

Acts 11:19-30

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[0 : 00] Just take your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you today, and turn to the book of Acts chapter 11. While you're getting there, let me say that I am thankful for the imperfections of this world in so far as they point us to the perfection of the world to come.

One day the earth will be lit by the radiance of Christ, and I'm confident that Wes' guitar will be fueled by Jesus' glory. Amen. This morning we are returning to our verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Acts, but before we do, I'd like to do two things.

Number one, I'd like to clarify what is meant by exposition. Simply put, to exposit a text in a sermon is to make the main point or points of the sermon to be the main point or points of the text.

It's simply to explain what a text means. Verse-by-verse exposition is a systematic working through a book or chapter or passage.

This is our general habit. That's where we find ourselves in Acts chapter 11, having taken a break from our verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Acts. Topical exposition begins with a particular topic in mind and then works out from a particular text concerning that topic what the Bible has to say about that particular topic.

[1 : 32] Please do not be narrow in your understanding of expositional preaching. There is a time and a place for both verse-by-verse exposition and for topical exposition.

But either way, true preaching is Bible preaching and therefore true preaching is expositional preaching. Secondly, because it has been a number of weeks since we have been studying Acts together, and because some of you weren't with us when we began our study, I think it wise to give a brief summary of what we have learned so far in the second account written by Luke.

Luke's first account is the account of the life and ministry of Jesus on earth. You know it as the Gospel of Luke. Luke's second account is the account of Jesus' ascended ministry.

How it is that He is now building His church is the account that we find before us. Remember that this book is our history.

It's our family history. This is the church in its early days. And we have in the telling of this story a lineage that's found within it, which means it's incredibly precious for us.

[2 : 47] In chapter 1 in the book of Acts, we see that Jesus ascends to the Father, but not before promising to send the disciples the Holy Spirit, the Helper that He had promised to them at the Lord's Supper.

In chapter 2, they receive the promised Spirit, and the church is born through the preaching of Christ, primarily through Peter. And we saw the fellowship of the early church and their devotion to the ways of the Lord.

The church expands in chapter 3, after a famous beggar is healed, and Peter preaches at the temple to the gathered crowd. In chapter 4, Peter and John are arrested for teaching the people about the resurrected Christ, and they speak the Gospel boldly to the Sanhedrin.

Later in chapter 4, Luke records the sale of a field and the donation of the proceeds by a man called Barnabas, which we'll talk more about today.

In chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple, also sell a field, but they are struck dead by the Lord for withholding a portion of the proceeds and for lying about it.

[3 : 55] Then, but later in chapter 5, the apostles are arrested again by the Sanhedrin. They're beaten, and they're charged not to preach Jesus any longer. In chapter 6, the church selects deacons, one of whom is a man named Stephen.

Stephen serves the church meals, and he preaches the Gospel, the latter of which finds him arrested again by this council called the Sanhedrin. In chapter 7, Stephen defends his preaching and indicts the Sanhedrin as being set against God, which infuriates them, and they have Stephen

stoned, the first Christian martyr.

Stephen's stoning is overseen by a man named Saul, who continues to persecute the church in chapter 8, which scatters the believers from Jerusalem.

This is all held within the walls of Jerusalem. Scatters the Gospel forth from Jerusalem. They go about preaching. We can think of it as gossiping the Gospel everywhere they go, and the Gospel begins to expand to other ethnicities through the preaching of Philip.

In chapter 9, Saul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus. He is converted, and he begins to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapter 10, a centurion named Cornelius, an Italian, so this is outside the ethnicity of the Jews, sends for Peter.

[5 : 19] Peter is given a vision that informs him that the Gospel is not just for the Jews. Peter travels to Cornelius, and he, being Cornelius and his household, is converted and receives the Spirit.

And in the beginning of chapter 11, Peter reports what happened with his vision and the conversion of Cornelius' house to the church in Jerusalem. And the church in Jerusalem declares, in verse 18 of chapter 11, then to the Gentiles also, God has granted repentance that leads to life.

And so chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 are these kind of hinging chapters. The story up to this point, beginning in chapter 2, has been primarily about Peter as a minister to the Jews, and we're transitioning across some chapters to what the rest of Acts really is about, which is Paul as a minister to the Gentiles.

We've got these chapters that transition between the two. And so that's where we find ourselves this morning, beginning in verse 19 through verse 30. So Acts 11, verses 19 through 30.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

[6 : 39] But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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.

And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.

And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea, and they did so sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

[7 : 55] Beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it this morning in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Now as we're looking at historical narrative in this way, Luke is a physician, but he's also a historian. He's writing down an account of what happened. This narrative form is not expressly meant to teach us, as you might in one of the epistles.

I much prefer preaching an epistle. One of Paul's letters are expressly, the intent of it is that he's going to correct doctrine, he's going to give application of doctrine.

And narrative is not necessarily that way, but it has massive value as biography does, because we get to peer into the lives of early Christians.

And if you read biography generally, into the lives of Christians, and we get to look at the way they followed Christ, and we get to emulate the way that they followed Christ. And so there are a number of characters in our text this morning, and we would do well to pay attention to the way that they live their lives, and to consider how it is we should conform to their pursuit of Christ.

[9 : 07] And so to do that this morning, I would like for us to note four things about four characters in the text. And the first is the proclamation of the gospel.

You see this in verse 19 through 21. People had begun to travel, right? The persecution of Stephen launched this advancing of the gospel.

You see verse 19 says, Luke reminds us, now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen, Stephen was the catalyst that began this work, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch.

And if you can picture the Mediterranean Sea in your mind, up in the far right corner of the Mediterranean, this is where these things are. Cyprus is an island, Phoenicia is a region, Antioch is a city up in that corner.

A good distance they had traveled already. And verse 19 tells us that, in large part, the disciples were just preaching Jesus to the Jews.

[10:11] But verse 20, some of them, some disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene, which is a region in Africa, what they've gone north for, I'm not really sure, but there they are.

So disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene go to a city called Antioch, and they proclaim the gospel to the Hellenists. Now Antioch is the third largest city in the Roman Empire in this day, second only to Rome itself and Alexandria.

It was a center of culture for the region. There's also a vile place full of pagan worship and sexual immorality. And it becomes, and we're going to see through the book of Acts, an incredibly strategic place of gospel advancement.

It becomes kind of a home base for Paul's missionary journeys as he takes the gospel far and wide amongst Gentile people. So in Antioch, these disciples of Cyprus and Cyrene have begun to expand gospel proclamation, be gone just those who are Jewish, to the Hellenists.

Who is Luke referring to when he talks of the Hellenists? Now back in Acts chapter 6, you may remember this title. Acts 6.1 says, Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

[11:38] So the Hellenists are believers. These are new converts. They're part of the church. And there's a problem because the widows of the Hellenists are not getting food. The footnote, if you have an ESV or maybe another translation, if you have an ESV, look at the footnote from 6.1, and it says of Hellenists, that is Greek-speaking Jews.

So the Hellenists here, as defined by the translators of the ESV, or whomever added the footnotes to it, calls the Hellenists Greek-speaking Jews.

Well, that seems inconsistent then, doesn't it? Because isn't what Luke's saying is that the disciples who went forward for preaching to the Jews, except for some guys that weren't preaching to, the Hellenists, they were preaching to the Hellenists, they weren't preaching to Jews.

Now, if you look back in Acts chapter 11, the footnote says, instead, if you have an ESV, or Greeks, that is, Greek-speaking non-Jews.

So in one place, just a couple pages over, they say that is Greek-speaking Jews, or the Hellenists, and in another place, that is Greek-speaking non-Jews.

[12:58] Isn't that fascinating? And it really made me scratch my head, because I said, well, how in the world did they arrive at that conclusion? How did the translators of the ESV Bible say, in one place, these are Greek-speaking Jews, and in another place, these are Greek-speaking non-Jews?

And to be totally frank, I'm not sure how they arrived at it, but I think this is how they arrived at it. Let me draw your attention here to a transition in language. The phrase that we find in our text today is that they were preaching the Lord Jesus.

And for us, we might read right past that, right? We understand Jesus to be the Christ. We understand Jesus to be the Lord. But there's a difference in the way that Christ is being presented. Luke is very precise here.

They're not preaching Jesus as the Christ. They're preaching Jesus as Lord. Acts 8.5 An example here. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

He went to a people who were not ethnically Jewish, or kind of a mixed crowd, but followed Judaism, and he preached to them the Christ.

[14:09] They understood. The Old Testament spoke of a promised one, a deliverer who would come and take away their sins. So they're preaching Jesus as the Christ to Jews because they had a context of understanding for that.

But these Hellenists, these non-Jew Greeks, would have had no idea if you came to them and said, hey, Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. They would have said, what are you talking about?

The Christ? Who is this? Messiah? We have no frame of reference for what you're talking about. But they would have understood Lord. They would have understood Jesus as Lord, King, Ruler of all things.

And it's important to note this as we're talking about gospel proclamation because this is the first place we see contextualization. Not that the message changes.

They didn't change who Jesus is, but they spoke very specifically about who He is. They spoke the language of the people that they were going to in order to present Christ to them appropriately.

[15:14] Jesus is Lord, and let us show you now how He's the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture, which you've not had prior to us bringing it to you. So it's a precious truth to see here, and it's why I think they can arrive at this idea of Hellenists used two different places.

These are non-Jews that they have now begun to preach the gospel to. Jesus as Lord. And verse 21 says, And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Beloved, we drove this last week. If you were here with us, we talked about gospel commission and the charge that's placed on the shoulders of all believers. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is your work to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

We are meant to be proclaiming the good news to everyone. You talk about what you love. No one's excluded from this. Some are particularly gifted at it, but no one is excluded from the call to preach the gospel and see people converted to Christ.

This is a responsibility laid on all our shoulders. But it is never effective if the hand of the Lord is not with us. It is God who works in our gospel proclamation to bring about conversion in the souls of men.

[16:32] So, the question is asked, right? If these people were meant to believe, these Hellenists in Antioch were meant to believe, would they have believed apart from the gospel proclamation of these particular disciples of Cyprus and Cyrene?

And my answer is yes and no. I do not believe that they would have believed had someone not proclaimed the gospel to them. I do believe that God intended to save these people and would have saved them by the gospel preaching of someone.

Someone would have come and preached the gospel to these people. It was to the disciples of Cyprus and Cyrene's great benefit that they were the ones who did it. They joined in the work of God amongst these peoples in this place called Antioch and they got to see Him convert people, a great number of people, to faith in Christ.

And this is where we find ourselves. God does not need you, but He loves you and He wants you to be involved in His purposes in the world.

There's no greater reward than to be caught up in the things of God in this world. So a great number believe. Because they're preaching and the hand of the Lord is with them, a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

[17:51] A great number who believed turned to the Lord. And we see a picture here of repentance and faith. And this is what Luke is trying to communicate to us. Not just mentally ascending to the idea of Jesus as Lord.

Not simply saying in their mind, that seems true, but they actually have faith that Jesus is Lord and they turn to Christ. They turn away from sin.

They turn away from the vileness, from the sexual immorality of the city in which they live and they turn to Jesus as Lord. These two things are inseparable. The gospel is proclaimed.

People repent. And they believe because the hand of the Lord was with them. So we see these disciples and their gospel proclamation. And we should note that carefully this morning.

Secondly, we see the life of Barnabas. The life of Barnabas. And we get to learn more about Barnabas later on in the book of Acts. I'm thankful for that. But here we can get this picture, this glimpse of the life of Barnabas verses 22, 23, and 24.

[18:58] This is the same Barnabas from chapter 4 that I mentioned to you in that very brief summary. His name is Joseph. You see in chapter 4, Joseph, who they also called Barnabas.

I'm not sure if it was another name. It seemed a lot of people in this day had multiple names or if it was a nickname. It could have been. Because it means son of encouragement. It's very possible that the way in which Barnabas lived amongst those early disciples, they had given him a nickname.

And they called him Barnabas, the son of encouragement. And it should be no surprise to us that when he comes to these believers in Antioch, he's sent to them by the church in Jerusalem, that he exhorts them.

He exhorts them. The word exhort can be a bit foreign to us. It means to encourage. It means to call to one's side as if to say to someone, come and walk the way I'm walking.

Come and be drawn to my side and walk along with me in the way of Christ. And this is what Barnabas does when he comes. He exhorts the church. In verse 24, Luke reports that he was a good man.

[20 : 11] He was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Why was he a good man? Because he was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And if Luke wanted to focus on the divine enabling of Barnabas' life, he could have said the key to him being a good man was that he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Or if Luke wanted to focus on the human side, he could have said the key to him being a good man was that he was full of faith.

Luke rightly says both. He says that for him to be a good man, he must be enabled by the Holy Spirit. And for him to be a good man, he also must have faith.

There's both a human element and a divine enabling in Barnabas' status as a good man. And this speaks to our gospel identity, doesn't it?

[21 : 14] Who we are in Christ and the way in which that motivates the way that we live. Over the past five weeks, we've been talking about that. We've been talking about these four different C's.

Conviction, community, character, and commission. I told you it was going to come back up and you're going to get so sick of hearing it. But I hope it changes the way that you live.

These areas of our life that we throw ourselves into and by the enabling power of God we're made more perfect by them. I want to show you those things. Right here in this text, these four areas of Barnabas' life that we're also meant to be excelling in.

So, quickly, Barnabas' gospel conviction. Verse 23, when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he did what? He exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

Barnabas knew who God was and that the ways of God were more excellent and so with steadfast purpose, he continued to draw them to the ways of God. He also recognized that he needed a greater element of teaching.

[22 : 22] Barnabas knew that he was not an apostle. So, who does he appeal to to come and help teach this early church in Antioch? Verse 25, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.

We're not really sure where he's been. He is Saul of Tarsus. So, Barnabas heads to his hometown, which is not very far from Antioch. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch for a whole year.

They met with the church and they taught a great many people. Barnabas recognized. He held deep convictions and he recognized that other Christians needed to hold deep convictions as well. Barnabas, in the area of gospel community. Verse 22, he was part of a church. The report of this, the conversions in Antioch, came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch, right?

He was part of that fellowship. He had proven himself amongst that fellowship and he was sent to help the church in Antioch because he was part of the church in Jerusalem. Verse 23 says, when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.

[23 : 29] He was relishing in the fact that God had been gracious to another people, right? He came amongst a new church and it brought him joy.

Look at his character. You can pick this up in multiple places, obviously. Luke has called him a good man. Let me give you another example. Verse 30, there's some raising of funds for a future calamity, a famine that's going to happen.

So they raised funds and they sent it and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Barnabas was a trustworthy individual. They could send this great sum of money with him to travel to the elders in Judea. And then Gospel Commission, verse 24, the last part of it, and a great many people were added to the Lord.

So as Barnabas is amongst them, exhorting them, he's also proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can learn much from the life of Barnabas as we observe it just in this text, much less in many other places.

[24 : 39] So we see the proclamation of the gospel by these disciples. We see the life of Barnabas. Thirdly, we see the leadership of Paul. the leadership of Paul.

Mentioned a moment ago, right? Barnabas sees a need, recognizes he's not an apostle, he goes to Tarsus, looks for Saul, brings him back, and for a year, they met with the church and they taught a great many people.

Now, in our text, Luke calls him Saul. You're familiar, I think most of us are probably familiar with this transition of name. This apostle Saul becomes the apostle Paul.

Does anybody remember how that happens? This isn't a God comes and changes his name situation. Saul was Paul's Jewish name.

This is his Jewish name. Acts 13.9. Here's the transition. Saul becomes Paul. Acts 13.9. Simply Luke records, but Saul, who was also called Paul.

[25 : 46] This is just after Saul has been sent with Barnabas to the island of Cyprus. Barnabas' home place. Just after this, you see this change in the way Luke records.

And I'm fairly confident that what's happened is again, Paul has contextualized. He's now changed, rather than been calling Saul by his Jewish name as he's been turned out as a missionary to the Gentiles.

He now goes by Paul, which is his Roman name. It's his Gentile name. So he'd be more accepted amongst them to say to them, I am part of Rome.

He's Jewish, but he's also part of Rome. And we can see in our text that his leadership was lengthy and that it was expansive for a whole year.

And they taught a great many people. And we can also see that his leadership was effective. Then the verse 26 says, And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

[26 : 55] Now, why would I suggest that his leadership was effective? Simply because in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. This is because, prior to Antioch, Christians were called followers of the way.

This is the standard thing that Christians were called. You can call yourself that today if you'd like to. People scratch their heads. They might think you're part of a cult. Followers of the way.

It was in Antioch that they began to call them Christians. And to be Christian is simply meant to be of the party of Christ. To belong to Christ.

And in Antioch, it was meant as a term of derision. This was not a positive thing. This was a persecuting thing. Unbelieving people in Antioch were beginning to make fun of those who claimed to follow Christ by calling them Christians.

They were beginning to suffer for the name of Christ, which means they were following Christ faithfully. So under Saul's leadership, Paul if you prefer, here it is that these early Christians are beginning in greater effort, broadening effort, to be persecuted, to be called Christian.

[28 : 16] Praise God, the term Christian was meant as a term of derision. It became a badge of honor. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4.16, Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

The name of being a Christian. Belonging to Christ. Being of the party of Christ. Christ. Now, no one in this room or anyone today is an apostle.

I'm not suggesting that we look at the life of Paul and lead the way Paul led. No one here is or ever will be or will ever know an apostle.

That is an office that has been closed down. But we are all still meant to lead in some form or some fashion. Some the way I'm leading now and give leadership to a church.

Some in leading a faithful friend to Christ. Some in walking before their co-workers in a way that is an example. We are all meant to lead and we can look to Paul as an example in that.

[29 : 26] So we see the proclamation of the gospel by the disciples, the life of Barnabas, the leadership of Paul, and fourthly, the generosity of the church. So our fourth character is the church in Antioch.

And we see this in verse 27-30. So we see in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Now Antioch is north of Jerusalem, but in these days everything came down from Jerusalem. Both because it was the center of Jewish life, but also because it was on a hill.

So if you come down off a mountain, you're not very concerned about the cardinal direction that you came down. But you would say, I came down off the mountain. So this is what they're talking about. They traveled north, but they came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And a man named Agabus stands up, foretells by the Spirit, gives a prophecy that there's going to be a famine over all the world. And Luke includes for us that this did in fact happen. It took place.

[30 : 27] The famine took place in the days of Claudius. And as a result of this prophecy, the disciples decide together that they're going to take up a collection in order to alleviate the suffering of the brothers living in Judea.

And they send it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. There's much debate over the gift of prophecy today, but wherever you may come down on that matter, which we won't get into today for the sake of time, the gift was in fact active at the time of the church in Antioch.

We can see that to be clear here. Somebody came and they prophesied that an event would happen and it did in fact happen. So wherever you are on that, it did happen here.

And as a result of that, the disciples were generous. The disciples decided that they should take it upon themselves to alleviate the suffering of their family members.

2 Corinthians 9.7 Wes quotes this loosely to us often as he talks about our offering here. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

[31 : 43] And you can see here these disciples determining everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. Beloved, we far too often look for satisfaction in this world by things that we purchase, that we can have.

And I can promise you this, that what you drive, or the house that you live in, or the designer clothes that you wear will never satisfy your soul. We look far too often fiscally to satisfaction that will never ever come.

The other day at dinner, Judah announced to me that he was going to live a really, really long time. And I said, really, Judah? How do you know that? And he said, because every time we go out on Papa's boat, so his grandparents on Sam's side have a pontoon boat, every time we go out on Papa's boat, I do this.

I said, why does that mean you're going to live a long time? And he said, because we need air. And I get lots of it on Papa's boat. I didn't correct him.

I just was cute. We just laughed about it. But he's seeking to fill himself with something that he thinks gives him life, right? And certainly air does do that very thing.

[33 : 09] But there's so much else that brings life to his little body. Am I right? In the same way, we stand gaping looking to satisfy ourselves with so much.

And what you will be ultimately satisfied with when it comes to your resources, when it comes to your money, is generosity. Richness toward God.

And I would suggest that as we look at this early church, we think about what we're holding on to that we really ought to let go of for the sake of the kingdom of God. That we look at how we can store up treasure above and not harbor treasure here.

You're not taking it with you. There's a Charles Spurgeon quote on the front of your bulletin. He said, Giving is true having. As the old gravestone said of the dead man, I really love this, what I spent, I had.

What I saved, I lost. What I gave, I have. So I would encourage you as we consider that, what can you give?

[34 : 11] Even those of you who are young and in college and working part-time jobs, you have more than many people in the world. How would God have you be more generous in the kingdom?

So we see the proclamation of the gospel by the disciples of Cyprus and Cyrene, the life of Barnabas, the leadership of Paul, and the generosity of the church. And if we will stop and be introspective and consider, right, God's word to us and what he means for us to do with this.

There are many, many applications of such a text. Lots of things for you to consider as you hold your life up to the lives of these people.

How does your life measure up? Are you regularly and widely proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you full of the Holy Spirit and of faith?

Are you giving leadership to others? And are you generous? Let's pray together.