

Church 1.0
Acts 11:19-30
“Spread Out, but not Split Up”

1. In the year 1054, tensions between the church in the west, and the church in the east led to a split of the church; an event called “the great schism.” The great schism eventually led to the modern Roman Catholic Church, and the rival Eastern Orthodox Church.

2. Unfortunately, throughout the history of the church, similar schisms have occurred on both large and small scales. Some of these splits have led to the formation of new denominations, while some of the more local splits have led to new congregations.

3. Usually the reasons for a church split can be traced to politics and power struggles, competitions and conflicts, disputes and disagreements that have little to do with doctrinal essentials, and more to do with personal egos.

4. In Acts chapter 11, we read about the formation of a new church in the city of Antioch. It is a critical shift in the history of the church, as well as the book of Acts, as increasingly the mother-church in Jerusalem fades from prominence, and the Gentile churches emerge.

5. As you read through this text, you find that the church in Antioch did not start as a result of an angry faction breaking off from the first church. This new and eventually powerful congregation was not the result of an ugly church split.

6. Verse 19 says, *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch...”*

7. When these scattered believers reached the city of Antioch, which had a population reaching upwards of 500,000 people, they preached the gospel.

8. Verse 21 says, *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”* This church was founded by the sovereign ordering and enabling of God.

9. The remainder of chapter 11 records for us the connection and interaction between the believers in Antioch, and those still living in Jerusalem. As we study their relationship, we realize that while the church was spreading out, it was not splitting up.

10. This chapter in the early church’s history speaks to our church today and reminds us that White Oak Baptist Church is not an island. We are connected to something much larger than our local congregation.

11. This text reminds us of the fact that we are a part of the church universal, and that we are connected to other Christian congregations, whether they are located a mile down the road, or on the other side of the world.

12. As we study this text there are three truths to which I want to point you. First of all, we are reminded here of:

I. THE PROGRESS THAT BUILDS THE CHURCH

1. Scientists say that our universe is not static, but that it is in a constant state of expanding. While our galaxy remains the same size, the space surrounding our galaxy continues to expand; or at least that is what it appears to be doing.

2. The church too is not a static. From the beginning, the church has been in a constant state of expansion. Though the growth may seem to slow or even stop in some periods and places, the church is always progressing.

3. This is illustrated in our text in Acts 11. Persecution in Jerusalem had thinned the original church, sending out many of its members into other regions.

4. As the church shrank in Jerusalem, it began to grow in other places. In Antioch, the church experienced an explosive growth. Verse 21 says, “...a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”

5. This passage reminds us that whether we are seeing it or not, the church *is still* moving forward, progressing, and growing into what Jesus promised when He said, “I will build my church.”

6. When we consider the progress that was building the church in this text, it reminds of a couple of truths regarding the growth and progress of the church even in our day. First of all, we realize that:

A. The work may be different from ours

1. Look with me at our text, and notice verse 22. It says, “*Then tidings of these things (the growth of the new church in Antioch) came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*”

2. Jerusalem was the birthplace of the church. Pentecost had occurred in that city, the apostles were headquartered there, and the early believers all traced their heritage that church.

3. Antioch was nothing like Jerusalem. It was one of the three most significant cities in the Roman Empire, it was completely immersed in Greek culture, and had nothing of the religious history of ancient Jerusalem.
4. As you can imagine, the church that was birthed in Antioch was quite different from the one in Jerusalem. The congregation was essentially all Hellenists, or those who had adopted the Greek language and culture.
5. No apostles had participated in the founding of the church, and much of Jewish influence on the church was missing. It was a very different kind of work.
6. Yet, look at what verse 23 says about Barnabas' reaction to this new and unusual church. It says, "...when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad..."
7. It is easy, if we are not careful, to look at a church or a ministry that operates differently from us with suspicion and skepticism. When someone does something new – something out of the norm – we are tempted to discount what they are doing because they aren't doing the way we are.
8. However, this text reminds us that God doesn't always work the same way in every place. He is the God whose love of variety is painted across the changing terrain of our world.
9. His people are called from every kindred, tribe, and tongue, and contrary to what some of us may think at times, He progresses and builds His church through works that are different from ours. We are not His only tools in the work of building His kingdom.
10. Notice something else we draw from this progress that builds the church. While the work may be different from ours, I would also point out that:

B. The work is not detached from ours

1. Look again at the text, and notice verse 22. It tells that when the word reached the church in Jerusalem regarding the upstart church in Antioch, "... they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch."
2. Now some have suggested that the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas as a sort of spy, looking for problems in Antioch. I don't see it that way.
3. I think the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch because they recognized that the work of God in Antioch was connected to His work in Jerusalem.

4. They did not feel as if what was going on in Antioch was somehow separate from them and their work for Christ.
5. Too often, we act as if what God is doing in the church down the road, or in some distant land is somehow a separate work, or even a competing work.
6. We wrongly feel as if a soul saved in another church is somehow less of an addition to heaven than if they had been saved in our building, and dunked in our baptistery.
7. The truth is, however, what God does at the Second Baptist Church is not somehow separate from what He does at the First Baptist Church. A person who comes to faith in Christ at the Presbyterian Church is not somehow a loss for the Baptist Church.
8. I remember watching all the different sub-contractors work on the new sanctuary at the church I grew up in. The painters and the electricians were not doing the exact same jobs, but they were both a part of the same work.
9. When the building was completed, it was one building; the product of many laborers, doing many different things, all for the one singular purpose.
10. As the church progresses toward its final completion as the spotless bride of Christ, we may not all be doing the same work in the same way, but we are all connected to one another, and no one work is detached from the whole.
11. That leads me to a second principle we draw from this text. We see here not only *the progress that builds the church*, but notice also secondly:

II. THE PRINCIPLES THAT BIND THE CHURCH

1. As we have already noted, the church that was started in Antioch was very different from the original church in Jerusalem. Yet, the differences were only cultural, not doctrinal.
2. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, verse 23 says that he saw the grace of God. For all its uniqueness, there was something very familiar about the new church at Antioch.
3. While different churches may operate in different places and with different methods, there are some things that are universally binding about the church.
4. Whether it is a Baptist church in the South, or a mission church in Sudan, if it is an authentic, Christian church, there are a couple of principles that bind that body of believers with us, and all other biblical congregations.

5. I believe we see these binding principles in our text. First of all, notice that in all true churches:

A. They have the same message

1. Look back at our text, and notice again verse 20. It says, *“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”*

2. Notice that phrase, “preaching the Lord Jesus.” When these dispersed Christians arrived in Antioch, they immediately began to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ.

3. Antioch was a cultured, advanced, very Greek city, but the message preached there was not polished up, or softened for the cosmopolitan ears of the city’s residents.

4. No, the message preached at the church of Antioch was the same as the one preached in Jerusalem. The Jewish Messiah was a man named Jesus. He had been crucified on a criminal’s cross, dying for the sins of man. He had risen from the dead, and now He was calling all men to repent and be saved.

5. What binds the true church is not the songs they sing. It is not their programs or their polity. What binds the true church is the message they proclaim.

6. You can tell a true church by whether or not they proclaim the biblical, undiluted message of Jesus Christ. If they preach Christ, they are connected with us.

7. Once again in 2008, Coca-Cola was voted the number one global brand. Coke is sold in over 200 countries around the world, and is consumed by billions of people.

8. You can buy a Coke in grocery store in Tennessee, or a market in Thailand. The bottle may have a different shape, and the label may be printed in a different language, but the substance inside will still be Coca-Cola.

9. The Church of Jesus Christ stretches across the globe. The buildings vary, the styles of worship are multiple, and the language is many. However, the true church is bound by the same, timeless, simple message – Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

10. Notice something else we find in this text about the principles that bind the church. Notice not only that true churches have the same message, but notice also that:

B. They have the same mission

1. I want to draw your attention back to verse 20, and that phrase, “preaching the Lord Jesus.” The word translated “preaching” in this text is not the word that describes what I am doing this morning, the act of preaching the Word of God in a congregational setting.

2. No, the word translated “preaching” in this text is the word from which we get our word “evangelism.” It describes the act of communicating the “evangel”, the good news. It is the work of witnessing.

3. Things were very different in Antioch. The church was a mixture of Jew and Gentile, and was shaped by the Gentile influence. However, one thing that had remained the same was that the church in Antioch was still obeying the mission given by the Lord Jesus.

4. True churches are not competing with one another. We are not working against other congregations to see if we can outgrow them and outdo them.

5. No, we may not agree on all the issues, and our methods may vary, but we share a common mission with all true Christian churches.

6. We are not isolated islands of Christianity, separate and segregated from all other churches. We are each individual outposts of the same kingdom – embassies representing the same homeland.

7. The true church of the living God is bound by a common message and a common mission. There are many different churches, but at the same time, there is but one true church, and all her individual congregations are bound by certain principles.

8. On the seal of the United States, as well as on our currency, is the Latin phrase, “E pluribus unum.” The phrase literally means “Out of many, one.”

9. That phrase is even more applicable to the church of Jesus Christ. There are many congregations, and yet one church. The many are unified by their message and their mission.

10. Notice a third truth we draw from this text. Notice not only *the progress that builds the church*, and *the principles that bind the church*, but notice also lastly:

III. THE PARTNERSHIP THAT BLESSES THE CHURCH

1. One of the great things about Acts 11 is the way in which the church at Jerusalem and the new, upstart church in Antioch were able to cooperate together.

2. Two different churches, in two different places were able to work together and help one another in accomplishing their goals.
3. Unfortunately, this sense of partnership is largely missing in our day. Churches are very often competing with one another rather than cooperating.
4. This text points us to the ideal for the church. Here we have a model for what individual churches can do for the sake of the church as a whole. Notice what the early church teaches us. First of all, when it comes to the partnership that blesses the church:

A. We can serve one another

1. Again, in verse 22, we read that the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived, verse 23 tells us that he, *"...exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."*
2. Notice what verse 24 says about Barnabas. *"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith..."* No doubt, Barnabas was a key part of the church in Jerusalem. Yet, they were willing to let him go in order to serve the new church in Antioch.
3. Verse 26 says that for a whole year, along with Paul, Barnabas taught and ministered in Antioch. He was sent out from Jerusalem for the purpose of serving another church.
4. Try to imagine what is going on in this text. Imagine that we were to send out one of our best teachers to another congregation for over a year. How would that teacher's Sunday school class feel about that?
5. Unfortunately, too many churches have become self-serving societies. All their resources and all their energies are focused on themselves.
6. The early church speaks to us from the pages of Scripture and challenges us to think carefully about what we could do to serve other churches and other people outside of our membership.
7. Our church happens to be located in the buckle of the Bible Belt, where there are multiple churches in even the smallest communities. However, even within our own country, there are places where there are few churches.
8. Some of those churches have little or no help. Pastors are needed, and people are needed who would be willing to serve those congregations and those communities.

9. If we are to follow the example of the early church, we must think carefully about how we can serve other churches besides our own. Notice something else we see about this partnership that blesses the church. Notice not only that we can serve one another, but notice also that:

B. We can support one another

1. There is a wonderful ending to this text. Notice verse 27. It says, *“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.”* Verse 28 tells us that one of these prophets predicted a famine that was soon to hit.

2. Now look at verse 29. It says, *“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.”*

3. Not only is the church at Jerusalem serving the church at Antioch, but the church in Antioch is now supporting the church at Jerusalem.

4. The reality is that churches should be willing and ready to offer support and aid to other congregations who are in need. The idea is that because we are all connected, there is a sense of responsibility that we should have to one another.

5. Right now, as we meet in our air-conditioned, well-lit, comfortable building, a group of Christians in China are crowded into someone’s home, trying to avoid government detection.

6. A church in Africa gathers under an arbor, their only protection from the sun, and listens to their preacher. A congregation in South America opens the windows so that those who cannot fit into their tiny building can still participate in the service.

7. We cannot help every church, but we likewise cannot forget that our brothers and sisters around the world are serving the same Christ, and they need our support.

8. According to the website of the International Mission Board, there are 181, 967 overseas Southern Baptist Churches with a total membership of 10.3 million. Those churches are served by over 5, 000 international missionaries.ⁱ

9. How can you and I support those churches and those missionaries? We can support them first through our prayers, and then secondly through our giving.

10. In our church, a portion of every dollar you give is sent to the cooperative program, where the money is then sent to those churches and those missionaries.

11. What this means is that our church, and you as an individual can and do play a vital role in partnering with other churches for the sake of the church as a whole.

1. When you think of the church, what comes to your mind? Is it this place – this church? The truth is, just thinking of the church in terms of White Oak Baptist Church is a pretty narrow understanding of the church.

2. The book of Acts teaches us that we should not think of the church in terms of our church and their church, or this church and that church.

3. In Acts 11 we learn that the church is not split up into the different parts, it is just spread out into different places. We are a part of something much bigger than just this local assembly.

4. May God remind us of the global reach of the church, and of our responsibility as a part of the global family.

ⁱ Fast Facts, *imbconnecting*, imb.org, accessed 7/18/09,
<http://www.imb.org/main/page.asp?StoryID=4452&LanguageID=1709>