



Sermon Series Notes

“The First Christians” (Acts 11:19-30)

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Topic: Christian Character

vv.19-21 Antioch was founded about 300 BC by Seleucus I, one of the inheritors of Alexander the Great’s empire. He had a thing about founding cities and naming them after his father, Antioch, and he did this about fifteen times. This city of Antioch was called “Syrian Antioch.” Back then it was a city of more than half a million; today it is a Turkish city with a population of about 3,500.

Antioch was on the Orontes River, about 300 miles north of Jerusalem and twenty miles east of the Mediterranean. During the first century it was the third largest city in the world, behind Rome and Alexandria. It was the melting pot for at least five cultures – Greek, Roman, Semitic, Arab, and Persian. Main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. It was the only city in its day that had lighted streets at night. Antioch was famous for its chariot racing and its pursuit of pleasure – Las Vegas on the Orontes! It has also been called The “Paris of the ancient world.”

Greek, Roman, and Syrian deities were honored, but Antioch was most famous for its worship of Daphne, whose temple stood just five miles outside town in a laurel grove. Apollo was the god that seduced Daphne, and his example was followed daily as men would and engage themselves with the “priestesses” of the temple of Daphne, the temple prostitutes.

It was in this setting that the church of Antioch was born! The darker the night, the brighter the light. If a light is already shining in a city, new light may be unnoticed. But you bring light into a place that has no light, and it will be impossible not to notice!

vv.22-26a Back in chapter nine, as a result of Saul’s bold proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah, the Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him. So the church took sent him back home to

Tarsus. Saul has been there for years, and we have no record of his life or ministry during this time.

v.26b They are first called “Christians” in Antioch, Syria. The term “Christian” is found only three times in the Scriptures (Acts 11, 26:28, and I Peter 4:16 If you suffer as A Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name).

Definition of Christian? Some say it means “little Christs.” But the Latin suffix “ian” means “belonging to the party of.” It's sort of like saying “Jesus-ites,” those who belong to the party of Jesus Christ.

Most scholars believe the term was not developed by the believers, but rather by the unbelievers living in Antioch. Why would they call them "Christians?" Most likely it was a derogatory term. But it tells us how different this group was from any other group in Antioch.

Today the term “Christian” has become one of the vaguest descriptions in the English language. Some people think that anyone who is not a Jew or a Muslim is a Christian. And of course now we have Jehovah’s Witness Christians, Mormon Christians, Christian Science Christians, Scientology Christians, Unity Christians, etc. etc. And this is not to mention Baptist (southern, independent, free-will, Ana Baptist, others?) Methodist (United, Free), African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian (U.S.A., Orthodox, Bible, Cumberland, Evangelical, Evangelical Covenant Order, Reformed Presbyterian of North America, Associate Reformed Presbyterian, & several others), Pentecostal (Assemblies of God, New Apostolic, Foursquare, Church of God in Christ), Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal, Seventh Day Advent, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Charismatic, Mennonites, Amish, Vineyard, Calvary Chapel etc. Because of the variety of groups calling themselves Christians, someone years ago added the term "born again Christian."

New names have been given to Christians over the years. A Christian named George Fox stood before a Justice Bennet in the year 1640 and “bid him to tremble at the word of the Lord.” In response the justice called Fox and his followers “Quakers.” Another group of Christians were known for their systematic, methodical pursuit of holiness, and they were dubbed “Methodists.” And of course during the Jesus Movement just a few years ago, they were called “Jesus People.”

I got into a conversation with a gentleman a few years ago by the swimming pool at a Holiday Inn, & when he learned I was a Christian he asked me what kind of Christian I was. It was quite a challenge trying to explain a "Calvary Chapel Christian" to him, because he

knew nothing about Calvary Chapel. So I just focused on the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do we need a new name? At the very least we need a fresh testimony of what real Christianity is all about. When I became a Christian, it was obvious to everyone that Danny Hodges was a different young man. My speech changed, my lifestyle changed. Now, going bowling on Friday night with the church youth group was my way to party! My closest friends became the people I had met at church and now began to hang out with. Going out to the "Sonic" and having a milkshake after Wednesday night service became a regular "addiction." And I began to tell people about Jesus. I wanted everyone to have the same thing I had. I wanted everyone to become a Christian! I still do.

Biblical Christians make a name for themselves by their lifestyle, their love (By this shall all men know that you are my disciples), their new association with "the church," & by their being different from the world.

Not only should we "make a name for ourselves" personally, but we should also make a name for ourselves corporately, as a church (CCSP).

Some biblical examples of churches that made a name for themselves as a result of their commitment to Christ.

Eph.1: 15-16 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I Thessalonians 1: 6-9 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became **a model** to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...

II Cor. 8:1-4 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

What was it about these believers in Antioch that caused them to gain a reputation of being "Christians?"

THEY WERE WELL FED BELIEVERS (v.26)

Read Romans 12:2

I Peter 2:2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Mark 10:1 Jesus then left that place and went into the regions of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

It grieves me to hear from so many the lack of teaching the Bible in churches across America. I believe one of the greatest needs in the church today is the teaching of the Word of God, and teaching all the Word of God.

Years ago Bill Hybels & Willow Creek Church introduced the "Seeker Sensitive Movement" in America. Preaching was out, relevance was in. Churches began being built by demographic studies, using professional strategists, marketing research, & seeking to meet the "felt needs" of people. Innovation took precedence over doctrine. If it wasn't "cutting edge" and consumer friendly it was out. The mention of sin, salvation, and sanctification were replaced by Starbucks, strategy, and sensitivity. Satellite seminars were packed with church leaders hungry to learn the latest way to "do church." But just a few years ago Bill Hybels and Willow Creek did a multi-year study of the effectiveness of their programs and philosophy of ministry. The report reveals that most of what they had been doing for many years & what they have taught millions of others to do did not producing solid disciples of Jesus Christ. Numbers, yes, but not disciples.

"Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for...We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become "self-feeders." We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between services, how to do spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own." (Bill Hybels, "Reveal: Where Are You?").

A well fed church should naturally grow, if the people are doing what they are hearing.

Pastor Chuck Smith used to say: "Healthy sheep naturally reproduce."

THEY WERE BELIEVERS WHO DID MORE THAN MERELY LISTEN TO THE WORD.

See James 1:22-25; Ezekiel 33:31-32 (They liked him, but they didn't do what he said).

The fact that these believers were doing what they heard is the reason they gained the reputation as "Christians." Not only were they looking for opportunities to share their faith, but because they were doing what they were hearing, they were being transformed into different people. They were giving up their worship of idols, immoral lifestyles, being set free from addictions, becoming better workers, neighbors, family members. Husbands were becoming more loving, wives more submissive, children more obedient. And they were loving one another (By this shall all men know that you are my disciples).

THEY WERE A GIVING CHURCH

II Cor.8: 7 But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us --see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Acts 20:35...It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Winston Churchill said we make a living by what we get, and we make a life by what we give.

Do your giving while you're living, then you're knowin' where it's goin'.

Matt.6:19-21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

THEY HAD A MISSIONARY MINDSET

Jesus is the greatest missionary, having left the glories of heaven to come to this cursed world. And why did he come? Yes, to die for the sins of the world, but also:

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

The Syro-Phoenician woman, the demoniac in the Decapolis, and one of my favorite, the woman at the well. John 4 says he “had to go through Samaria.” Why, because a woman was there who had been looking for love in all the wrong places, and everlasting love was looking to seek her out and satisfy & save her soul.

In going to offer the water of life to the woman at the well, Jesus sets an example for us of what it is like to live out a missionary mindset.

- Willing to cross barriers to reach people for Christ.

a. Traditional

- Pastor Chuck Smith crossed some pretty big traditional barriers during the Jesus Movement & the explosive growth of Calvary Chapel. I have crossed some traditional barriers as a pastor (casual dress, music style, freedom for past legalistic views on some things).

b. Racial

- The bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans was long-standing. In 721 B.C., the Assyrians swept through Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and took some of the Jews off to Assyria. They also sent Assyrians to replace them in the land of Israel. The result – Samaritans, Jews who had intermingled and intermarried with Assyrians and Cuthites. In 587 B.C, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was taken into Babylon. But in Babylon there was no intermarriage. So years later, when the Jews returned to the land, they were of “unadulterated blood.” As a result, they refused to accept their northern kinsmen. So the Samaritans built their own temple and developed their own system of worship, but it was not based on truth.

- Jewish rabbis said, “Let no man eat the bread of the Cuthites (Samaritans), for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine’s flesh.”

- A popular prayer in those days said, “Lord, do not remember the Samaritans in the resurrection.”

- When his enemies wanted to insult Jesus, they called Him (among other things), a Samaritan.

- John 8: 47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

48 The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

- “Good Jews” would go out of their way to avoid Samaria. There were three possible routes north and south in that day. One was along the coast. The second was the most traditional route, and this was east of the Jordan, through Perea. The third was the least traveled by Jews, and that was through Samaria (the shortest of the three choices).

c. Social

- We have a very diverse social makeup here at CCSP. May the Lord make it even more diverse.

d. Geographical

- Our cross cultural missions ministry began because we were willing to get on an airplane and go to other countries as God opened the doors for us.

- Samaritan's Purse teams, especially most recent in Tarpon Springs.

The church at Antioch became the greatest missionary church of it's day! (See Acts 13:1-3). And it was because the believers there had a missionary mindset that motivated them to cross traditional, racial, social, and geographic boundaries in order to reach people for Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Have a regular diet of the Word of God, be a doer of the Word and not just a hearer, excel in the grace of giving, & maintain & live out a missionary mindset, and you will reflect what a real Christian should be. Let's leave with a fresh desire to make a name for ourselves to the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.