



# SERMON NOTES

US N<sup>o</sup>. 109

Date: July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Title: Antioch Beginnings

#17 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. Peter returns to Jerusalem
  - a. The story of Cornelius, in Luke's mind, would be incomplete without recording the effects of the incidents on the Church.
  - b. Later we see that Herod Agrippa in league with the conservative Jews, puts to death James the brother of John. There is a rise among the Christians of a strong conservative party, "*You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!*" The "*circumcision party*" questions Peter as soon as he returns.
    - i. Jews in Christianity did not see themselves as converts, whereas the Gentiles did, but not a conversion to Judaism. How do you become a convert to the Jewish Messiah without becoming Jewish?
    - ii. Jewish food law was of extreme importance, along with circumcision it had separated them from the Gentiles for hundreds of years in at home and abroad. If Gentiles did not follow Jewish customs, how could they fellowship together?
      1. Peter falls into this snare when he comes to Antioch, Paul was obliged to confront him and tell he was wrong. (cf. Gal. 2:11-14)
  - c. Ecclesiastical controversy often arises over points of non-essentials, and is seldom without strife & angry feeling.
  - d. Not all Christian believers are equally enlightened, or equally free; best way to remove misunderstanding is to come together & talk. So Peter tells the story from the beginning in order.
    - i. Expository preaching; a kind of preaching that expounds upon the meaning of a particular passage of Scripture.
      1. "*One advantage in preaching through a book of the Bible is that it compels us to face every single statement, come what may, and stand before it, and look at it, and allow it to speak to us. Indeed it is interesting to observe that not infrequently certain well-known Bible teachers never face certain Epistles at all in their expositions because there are difficulties which they are resolved to avoid.*" Martyn Lloyd Jones
  - e. Peter's highlights
    - i. Peter cites the divine warning to respect what God has made holy. For church leaders it is important to not erect fences where Christ has not, not to impose burdens Christ has not, and not excommunicate those Christ has not.
    - ii. God commands Cornelius to send for Peter who would tell him the words of salvation,
      1. The nature & necessity of salvation,

2. The source & means of salvation,
3. The recipients & subjects of salvation.
- iii. Peter does well to remember the words of the Lord.
- iv. “Who was I...” a feeble, commissioned creature who is equally a recipient of grace.
- v. Repentance unto life...
  1. Its nature. A turning away from self & sin to Christ; genuine renunciation of the old life (selfishness, worldliness, irreligion, immorality, idolatry, etc.
  2. Its origin. It is a grace, heavenly gift, by the Holy Spirit
  3. Its necessity. Required by all men, Jew or Gentile, who wish to enter in.
  4. Its end. Salvation & eternal life.
- vi. It is significant that the Gentiles had the same experience as the Jews did at Pentecost, baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then follows water baptism, one did not replace the need of the other.
- f. No argument against God’s action, but the matter of Judaizing the Gentiles would still remain a hot item. The church in Jerusalem accepted these Gentile believers at first, but it would still be a long time until all the objections of those of “*the circumcision*” were answered.
- g. Jerusalem loses its importance over time.
- h. The gains now in Jerusalem open the door in Antioch
2. The Gospel goes to Antioch; In Antioch, we have the first example of Christians deliberately targeting Gentiles for evangelism, and this effort had great results
  - a. Antioch
    - i. Antioch was founded about 300 b.c. by Seleucus I, one of the inheritors of Alexander the Great’s empire. He liked to make a city and name them after his father, Antioch, and he did this about fifteen times. This city of Antioch was called “*Syrian Antioch*” or “*Antioch on the Orontes*.” In the first century it was a city of more than half a million people, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the known world.
    - ii. “*The city’s reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on.*” (Bruce)
    - iii. According to Hughes, when the ancient Roman senator Juvenal wanted to describe the decadence of Rome, he said that “*The Orontes has flowed into the Tiber,*” flooding Rome with wickedness.
    - iv. One might say that Jerusalem was all about “*religion,*” Rome was all about “*power,*” Alexandria was all about “*intellect,*” Athens was all about “*philosophy,*” and Antioch was all about “*business and immorality.*” When the Gospel came to Cornelius and he became a follower of Jesus, it came to a man who was already a “*God-fearer.*” He had a respect for the God of Israel and lived a moral life, but when it came to Antioch it came to an utterly pagan city.

- b. Church in Antioch was begun by Jewish Christians from Cyprus (Barnabas' home) & Cyrene. Two men stand out later in the Book of Acts, Mnason of Cyprus (Acts 21:16) and Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13:1), perhaps they were among the founders, but they certainly were influential later.
  - c. They preached the Lord Jesus; Lordship.
  - d. They were simple ministers with a strange doctrine (resurrection) who had the power of the Divine behind them. In the end, many souls saved and a Church was established that would subsequently be the point of origin for heathen missions.
3. Barnabas is sent to Antioch
- a. Barnabas was chosen because he had proved himself an eminent disciple, was fitted for the work of encouragement, and probably was known by the other Cyprian disciples in Antioch. Barnabas was evidently not a strong Judaizer; otherwise would have stifled the movement in Antioch.
  - b. When he came, he saw the grace of God and he was glad. There was something in the work and atmosphere among the followers of Jesus in Antioch that made Barnabas able to “see” the grace of God.
    - i. In whatever gathering of Christians we associate ourselves with, it is important that others be able to see the grace of God among us. They should not see an emphasis on self, on man-made rules, on human performance – but on the glorious grace of God. It will make them glad.
  - c. Barnabas encouraged them that with full purpose of heart that should continue with the Lord; cleave unto the Lord.
    - i. Cleave to Lord's work as the only, all-sufficient ground of acceptance & salvation; external (that which He accomplished Himself) and internal (that which is wrought in the heart of man by the HS). The Atoning and Quickening
    - ii. Cleave to the Lord's person as the exclusive source of spiritual life and the supreme object of affection. Conduct, not creed, is the ultimate test of piety; adherence to Christ's person and to His truth is the surest path of discipleship.
    - iii. Cleave to the Lord's book as the best directory for faith & practice. The Bible is pre-eminent overall the writings of men as the loftiest compendium of truth and the safest guide for duty. Inerrancy.
    - iv. Cleave to the Lord's people as the best companions for the heavenward journey. They have holiness which carries a contagion of goodness. They know where they are going.
    - v. Cleave to the Lord's heaven as the future and final home.
  - d. Barnabas rightly focused on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He strengthened the church family itself, with the result that a great many people were added to the Lord. This is the plan for church growth spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-16 where leaders are to dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it “*causes growth of the body.*”
4. Barnabas signs up Paul
- a. Barnabas perceived a tide of revival and needed strong leaders. Strong leaders are hard to find.

- b. Paul had been in Tarsus from 38-46 AD until Barnabas came looking for him.
- c. Barnabas and Paul have about a year of revival and building momentum.
- d. First called Christians.
  - i. In Latin, the ending “*ian*” meant “*the party of,*” therefore a “*Christ-ian*” would have be “*of the party of Jesus;*” like saying “*Jesus-ites,*” or “*Jesus People.*” Soldiers under particular generals in the Roman army identified themselves by their general’s name by adding *ian* to the end. A soldier under Caesar would call himself a *Caesarian*. In Antioch, they probably first used the term Christians to mock the followers of Jesus. “*Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names; it was known by its witty epigrams.*” (Gaebelein) But as the people of Antioch called the followers of Jesus the “*Jesus People,*” the believers appreciated the title so much that it stuck.
  - ii. Can also have the idea that they were called Christians before they were called anything else. They *first identity* was now to be called Christians. Today, Christians must be willing to take at least the idea of the title “*Jesus People,*” and must also be worthy of the name. Instead of claiming any other title – Roman Catholic, Protestant, charismatic, whatever - we should be first called Christians.

## 5. Prophets and Famine

- a. Prophets come up from Jerusalem and ministered among them. One, Agabus, forewarns that a great famine upon the Roman world; days of Claudius Caesar.
  - i. Prophecy was not intended for regular, daily guidance, but more for inspiration and forth telling especially when crucial decision had to be made.
  - ii. Prophets are to be submitted to local church leaders; the shepherds.
    - 1. 1 Cor. 14:32-33, “*And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*”
    - 2. 1 Cor. 14:39-40, “*Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.*”
- b. The people respond. Then the disciples: You can tell these were truly disciples and *Christians*, because they gave generously to meet the need. They gave, each according to his ability. This means that they gave according to the ability of their resources; those who had more gave more, probably referencing a proportional giving. It also means that they gave according to the ability of their faith, trusting that their gift to God’s work was a worthy investment in His kingdom, and not a loss. We also see they determined to give. If a person does not *determine* to give, they often never do.
- c. The Collection was
  - i. praiseworthy (assisting the saints) (Lk. 12:33),
  - ii. voluntary,
  - iii. universal (everyone helped),
  - iv. generous (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7), and
  - v. prompt (2 Cor. 8:10-11)

- d. The disciples in Antioch took a special collection for Jerusalem and dispatched it with Barnabas & Paul. Probably the occasion for Gal. 2:1 where he was recognized as an apostle to the gentiles. Also persecution breaks out during their visit to Jerusalem.
- e. *“As far as I know, this is the first charitable act of this nature in all recorded history – one race of people collecting money to help another people. No wonder they were first called Christians at Antioch.”* (Boice)