

## **Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3**

### **A Ministry of Grace and Truth**

**Introduction:** Acts is the history of the earliest Christians. We've been studying this story over the last several months, focusing in on the fact that this was indeed a Jesus movement..... a community that was centered on the person and ministry of Jesus. They couldn't get enough of Jesus.

In our last study we saw how the Gospel had finally come to the Gentiles. God used Peter to preach Jesus to Gentiles and they believed and received salvation, evidenced by the giving of the Holy Spirit, without first becoming Jews. This was clear evidence to all the Jewish Christians that God had chosen to offer salvation to all, both Jew and Gentile, without distinction.

In our study this morning Luke seems to indicate that while all that was happening, or shortly there after, those who had gone out because of the persecution that began with Stephen's death, went north to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch in Syria. In Antioch many of the Jewish Christians preached Jesus, just as Christians had done from the beginning. Everywhere they went they talked about who Jesus was and what he had done, and about the forgiveness of sins, salvation and rescue being found in him. But they only did this with fellow Jews. But there were some (Those from Cyprus and Cyrene) who began to share Jesus with the Greeks, they proclaimed that Jesus is Lord, and many of the Greeks turned to the Lord....

The Church in Jerusalem hears about this mixed congregation in Antioch and they send Barnabas down to check it out... maybe they thought the church would need some affirmation or some convincing of the stricter Christian Jews that this was truly a work of God. But instead what Barnabas witnessed was "the grace of God" in their midst.

The Church in Antioch will become a strategic Church in Christ mission to the world. Antioch is the church community that paved the way for Paul the Apostle to be sent on his missionary journeys. This would have been considered Paul's home church or sending church if we were to talk about him in our modern missionary terms.

I mentioned already that this church was unique because it was the first racially mixed congregation, not only that, consider the leadership (teachers and prophets) of the church listed in vs.1-3 of chapter 13

- Barnabas - who was a Cypriot Jew - a bi-cultural Jew
- Simeon who was called Niger - Niger means black in greek, he is a north African black man
- Lucius of Cyrene - Cyrene is modern day Libya this man would have been Arabic in ethnicity
- Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch - was an aristocrat, of the upper crust of society.
- Saul - who is Jewish, but he is a scholar, an academic, a Professor type. That's some diversity of leadership.
- In Antioch we have the first multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-class church in Christian history. It says, "In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Literally, Christ-people, or followers of Christ). This naming was by outsiders - partially because their religion was not based on a nationality, culture, or ethnicity, they couldn't place it in those categories and then secondly because they were a community simply following Jesus.
- The first truly mixed congregation in Christianity. There is clearly seen unity. - oneness of mind and heart, unity in identity, and calling - mission evidenced by the grace that Barnabas saw.
- A church who were recognized by outsiders as followers of Jesus (vs. 26)
- A church who worshiped, fasted and prayed (13:2-3)
- The first truly missionary church - through prayer (13:2-3)
- A church that disciplined, instructed, and brought up it's members (vs. 26;13:1-2)
- A church who took care of the poor and the needs of others (vs.27-30).

This is clearly a unified church and yet there unity is not exclusive.. they show great concern and generosity toward other Christians and churches - sending charitable aid, which brings even greater unity to the Church as a whole.

This congregation is a truly remarkable community and they should stand out not only in the book of Acts but to the Church throughout history of a model of what the Church is to be.

But this morning I want to focus on a subtlety in the text that we might have missed.

As we read, Jews had begun to evangelize greek pagans... Barnabas came down from Jerusalem to check out what was happening, and it says, **“When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.”** Immediately after this happens it says, **“And a great many people were added to the Lord.”** Not only that but the discipleship, prayer, worship, fasting, service to others, giving aid to the churches, being known by the surrounding community as Christ followers, and missionaries being sent out.

After Barnabas gives this exhortation the ministry of this church explodes in fruitfulness. Why? What was it?

### **1. Parakaletic Ministry**

1. The word exhort or encourage (depending on your translation) is a hard word to translate from greek to english. There are multiple definitions if you look the word up because not one word in our english language does it justice. In Greek it is the word Para-kaleo.
2. Kaleo means to call, to point people to a goal, or a truth; to call out.
3. Para (which we use in English) means to come alongside, to be sympathetic, to be next to you, to be near you, almost the idea of holding someone’s hand through a hard time..
4. In the word Para-kaleo you can sense the tension. It is a strong and a tender word. To call someone out is a forceful thing, to correct, to point out the truth. (what do we say? the truth... hurts.) Yet Para means to be gentle, to be someone who has been in there shoes, someone who can empathize and sympathize, someone who holds your hand and walks beside you on your level.
5. Parakaleo is a sympathetic, loving, insistence on the truth. It is a mixture of truth and love. But we don’t normally think of it that way when we read the word encourage or exhort. But it was through this sympathetic, loving insistence on the truth, ministry, that caused the Church to explode in fruitfulness.
6. **Why?** - Because each of us desperately need both truth and love in order to grow in Christlikeness and fruitfulness in our callings and giftings.

7. We need truth - if no one ever challenges you, objects to your behavior or thinking, never calls you out, you'll never grow, you'll never change.
8. We need people in our lives who are willing to tell us what we don't like to hear or want to hear, but need to hear for our health and growth.
9. The problem is without love and grace, the truth will ruin us. It will make us proud and hard if we are doing well, and leave us helpless and hopeless if we can't measure up. But ultimately one without the other will leave us unchanged. We know how love without truth can simply be enabling. We need truth and Love. We need someone who knows what's it like to struggle and yet isn't afraid to tell us the hard truths.
1. Paul the Apostle in Ephesians says that this is a key ingredient to our mutual maturity and growth **“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**
  1. The problem is that each of fall either to one side or the other. We are either hardline people who are all about the truth and don't care if people are hurt or steam rolled; or we are people who are so afraid of what other people will think we never tell them the truth or object to their behavior.

## 2. The Paraclete - how we get it and maintain it.

1. This is the point where we have to remember that this is exactly what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. John the Apostle says, **“the Law came through Moses”** - pictured as God's righteous requirement that no one can ever live up to, But he goes on to say, **“Grace and truth came though Jesus Christ”**. **Jesus is the perfect embodiment of both Grace and truth.** What does that mean? Well Jesus affirms the truth of God's law and commands, of God's holiness, our failure to live up to it, and our guilt and condemnation before God. But Jesus is also the one that takes our place under the punishment of God- for the sins and failures that we are guilty of. He is broken so we can be healed. He is cursed so we

can be forgiven. He is cast out so we can be accepted. He takes our sin, so we can have his righteousness.

1. The Gospel never says, love people, do good and God will accept you, (you can never do it) The Gospel says, God already loves and accepts because Jesus measured up for you, he took your place, and stood in your shoes; now you should do for others what God has done for you.

### **3. The Other Paraclete**

1. Do you know that each of us are called to this ministry of truth and love. This is not a gift that some Christians have and some don't.. Rather, this is like salt that seasons each of the gifts that Christians have; every ministry we perform should be seasoned with truth and love. The problem is that each of us lean to one side or the other, we rarely balance both. But the great news is that God has given us his Holy Spirit who is called the Paraclete - our advocate or strong helper, and His main ministry is to convict our hearts of Jesus, to make real to us and alive to us what Jesus has done. - Jesus is the OG Paraclete - our advocate and strong helper, before the Father - the one who is full of grace and truth.. the one who has abundantly showered us in grace and has by no means swept our sin and disfunctionality under the rug.... But has justified us by his blood. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts to remind us of what Jesus has done, about how greatly loved we are, the depths that Jesus had to go to shower his love and grace on us.. to walk in our shoes.. and then says to us - Look what he has done for you - now you go and do likewise.

**Conclusion:** Ray Ortlund says, the Church is where people should find lots of gospel, lots of safety, and lots of time. That sounds a lot like parakaletic ministry. People need:

1. Multiple exposures to the happy news of the gospel from one end of the Bible to the other. (This is why we always bring it back to what Jesus has done for us and what he offers us through his life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again.) That there is forgiveness, hope, healing, peace, security, joy, and steadfast love in Jesus for any and all who will simply trust him.

2. The safety of non-accusing sympathy so that they can admit their problems honestly; and (this is where the humility and the security that the gospel gives us become essential)
3. Enough time to rethink their lives at a deep level, because people are complex and changing is not easy, but it is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit..
  1. This balance of Grace and Truth creates an atmosphere where no one person is under pressure or singled out for embarrassment. Everyone is free to open up, and we all grow together as we look to Jesus.
  2. When the gospel of Christ' grace defines both the doctrine and the culture of the church, it's members can safely confess and forsake sin. Even "extreme" sinners find themselves wonderfully forgiven and freed. - the goal is not to make the church safe for sin; it's to make it safe for confession and repentance.
  3. What if we made this our aim - That what Jesus has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection informed the way we do everything. The way we saw one another, the way we treated and spoke to one another, the way we shared our resources, time and money, the way that we prayed and encouraged one another, the way that we helped, corrected, and challenged one another, the way we thought about sinners and saints, religious and irreligious, other churches and other cities? I believe we would see a huge increase in fruitfulness in our lives and in the life of this community. But it is only to the degree that we know God's grace and truth in our own lives that we will be able to show this to others. God helps us.