

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

"We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God"

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 11:19-30

Topic

Barnabas encourages the Christians in Antioch
in whom he can see the grace of God

Title

I See Graced People

or

It Came from Inner Grace

Acts 11:19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

Acts 11:20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Acts 11:21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Acts 11:22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

Acts 11:23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Acts 11:24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

Acts 11:25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Acts 11:27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Acts 11:28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Acts 11:29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Acts 11:30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Introduction

What does **the grace of God** look like? Apparently it was visible in Antioch:

1. In verse twenty-three you're told that Barnabas **had seen the grace of God** in these believers.
2. Verse twenty-six indicates that nonbelievers could see it because they coined a new name for believers - calling them **Christians**, which means *like Christ*.

Their countenance and character and conduct was so radically different than it had been and from the surrounding culture that it was obvious **the grace of God** was at work *in* them and *through* them.

Reveling in God's unmerited favor in saving them, they spoke and served and shared with each other and others in ways that were seasoned with grace.

I want that! So do you. We want to appear so Christ-like that we make grace visible. *Jesus changed to bring change* -

An analysis of the activities of Barnabas in Antioch can help us. He came upon people who had been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But he didn't stop there. Barnabas knew grace needed to be encouraged if it was to continue to *show and grow*. So Barnabas encouraged these Christians to *abide* and to *abound* in the grace of God.

We can and should do the same. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You See the Grace of God Encourage the Christ-like to Abide, and #2 When You See the Grace of God Encourage the Christ-like to Abound.

#1 When You See the Grace of God
Encourage the Christ-like to Abide
(v19-24)

For the first few years after the resurrection of Jesus the believers were all Jews. Social prejudices between Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) kept the good news from spreading. All of that changed when Stephen, the first martyr of the Church Age, was stoned. Luke takes us back to that event.

Acts 11:19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

Acts 11:20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

The farther a Jew lived from Jerusalem the more likely he was to have dealings with Gentiles. While many of the **scattered** Jewish believers spoke only to other Jews, those who were originally **from Cyprus and Cyrene** were comfortable telling Gentiles about Jesus.

Luke focuses our attention on the city of **Antioch**. It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria and boasted a population estimated anywhere from two- to five-hundred thousand.

Arriving in Antioch these Cyprian and Cyrenian believers **spoke to the Hellenists**. These were Greeks who had nothing to do with Judaism in contrast to the **Jews** of verse nineteen.

Don't be intimidated by the word **preaching**. It doesn't mean they stood behind a pulpit and delivered Bible studies. Their changed lives preached to the people they encountered. Jesus was so real to them they couldn't help but reveal Him and talk about Him.

Acts 11:21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Literally it reads, *in believing they turned to the Lord*. God receives whoever will believe in Him. Whoever you are, wherever you're from,

whatever you've done... God has redeemed you on the Cross of Jesus Christ and saves you if you will believe.

Acts 11:22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

We met Barnabas before in Acts and were told his nickname was *son of encouragement*. When there was a financial need in Jerusalem he sold property he owned and gave the money to be distributed among the needy.

Why send Barnabas? We can't know for sure how they arrived at their decision. It was probably a combination of many factors:

1. Barnabas was originally from Cyprus so he would relate well to the fellows in Antioch sharing Christ with Gentiles.
2. He was faithfully serving the Church at Jerusalem.
3. He was obviously available and willing to go!

A lot of factors go into when, where, and how you are called to serve God in His Church. Your part is to stay busy serving, be faithful in your service, and make yourself available. **Don't do these things only to get sent to something greater!** Do them as if they were a great work in and of themselves. Do them as unto the Lord.

Acts 11:23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Acts 11:24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

It was obvious to Barnabas these Gentiles were genuinely saved. They had turned to God from the wicked, pagan idolatry of their Greek culture.

Grace is God's unmerited favor upon a person who believes in Jesus. It effects radical, wonderful changes that make a visible difference in life and living.

Barnabas was **glad**. Everyone should be **glad** when a person gets saved. They're never giving-up stuff; **they are getting something!**

Barnabas teaches us an important lesson. You must encourage those whom God has saved by grace. You don't leave them alone and hope for the best. The first thing you encourage them to do is to **abide**. The word translated **continue** means *to abide*. *Persevere* would be another excellent translation. So would *cleave*. He encouraged them to *abide* by the truths of God's Word, to *cleave* to Jesus and fellowship with His Church, and to *persevere* to the end.

There's a picture to help you understand abiding. The word translated **purpose**, in **purpose of heart**, is the same word that describes the **shewbread** in the Jewish Temple. Twelve specially prepared loaves were arranged in two rows on a table that stood in the Holy Place before God's presence and remained for a week. Each Sabbath fresh loaves replaced the old. Then the priests were required to eat them in the Holy Place.

What would this mean to the Gentile converts in Antioch?

1. First it would mean that they were like that shewbread. They were to see themselves as specially prepared, separated from the world, and perpetually in the presence of God.
2. Second, it would mean that, like the priests in the Temple, they were sustained by feeding on the bread of God.

It's simple, really. While in the world we keep ourselves separated by remembering we are perpetually in the presence of God. We're like those loaves just hanging out with God in the Holy Place – only (for us) the Holy Place is anywhere we are!

When among people we are to think of ourselves as priests having eaten the loaves in our private devotions. We are thus spiritually nourished to share with others who have not yet entered in to the Holy Place of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

Barnabas saw that the believing Gentiles in Antioch were off to a great start. He encouraged them to abide. Then he turned his attention to insuring that they would abound.

#2 When You See the Grace of God
Encourage the Christ-like to Abound
(v25-30)

The believers needed regular, systematic encouragement from God's Word. They needed to be taught. They needed a teacher.

Barnabas is not presented to us as a gifted teacher. He may have been able enough to teach; but he loved the Lord and the Lord's people too much to settle for less than they deserved.

Acts 11:25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

It had been anywhere from seven to ten years since Saul left Jerusalem for Tarsus. He seemed to have been forgotten. But not by God, and not by Barnabas. Saul's time had come.

God is in no hurry to promote you. Let Him use you as He sees fit and promote you in His time. **Don't promote yourself!**

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him...

I should mention that the word for **found** indicates an intense search. It's the same word used to describe Joseph and Mary when they found Jesus back in the Temple after He had stayed behind.

After a flashy beginning it had been close to a decade before Jesus began to fulfill the promises He made to Saul on the road to Damascus. **Wait for it!**

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Saul was a linear, logical, systematic Bible teacher. He would later say of himself that he taught the whole counsel of God.

Listen: You must never stray from linear, logical, systematic Bible study. It may not always be exciting, though it need not be dull. But you *can not* and *will not* abound in grace without it.

Believers were telling nonbelievers about Jesus. They were getting saved by grace through faith. Barnabas encouraged them to abide while Saul taught them how to abound.

We all have our giftings. Know what yours is; **and know what yours isn't!**

The name **Christians** is variously translated as *Christ's followers* or *Christ-like*. Jews would not have given them this name because Christ is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*.

It's been suggested that this was somehow a derogatory name, given by pagans to ridicule; but I don't think so.

These believers in Antioch were so full of grace, so overflowing with grace, that **they were like Jesus Christ Himself**. People looked at them and saw Jesus!!

Saul's teaching was revealing Jesus to them. They were seeing the Lord and being empowered to act and react as He would. They were abiding in grace and (now) abounding in grace.

Luke gave an example of their abounding grace:

Acts 11:27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Acts 11:28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Acts 11:29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Acts 11:30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

It was a time before the New Testament was written. **Prophets**, along with the apostles, laid the foundation for the Church. Afterwards pastor-teachers and evangelists continue the work founded in the first century.

Prophets traveled from place-to-place. They spoke forth the Word of God. They also apparently could speak predictively about future events. **Agabus** was going around prophesying a great famine.

The prophesy is the background for Luke to describe what abounding grace looks like. With no prompting other than by the Holy Spirit, the Christians at Antioch **determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.**

Grace is active. It must do something. It can't hear about a need and not act to meet the need.

Grace is sacrificial in nature. It costs me something. But it doesn't need to be coerced or manipulated. When I am abounding in grace I give sacrificially **according to my ability.**

You read that they sent the relief **to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.** Originally in the Church benevolence funds had been given to the apostles to distribute. They eventually chose deacons to take over the work. Now there is a mention of elders. It tells us that the Churches were maturing in their understanding of organization and administration.

As far as teaching us more about what abounding grace looks like, we see that it follows thru. It isn't just touched emotionally momentarily. It accomplishes ministry. It is faithful.

We might look at this in reverse to get a better handle on it. You get saved and start assembling with other believers. The foundation of your assembling together ought always to be regular and systematic Bible study that reveals the grace of God in the Person and work of Jesus Christ on your behalf.

Then each of us in the assembly should encourage everyone to continue, to persevere, to abide.

We'll know if we are abiding if we are also abounding in the fruitful work of the Lord. We will give sacrificially of our time, talent, and treasure. Nonbelievers will then have no choice but to look at us and say, "You are like Jesus!"

Applying the Word...

1. Maybe you are a nonbeliever. God saves you by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Whoever will believe on Him can have their sins forgiven and be born-again.
2. For the rest of us who are believers... Grace ought to be the theme of our character and countenance and conduct.

