

The Church In Antíoch

Acts 11:19-30

MEMORY VERSE

ACTS 11:21

“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Many pictures of flowers from books or magazines, and a large bouquet of real flowers.

Several small tongue depressors, little paper cups, sour cream, and Instant Breakfast Drink mix (like Tang).

As many “Colorful Difference” worksheets as the number of children in your class, color crayons, and an iron.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Eh, What’s the Difference?

Bring pictures of flowers from books or magazines or allow your class to cut some out of magazines. Tell your class that you want to show them something very special that God makes for all of us to enjoy. Briefly show them the pictures. Then bring out real flowers and pass them around the room. Ask the children to tell you the difference between the pictures of flowers and the real ones.

Explain to your class that the world has a lot of opinions about what a Christian is, but unless they have actually seen a Christian that is surrendered to Jesus and filled with His Holy Spirit, they have only seen pictures; they have not seen the real thing. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.**

LESSON TIME!

ACTS 11:19

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

This is one of the turning points in the early church, because the Jewish Christians began to share the gospel with Jews in Gentile lands. God had used the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution of the church to spread the gospel. So often God will use something we think is bad to further His purposes.

It is believed that this persecution started about five or six years prior to this narrative, yet the gospel spread in spite of it. Though most Jews neglected to share the gospel with the Gentiles, they would later come to understand that the Gentiles were to be fellow heirs of God's family.

It is interesting that the Lord had spread Christians all over the place. The gospel would now only spread as the Lord was working to get the gospel everywhere. The message of the gospel brought encouragement to a desperate and hopeless heart. Many of the Jews hearing the gospel for the first time would reject it, but still others accepted it. Soon the gospel would be taken to the Gentiles. As the gospel would go forth, this world would be forever changed. We can make a difference today and encourage others with the gospel. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.**

ACTS 11:20-21

But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

With a population of half a million, Antioch, located 300 miles north of Jerusalem, ranked as the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Antioch was a wicked city with gross immorality. Yet God would use the church in Antioch to become the base of operations for the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys.

When the persecuted believers arrived in Antioch, they took an amazing step forward in sharing the gospel with the Gentiles. The Word of God was on their lips and the

hand of God was on their witness. With their determination to boldly witness, they led many sinners to repent and turn to the Lord. It was a thrilling work of God's wonderful grace. The gospel was changing many lives as these faithful believers witnessed in the midst of great wickedness. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.**

It is so easy to lower our standards, getting comfortable with the sin around us. Before we know it, we can blend in with the wickedness that surrounds us. It is our nature to lower to the standard set around us, but these faithful believers made God their standard, not allowing themselves to blend in. Their love for the Lord and their desire to share the gospel made a difference, and as a result, many were saved.

Zip in the Dip

Set up a taste testing lab with lots of Popsicle sticks (tongue depressors), little paper cups, sour cream, and Instant Breakfast Drink mix (like Tang). Have children place sour cream in a bowl and add the drink mix one-quarter teaspoon at a time. Let them comment on the taste of the dip. The sour cream by itself does not have a lot of taste. Have them continue adding mix, stopping occasionally for taste tests. If there is not enough "zip" add more mix. After the dip is finished, serve some in the little paper cups with banana quarters, or apple slices.

Explain that just like that drink mix made a difference in the sour cream, Jesus makes a difference in us. The more we allow Jesus to season us, the more "zip" we will have in our world.

ACTS 11:22-24

Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The church leaders in Jerusalem had a responsibility to oversee the scattered church, which now included Gentile congregations. The leaders elected to send Barnabas to Antioch to find out what was going on among the Gentiles. Barnabas was a godly man who would live up to the meaning of his name, "son of encouragement."

Barnabas gives us a wonderful example of how to help new Christians. He demonstrated strong faith by ministering joyfully, showing kindness and encouragement to build up the faith of new believers. He knew the difference he could make in the world as he allowed Jesus to work in his life. Barnabas was a man of kindness, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He allowed God to have His way in his life, and in doing so, the Christians in Antioch learned what it meant to be a Christian.

What an amazing difference we can make in the lives of others if we only allow the Lord to have His way in our lives. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.** To be light in the midst of darkness, hope in the midst of despair, love in the midst of hate, joy in the midst of sorrow, and life in the midst of death, we must be an encouragement to others as we allow the Lord to work through our life.

ACTS 11:25-26

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

The church in Antioch was growing so much that Barnabas needed help and he could think of no one better suited for the work than Saul who was living in Tarsus. Saul had been sent to his home in Tarsus to protect him from danger in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30).

As a Christian, Saul threw caution to the wind as he boldly proclaimed Jesus as Messiah in Jerusalem, and as a result, he had to flee for his life. He stayed there for several years before Barnabas brought him to help the church in Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul stayed at Antioch for a full year teaching new believers. They could have left for new cities, but they saw the importance of follow-through and training. These new believers needed encouragement and discipleship and they found it through the ministry of Barnabas and Saul.

Have you helped someone believe in God? We need to realize the importance of spending time teaching and encouraging others in the Word of God. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.**

This young church in Antioch was a curious mixture of Jews (who spoke Greek or Aramaic) and Gentiles. It is significant that this is the first place where the believers were called “Christians,” because all they had in common was Christ. Jesus crosses all boundaries and unifies all people from all over the world.

Unfortunately, the word Christian has lost a great deal of significance because of the many different religions that claim to represent it. A Christian is one who follows Jesus and His teaching. Having repented of their sin, they trust in Him by faith to receive salvation by grace (Acts 11:21-23). They are “Christ-like.”

ACTS 11:27-30

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Prophets were found not only in the Old Testament, but in the early church as well. God would use them to present His will to the people and instruct them in His word. Sometimes they, like Agabus, also had the gift of predicting the future. Agabus was used by God in Antioch as a prophet to warn His people of a great famine that would affect the whole world.

The foundation of the church was laid by the Apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), and then both eventually moved off the scene. We today have the completed Word of God from which the Holy Spirit teaches and guides us (John 14:26; 1 Timothy 3:16,17).

There was a serious food shortage in the Roman Empire during the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) because of a drought which also affected Judea. What a blessing it was for the Christians in Judea to receive relief from the Christians in Antioch.

The Christians of Antioch were motivated to give generously because they cared about the needs of others. They teach us what it means to be a “cheerful giver” which the Bible commends (2 Corinthians 9:7). Reluctant giving reflects a lack of concern for others. If we focus our concern on the needy, we will be motivated to give and help others.

Even if we have nothing else to give, we can always encourage others with the joy we find in Christ. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.** When we give Jesus complete control of our life, He will work through us to be a blessing to others.

The Colorful Difference

Pass out the “colorful difference” worksheet. Have the children color very heavily on the side of the sheet that has the man holding the Bible. When they are finished, fold the sheet in half so the man is facing the world. Lightly iron over the back of the drawing; this will transfer the colors on the sheet with the world. Showing an example of how heavily the coloring must be will help avoid disappointment when the ironing is done.

Explain that Jesus changes our lives and, in turn, we change the world around us, just like this man made the world a brighter, more colorful place. **In order to make a difference in the world, we need to let Jesus make a difference in us.**

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to allow Jesus to change us into His image. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

