

Series: You are sent volume 2
Sermon: Always For All People
Text: Acts 11:19-26

INTRO

If you do not know this about me, I was born and raised in Kenya, my wife and I moved to the states back in 2014 for me to attend seminary in Texas. We've been in Charlotte since December and apart from the quarantine we are really enjoying our time here and feel blessed to be part of Mercy.

Today we are going to be Acts 11:19-26, as I was reading this I was confronted by how easy it is for us to romanticize persecution, but persecution is painful and destructive. I remember when post-election violence broke out in Kenya towards the end of 2007. This was a very tribal and politically charged affair. More than a thousand people were killed, and more than half a million people were displaced in their own country. Lives were destroyed.

I share this with you not to give you a sad story but to point to you something that really left an impression on me. I've always known my grandmother to be a Christian. But during this season she did something that demonstrated to me that indeed she was a Christian. You see my grandmother opened her house to a family of 5 who lived with us for over a year. Their neighbors,

people they had grown up with, shared meals with had turned on them and they had to run for their lives and when they showed up at my grandmother's house, she welcomes them with open arms.

Part of the problem with Christianity today is we tend to set limits to our faith. We are willing to go only as far as our comfort level will let us go, we are not willing to follow Jesus into the unknown and just humbly trust that he will take care of us. I want to encourage you this morning not to set limits on your faith. I know you desire to be used by God to transform your neighborhood, your school, this city and the world and God wants to use you.

As we unpack this passage In Acts 11, I want you to see the main characters, you will see a group of believers that were self-centered and another group that was Christ centered. And you will see clearly how the lives of the Christ centered Christians were transformed, and how God transformed the city and indeed the world through the efforts of these Christians.

We will make three observations from the text and finish with three applications. If you have your bibles lets start at verse 19

THROUGH THE TEXT

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

Here is what is going on, after Stephen a man filled with the Holy spirit of God was stoned to death for preaching about Jesus Christ, persecution broke out and all who believed in the Lord Jesus fled to different parts of the roman empire. Some of them went to Phoenicia, some to Cyprus and some to Antioch. It's important to remember that at this point Christianity had been a very Jewish centric movement, and so some of the men fleeing did what was comfortable. They spoke the word to no one except Jews.

Now before we are too quick to judge these men for speaking only to Jews, we have to remember they were in the midst of persecution and maybe they were scared to talk to gentiles. But remember the Lord had told the disciples In Acts 1:8 **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.** Jesus had commissioned his followers to share the good news of salvation with all men and this first group of people did not follow through.

They let their cultural bias dictate who they would proclaim the good news of salvation to. And If we are honest, sometimes we fail to share the gospel

with people who don't look like us, think like us, believe the same way we do, and the list goes on because we are scared of the baggage they might bring with them. I mean if they become Christian, we might have to eat their food, be seen with them by our cool friends, maybe learn a different language and don't forget they might influence our culture.

My wife is a white girl from Texas, but we meet in Kenya she had been there working in the mission field and she tells me some funny stories of her interactions with the our culture. One of this story is how frustrating it was for her when people didn't show up on time even for a bible study. She is there ready with her notes and nobody is there, and then when they show up they stay for a long time so if she had other plans she had to cancel them. She had to learn how to serve in a culture where time is not of the essence.

You see Jesus does not call us to do what is comfortable or easy when it comes to sharing the gospel; he calls us to radical obedience. In Matthew 5:47, Jesus says **if you greet only your brothers**

and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary. Don't even the Gentiles do the same?¹

And here is where the second group of believers comes in. Luke tells us in verse 20,

20 But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.

When you think of great movements you think of great men and women of those movements, you can name names, and you can find all kinds of information about those great men and women. But here in Acts, we do not get to know the names of these men who God used to start the first multiethnic church. All we get is "some of them." No first name, no last name, nothing about their life other than where they come from, just "them."

These unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene were so Christ focused that they did not let the cultural differences between them, and the gentiles stop them from proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. It is important to note that it wasn't the Greeks; (and this term Greek is used here to mean gentile – separate other – having nothing to do with

the Jewish people.) It wasn't the gentiles who sort the Believers out, no, the text tells us these men "began speaking to the Greeks also". These believers did not wait to be approached by the gentiles, they did not wait for an invite, they went out and preached the gospel to the gentiles. But not only that, they preached to Jewish people as well, the text says "to the Greeks also" which means they preached to the gentiles in addition to the Jews.

The first observation that we see here is

1. The Gospel is always for all people

Tony Merida says it this way "we must be involved with people. We have to learn how to live faithfully, sensibly, soberly, wisely, graciously, and winsomely among those who are far from God. We're in a war, and war is never fought by escapism. It requires engagement—for the good of those we're engaging."

This means we can't just sit in our corner and wait for those far from God to come to us, we have to jump the fence go to the other side and seek them out. We have to get past our likes, dislikes, taste and preferences and realize the

¹ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#). (2017). (Mt 5:47). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

world needs what we have, and the Lord of the Harvest has sent us out to proclaim the good news of salvation.

Now what we see next is how God blessed the efforts of these men. Listen to how God responded to their radical obedience. Verse 21 tells us,

21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire after Rome and Alexandria, it had a population of around half a million people, it was an epic center for Idol worship and all kind of ungodly activity. People here were really far from God. It sounds like any big city today right, but what happened when believers radically obeyed Christ and engaged the cultures around them without discriminating? a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

This just fires me up, because it means if we radically obey Christ and engage in evangelism the Lord's hand will be with us and we can see a large number of people turning to the Lord. The same God who opened the eyes of the people in Antioch and saved a large number of people, is willing and is able to save a large number of people in our city right here right now.

As we go into our daily activities, even in this season of being quarantined, we have to bring those still in darkness to Jesus; because He is the Light of the world. And we have to do this without making any ethnic, cultural, social-economic, political, or even nationality distinctions. Just share the gospel and then embrace the new believers as sisters and brothers in Christ. And when I say embrace, I don't mean lip service, I mean real Christian love that is authentic and sacrificial.

And here is our second observation,

2. Because the Gospel is always for all people, we should expect the church to be diverse but united.

The emphasis here is unity and not uniformity.

Now up to this point we see the church in Antioch is growing and it's diverse. It's made up of Jewish people who had fled persecution, Jewish people native to Antioch and Gentiles native to the city. We can say the church resembled this cosmopolitan city. And this is what led to what we will read next, let's turn to verse 22

22 News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as

far as Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw the Grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.

Acts 4 tells us a man named Joseph...who the apostles call barnabas...was really generous. He sold a piece of land he owned and gave the money to the church to help further the gospel!" "...some of you God is going to give Barnabas kind of generosity and that is how Mercy is going to be able to carry the gospel further. As you give generously God is going to stir up generosity in others as well. but that's not the point just a side note

The sending of Barnabas is such an act of God's Grace to this new church. (And by the way this word Grace, we tend to use it a lot – it means undeserved favor.) The church in Jerusalem could have sent anyone else, but through God's providence, they sent Barnabas. He did not have a lot of the cultural baggage that some of the believers in Jerusalem had. He was born and

raised in Cyprus and so he had grownup with gentles.

Barnabas is the kind of person you want as a friend. He was filled with the spirit, he had faith in the Lord (meaning he had a deep and abiding trust in the Lord²), and he was generous and encouraging. Paul tells us in (1 Thess 5:11) "encourage one another and build each other up". That's precisely what Barnabas was doing. He saw the number of people being saved and the diversity of the church, and he recognized this was the work of God. Barnabas doesn't ask the new gentile believers to follow Jewish law, he encouraged the multiethnic church to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts.

Luke tells us Barnabas did what he did because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. One commentator says "The spiritual qualities of **Barnabas** were obvious to the Jerusalem church' No wonder they sent him to **Antioch**."³ And again we see the Lord blessing the Christ centered faith of his people, the end of verse 24 tells us large numbers of people were added to the Lord.

² Osborne, G. R. (2019). [*Acts: Verse by Verse*](#) (p. 218). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

³ Sills, M. D. (2017). [*Opportunities and Challenges in Global Missions*](#). In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes* (p. 1738). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

And this brings us our third and last observation

3. Followers of Jesus watch out for each other to provoke love and good works

Barnabas did not stop at encouraging the church. He also did something else that would help the church in Antioch and also initiate a worldwide spread of the gospel. We see what He does in Verses 25 and 26

25 Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. 4

Barnabas recognized that even though the church was growing, and the believers were fired up for evangelism, they needed to be taught the word of God so their faith can be even stronger. After all, there is something in the great commission about "teaching them to observe all that I have taught you." He also recognized that he could not be able to take up this task of training the church on his own. And so he went to Tarsus to look for Paul. And it's not like he knew exactly where to find Paul, the word used here -translated search, had the idea of hunting or tracking.

⁴ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#). (2017). (Ac 11:19–26). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

The last time we saw Paul was In chapter 9 when the brothers sent him off to Tarsus. Barnabas must have remembered what the Lord had said about Paul, in Acts 9:15 the Lord says **"this man (Paul) is my chosen instrument† to take my name to Gentiles, † kings, and Israelites.** †. And so he went out and tracked him down. And then for an entire year, Paul and Barnabas taught the church in Antioch. In the middle of all this teaching that's when the disciples were first called Christians. Their faith was so evident in Antioch that people called them Christians. Note – they did not call themselves Christians; other people called them Christians.

This name Christian can be understood to mean Christ-folk, like Christ, little Christs, or followers of Christ. The people in Antioch used this name to ridicule the believers because they reminded them of Jesus Christ. Oh, that our lives would reflect so much of Jesus that people would call us Christians.

One commentator says it this way, **" They not only talked about Christ but also resembled him in their actions. It was evident to all that they belonged to Christ."**⁵

⁵ Thomas, D. W. H. (2011). [*Acts*](#). (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 322–323). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

Here is the thing that is so evident in this text, these men were Christ focused, they had a faith that was Christ centered. They did not have it easy, and they did not have it all together, but they followed Christ and rested in Him. Regardless of persecution and cultural differences they lived in radical obedience and limitless faith.

So how does this look for us, let me tell you its pretty much going to look the same. But lets break it down a little bit. First, we need to

Preach the Gospel to ourselves.

We have to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. I'm convinced that most of us have limited faith because we are still holding on to the feelings of brokenness and past mistakes.

You have been saved by Christ; you need to hold on to that. He has transferred you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his son whom he loves and in him you have received the forgiveness of sins.

It's important to remind yourself daily of this ultimate truth. Be in the word , stay in communication with other believers especially in this season where loneliness and isolation can lead us to dwell on who we used to be other than who we are in Christ.

After we have preached the gospel to ourselves, then we have to

Proclaim the gospel to the lost.

If we understand that all humanity needs salvation, and no one else can save other than Jesus Christ, then we have to proclaim the gospel. Paul asks in **Romans 10:14** How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? This means you and I have to proclaim the good news of salvation.

And just like the men in Acts 11 we have to make sure we are proclaiming the gospel to all people and not just those who are like us. We have to be intentional to reach those outside our comfort zone.

I encourage you to continue praying for your one and ask the Lord to give you the boldness and opportunity to share the gospel with them.

As we are preaching the gospel to ourselves and Proclaiming the gospel to the lost, we must make sure we are not just talking about it but endeavor to.

Demonstrate the Gospel to everyone.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:16 "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

This means parents we will have to show some grace when all we want to do especially right now is send our kids to their rooms forever. Students we need to make an effort to help out around the house and be gracious with our words and attitude.

It means we have to reach out to our neighbors and find out if they need help. You know sharing a roll of toilet paper might be the best way to demonstrate the gospel right now.

And so, I encourage you to demonstrate the gospel by loving those around you with a Christ centered love that gives and steps into the uncomfortable and the unknown.

Prayer points

1. **Thank the Lord for Christ's work in your life**
2. **Pray for boldness and opportunity to share the gospel with your one**
3. **Ask the Lord to give you opportunity to demonstrate the gospel**