their brethren in Judea. They gathered up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem with Saul and Barnabas (vv. 29, 30).

The believers in Antioch and the believers in Judea were one Church, one Body of brethren, with one common concern for the Kingdom and the wellbeing of God's people. We must “work hard” to maintain this kind of unity (Eph. 4.3), but doing so is an important part of the ongoing work of Christ. Jesus said it's unity like this that convinces the world that He has come for its salvation (Jn. 20.21). Paul would maintain this focus on the worldwide oneness of the Body of Christ throughout the course of his ministry, and across the vast expanse of the Roman world (cf. Rom. 15).

Things were expanding rapidly, but Luke did not want us to lose sight of the fundamental oneness of the Body of Christ. Of course, today we pretty much *have* lost sight of that. *Disunity* has become the norm among the churches of Jesus Christ, and we don't make much of an effort to overcome that and demonstrate the oneness we have in Jesus Christ.

Unity among the churches of the Lord doesn't just happen. If we will not work at our unity, then we can't blame our unbelieving neighbors for not taking seriously our claim that Jesus has come for the salvation of the world.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The disciples in Antioch determined (came to the decision) to help the church in Judea because of the coming famine (Acts 11.29). But as we know from this multi-attributed statement: *The road to hell is paved with good intentions*, good intentions don't always get the job done.

And as the Bible says: “Whoever falsely boasts of giving is like clouds and wind without rain” (Prov. 25.14) And then the Bible adds this warning: “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—Better not to vow than to vow and not pay” (Ecc. 5.4, 5). Happily for the Church in Judea, the disciples determined to send relief, and then actually did it! (Acts 11.30) And they gave, “each according to his ability.” (Acts 11.29) A tithe is one tenth of a person’s income. And one tenth of our income does not belong to us. It belongs to God. In fact, if we hold that back and keep it for ourselves, we are guilty of robbing God. He asks, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings” (Mal. 3.8). And who wants to be guilty of that? So their ability to give depended entirely upon their own income. It would be a different amount for each one. But give it they must and give it they did.

The same is true for us. And today, the blessings of tithing are also still true. God tells us to “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3.10).

There are always needs in the household of faith. Churches, para-church organizations, neighbors—all have needs that can only be met by outside assistance. And these needs are in our local churches and neighborhoods, but also all over the world.

When we ask the Lord to show us, where He wants us to determine to help, then He will guide us to know where to give. And we will rejoice to do it.

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9.7)

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20.35).

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4.16).

“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13.16).

Determine. Do.

For reflection

1. The Christians in your Personal Mission Field have needs. Whom will you encourage today?
2. Why is it so important that Christians care for one another’s needs? How can churches do that in a community?
3. What does it mean to be a “cheerful giver”? How can believers encourage one another in this?

*Grant, Lord, that Christians may forget other names and distinctions, and love one another as the followers of Christ ought to do. True Christians will feel for their brethren under afflictions. Thus will fruit be brought forth to the praise and glory of God. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 11.25-30**

Pray Psalm 133.2, 3.

Pray that God will build a strong desire for unity in the souls of all His people, and that believers and churches everywhere may begin to work hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3)

Sing Psalm 133.2, 3.

(Tryggare Kan Ingen Vara: [*Children of the Heavenly Father*](#))

Like the precious oil of blessing flowing down on Aaron’s vestment,

Mission to the Gentiles: Acts 11

God's anointing rests forever where His people dwell together.

Like the dew of Hermon's fountain falling down on Zion's mountain,
So the blessing of the Savior dwells where unity finds favor.

7 The Hand of the Lord

Pray Psalm 66.1-4.

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God,
“How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
All the earth shall worship You
And sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises to Your name.”
Selah

Sing Psalm 66.1-4.

(Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))
Shout for joy to God, all people, sing the glory of His Name!
Give Him glorious praise and say, “How great Your pow’r and great Your fame!
All the earth shall worship gladly as they praise Your glorious Name!”

Read Acts 11.1-30; meditate on verse 21.

Preparation

1. What does this verse report?
2. How does it account for this?

Meditation

For centuries, Gentile nations oppressed those who understood themselves to be the people of God. A wall of hostility existed between Israel and the pagan world, and it was continually reinforced by traditions and admonitions on the Jewish side, and condescension and abominable offenses on the part of the Gentiles.

Now, suddenly, Gentiles and Jews were together in worship, breaking bread in each other’s homes, rejoicing together in their common salvation, and sharing their resources gladly. No human law could accomplish such a dramatic transformation. Nor could any sincerely-intended, earnest effort on the part of well-meaning men.

It had to be the hand of God. Specifically, the Right Hand of God, He Who sits at the Father’s right hand in glory and Who, with the Father, sends the Spirit and Kingdom of God to the world (cf. Pss. 2, 110). Jesus is “the hand of the Lord”, and what we see in Acts 11 is the ongoing work He began while on earth and is now prosecuting from His heavenly vantage point through His chosen people.

Only the Hand of the Lord can bring others to the saving knowledge of the Gospel. Only the Hand of the Lord can turn persecutors into preachers, foes into friends, and famines of every kind into flourishing. If we are looking to anything other than Jesus, exalted in glory, for our own progress in faith, for the growth of our churches, and for the advance of His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven – whether we’re depending on programs, preachers, or places of worship – we are not looking where we must. There is no other Name given among men under heaven whereby we must be saved, but the Name of Jesus.

Prayer, attention and obedience to God’s every Word, heartfelt worship and devotion, mutual encouragement

and aid, self-denying love for neighbors, courage in the face of uncertainty or risk, readiness to bear witness, and a willingness to go anywhere and do anything the Lord requires – these are where we join hands with the Right Hand of God to turn our world rightside-up for Him.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

As we can see from this verse, there is an action that accompanies belief that makes all the difference. “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number *believed* and *turned* to the Lord” (Acts 11.21).

The Bible says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble” (Jms. 2.19).

It is the turning that changes us:

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God; “Repent, *turn* away from your idols, and *turn* your faces away from all your abominations”’” (Ez. 14.6).

“Now, therefore, says the LORD, ‘*Turn* to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2.12, 13).

“Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; *turn* away from it and pass on” (Prov. 4.14, 15).

When the Hand of the Lord is with us, guiding us, teaching us, convicting us, restoring us, and loving us, we should want nothing more than to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him. Believing and turning.

In the Word of God is where we should dwell to know the Hand of the Lord with us. For His Word is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4.12).

His Word leads us to believe and turn, and experience His Hand with us.

Then His Hand leads us into our Personal Mission Field to help others believe and turn.

For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised...and great numbers will believe and turn! (Ps. 16.25; Acts 11.21)

For reflection

1. What is repentance? How is repentance a kind of “turning”? Who needs to repent?
2. Believing and turning are both essential to being saved and growing in salvation. Explain.
3. What can believers do to help one another stay within the reach of the Hand of the Lord, so that He might work powerfully in and through us?

*What should the ministers of Christ preach, but Christ? Christ, and him crucified? Christ, and him glorified? And their preaching was accompanied with the Divine power. The hand of the Lord was with them, to bring that home to the hearts and consciences of men, which they could but speak to the outward ear. They believed; they were convinced of the truth of the gospel. They turned from a careless, carnal way of living, to live a holy, heavenly, spiritual life. They turned from worshipping God in show and ceremony, to worship him in the Spirit and in truth. They turned to the Lord Jesus, and he became all in all with them. This was the work of conversion wrought upon them, and it must be wrought upon every one of us. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 11.19-24**

Pray Psalm 66.5-9.

Pray that the Church of our Lord Jesus will be revived into His greatness and awesomeness, and that we will increase in His salvation, take up the work of witness-bearing, and lead the world to a great awakening of

faith in the Lord.

Sing Psalm 66.5-9.

(Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))

Great and awesome is our Savior in the works which He has done.

He the sea and river dried to let His people cross as one.

Then our joy was great to worship Him our mighty, sovereign One.

He the nations watches ever – all you rebels, humbled be.

Bless our God, all men and nations, praise His Name eternally!

He preserves our souls, and He will keep His paths beneath our feet.

Mission to the Gentiles: Acts 11

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “the ongoing work of Christ”? How does that work go on?
2. What evidence should we expect to see in a community where Christians are realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?
3. What does it mean for an individual believer to take up the ongoing work of Christ in his or her daily life?
4. Why is it so important that churches work for unity in the faith, both in their own churches and in their communities (Jn. 13.35)? What are the primary obstacles to this happening in our day?
5. What’s the most important insight or lesson you’ve learned from Acts 11?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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