

Acts 11:22

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[0 : 00] Of everything that is right, you are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun. Immediately, mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Amen. May God bless to us that reading from his own word.

May his name be praised and glorified for his truth. Now we will sing again. This time we are going to sing in Psalm 72. In Sing Psalms Version, page 93, the tune is Dover's Dale, and we are going to sing from verse 8 to verse 15.

From sea to sea he will hold sway, and from the river to earth's end. His enemies will liquid us, the desert tribes, the knee will bend. From verse 8 to verse 15 of Psalm 72.

[1 : 19] The tune is Dover's Dale. From sea to sea he will hold sway, and from the river to earth's end.

His enemies will liquid us, and from the river to earth's end. The desert tribes, the knee will bend.

Then Tartishan, the distant shores, will send a tribute of their kings.

Sheep as Antipas kings will come, and bring to him their offerings.

All kings will humbly bow to him.

[2 : 51] All nations worship him with fear.

He will take pity on the will.

And save them from oppressive might.

He'll rescue them from violence. Their blood is precious in his sight.

Long may he live. May sheep as gold be given to him abundantly.

[4 : 23] May people ever pray for him.

And bless his name continually. May God bless you.

My text tonight is to be found in the book of Acts, chapter 11, and at verse 26. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of the people.

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. These words, the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Now this passage marks another forward move in the life of the church. And from here on in the story of the book of the church, which deals with the expansion of the church, following the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at the time of Pentecost, the action moves away from Jerusalem to Antioch, which was a city in northern Syria.

[5 : 49] It's now within the bounds of modern Turkey. And it was a place that was known for its heathen religion and for its great wickedness.

But here, in that place where all the gods of antiquity were worshipped, there Christ was exalted.

And it happened this way. When persecution broke out in Jerusalem, many of the people, many of the Christians had to run for their lives.

They were scattered abroad. Remarkably, it records to us that they who were persecuted, they were all scattered abroad except the apostles. They were still in Jerusalem.

But the common people went, and they went everywhere, gossiping the gospel, telling people of Jesus, telling why they were running. And the result was the message of the gospel and the saving news of Christ was spread widely apart from Jerusalem.

[6 : 53] And we read that those who went everywhere preaching were Jewish people. The gospel had come through the Jewish people, and they preached to their own people mainly.

They went preaching generally to Jews only. But some who came from Cyprus and from North Africa, from Cyrene, when they came to Antioch, they just preached the gospel to everyone. Not just to the Jews, but also to the Greek-speaking people as well. And the God blessed their ministry. And many people were converted to Christ in Antioch.

And there was great rejoicing. But this was something, this was a breakaway. This was something new. And the apostles got news of what was happening away up there in the north, in Antioch. And it didn't seem to be just what they better go and investigate. So they decided that they would send Barnabas to go out to see if everything that was happening up there was indeed something that God was, where God was working and God was blessing.

[7 : 59] And Barnabas made his journey, and he came. And when he came, he saw the evidence of the grace of God. And when he saw that evidence, it says he was glad.

And he rejoiced. Because it says he was a good man. And full of the Holy Spirit. And at that time, he saw a great number of the people being added to the Lord.

And so, he wondered what's going to happen with these people. How are they going to grow? And he remembered Saul of Tarsus, who had been converted years before in Damascus.

And he who had once persecuted the church, how he had eventually come back to Jerusalem. And the Jews there thought he was a spy. He was infiltrating them.

And it was when Barnabas spoke up for Saul that he was accepted. And they realized that he who once persecuted the church was truly one who was proclaiming the gospel that he once opposed.

[9 : 09] But things got pretty tough for Saul. And his life was under threat. And so, Saul was sent away to his old home in Tarsus.

Barnabas remembered. We need a teacher. So, off he went from Antioch across to Tarsus. And he brought Saul back to teach the people.

And for a whole year, it says, that they taught the people there. And the church grew. And the Christians developed into maturity and Christlikeness.

And the people round about took note of them. And they began to speak about these people. And they put a name on them. They said, hey, these are the Christ ones. And so, we read that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

That was the nickname that they were given. We don't read that they went out telling people what they were. But people saw who they were and what they were.

[10 : 10] And they identified what they were. And this new life that they were living. Was like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. It tallied with the teaching of the man of whom they had heard.

Who had been crucified. And they called them Christians. What a wonderful privilege to have earned the name Christian. In that situation. In a heathen environment.

I wonder what nickname you and I might earn. What nickname do you and I deserve for the way we live and the kind of people we are?

Would people think of saying that's a Christian? I wonder, as someone once asked in my hearing, if you were arrested for being a Christian. Would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Let's see, as we look at this chapter, and what follows. What made these disciples earn this worthy and wonderful name?

[11 : 14] And I think, as we look at it, we might find here that we have their new life explained. We see their new life encouraged. And we see the new life exhibited.

And see if we can learn about how true Christianity should look and appear in this world in which we live. So first of all, let's notice the new life is explained here.

Now there are many ideas abroad in the world, our world, as to what a Christian is. A Christian is regarded generally as being perhaps a good person. Maybe a religious person, a church-going person.

Perhaps they are called a Christian in some situations because that's the culture they belong to, as opposed to being of Islamic culture or some other culture.

Or they are known not to be atheists, and so on. Or maybe somebody is more precise. A Christian is a person who has made a decision to follow Jesus.

[12 : 17] Or they may say, a Christian is someone who has left an old life and begun a new life, and who is trying to follow Jesus. But here we're told what happened to these people, that they earned this particular title or nickname.

We read that these evangelists came to Antioch. And they came with one message. And wonderfully it was the message that saves.

In verse 20 we read that they came preaching the Lord Jesus. And added to that is this statement, that the hand of the Lord was with them.

You see, when that message is proclaimed, and when the Lord blesses that message, things happen. Lives are changed. Amazing things happen.

I remember hearing Dr. Firm, who was a psychiatrist, a psychologist, who worked for the Billy Graham organization, telling of how he was at the time the dean of Horton College in New York, a divinity school.

[13:27] And there at lunch, during one of the long crusades of Billy Graham in New York, one of his intellectual colleagues said to him, I can't understand you, Firm, sitting under that simplistic preaching night after night after night.

And he says, you know, he preached 90 sermons on that crusade. And he said to this man, he said, you know, it's not so much what Billy Graham says, that fascinates me, it's what happens when he says it.

You see, Dr. Firm was in charge of the counseling. And he knew of the lives that were being changed as the Holy Spirit was blessing the word. And when the hand of the Lord is on the preaching of the gospel, lives are changed.

Things happen. And what does it say? Verse 21, a great number were added to the Lord. A great number turned to the Lord and believed.

And when Barnabas came, he saw the evidence of the grace of God in these lives, says verse 23. So there are three things that we can say happened there in Antioch under the preaching of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

[14:36] First of all, it says, they turned from sin service. They turned to the Lord. Now that's the positive statement. The other side of it is that it means that they left where they were before.

And they turned. They turned from the service of an old master to a new master, to the Lord. They turned from where they were before. And where were they before?

Well, you know, in the spiritual and spiritual geography, there's only two places you can be. You are either in sin or you are in him. If a person is in sin, he is a slave of sin.

Jesus says, if any man commits sin, he's a slave of sin. And if you are not saved tonight, sin is your master. You may not think so, but Jesus says so.

That is the truth about your life and your position. You're serving self. You are being led by Satan. And your life is sinful and you are at odds with the God of heaven, your creator.

[15:45] The first thing the gospel teaches us is this, that there is another king that claims our love and our service. And his name is Jesus, the king of whom we've been singing.

And to ignore him, to leave him out of your life, to marginalize him, you may say, I have got nothing against him, but I'm not committed to him. It's to be a rebel and an enemy of God and to be still under his certain judgment.

These people, we read, turned from sin. I wonder, can you say that in your life, yes, there is a time, there is a day when I turn from sin.

I know it's still, and you may say, yes, I know, but it's still in my life, but I'm turning from it daily.

Turning to him. Have you faced it?

Have you confessed it? Have you repented of it? Have you left it? Have you turned to the Lord Jesus? That's the first thing. Secondly, we read, they turned from sin service and they trusted in the Lord Jesus.

[16:55] It says, they turned to the Lord and they believed. Now, what is spoken of here is true saving faith. So many people, we say, do you believe?

You believe in God? Of course I do. So many people believe in God. But what is meant? The Bible tells us the devils, they believe. And the fact of what they believe shakes them to the core.

They tremble. What does it do for you? What is the difference your believing makes in your life?

True belief means to commit oneself, to entrust oneself, to the Lord Jesus.

That same word is translated in other places in the New Testament as to commit oneself. It means to commit yourself to Jesus. To commit yourself to Jesus is to trust him.

When I'm tired, I commit myself to my bed. I put my whole weight on it. When I'm sick, I have to trust my doctor. I commit myself to him.

[18:01] I trust him that he's going to give me something that will help me. He has no evil designs on me. I put myself in his hands. I trust him. And because I'm sick of sin, I commit myself without reserve to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who can free me and cleanse me from sin's dread disease.

I rest on him alone. Are you resting on him today? And the third thing was this. They turned, they trusted, and they were transformed.

They were transformed by God's grace. When Barnabas came, it says, what did he see? He saw the evidence of the grace of God. There was something happening in these lives that made him glad.

He knew the Savior. He saw that it was working. He saw evidence that the Christ he loved was working in these lives and had changed them. They were lives that had been made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

You see, conversion is a work of God's grace in a soul. It is God who makes the difference. A person who becomes a Christian, they are born again by the Spirit of God.

[19:16] He is the one who lifts the burden of our sin, who changes our who puts a new heart in place of the hard and stony, resistant heart. It enables us to believe in Jesus and to rest in him.

I wonder, is there a change in your life? Can people see a change in my life from what I was? Have you been transformed by the power of Jesus?

We must turn. The first thing is to turn, then to trust, then we will be transformed. Paul said that he summed up his preaching as he left Ephesus where he had been a long time.

He said, I cease not day and night to preach to you repentance toward God. That is turning from sin. And faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. And people who respond to that by the grace of God are transformed into new creatures in Christ Jesus.

The new life explained. But also, I think, we can say here that we see the new life encouraged. Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to investigate. He came and he saw the grace of God, the evidence of the grace of God and was glad.

[20:31] He rejoiced because of what he saw. Here were people saved and rejoicing in new life. Babies in Christ, babies that need nourishment, needed to grow. And it says he encouraged them.

You see, first of all, he had an exhortation for them. And what was it? That with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord. Now he was not telling them, now you've been saved, you better stay saved.

That's not what he was saying. He was telling them how the Christian life would grow and develop and become strong. You see, a new Christian is someone who is born again.

A baby, when he is born, needs to be sheltered, needs to be kept warm, needs to be nourished, needs to be protected so that they will grow.

And I fear sometimes people are very hard on young Christians. He cannot be much of a Christian. He doesn't come to the prayer meeting and things like that. Do we really nourish them and nurture them?

[21:35] The baby stays alive because he stays near his mother. He's the source of warmth and protection. His nourishment comes from his mother. And so we must do so with Christians.

They must be taught to cling to the Lord Jesus. And Christians must learn that that is what they must do. You see, we live in a dangerous world. That is why we protect our babies.

So that they can grow. Because they live in a dangerous world. They are a danger of infection, a danger of disease, a danger of all sorts of things. And people who would harm them and situations that could be very dangerous for them.

You become a Christian and you will find one thing. That you have found a new friend in Jesus but you have made a new enemy in the evil one. He has lost you from his kingdom. He is incensed and he is angry.

And he is going to do what he can to harass you and to assault you and to bring you down and to sow doubt in your heart. To deceive you, to make you think you are not a Christian and so on.

[22:40] He is there. He is active. And so the Christian has said, you stay close to Jesus. The devil knows he cannot rob you of your salvation. It is the new life of God.

It is the life of God in your soul. But you have to make up your mind when you become a Christian what kind of Christian you are going to be. And he urged them, it says, with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord Jesus.

Hold on to Jesus. Live in his company. Let nothing come between you and the Lord. You know, we think of Daniel as one of the most beautiful lives in the Bible.

We think of that great triumph of his life. Daniel at the end of his days, an old man of 90, being delivered, being thrust into the den of lions because he would not compromise on his relationship with his God.

How did he get there? We read at the very beginning when he was just a teenager. He was in a place of amazing privilege, chosen to be trained by the, for Nebuchadnezzar's leadership in his government.

[23 : 53] And he was given special food he had to eat. And he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. You might say, well, that was a trifle.

Man, he might have lost that amazing position. But his heart was on honoring his God and he was going to serve his God. And God honored him. And that was the beginning. And as he began, he continued.

And at 90 years old, you see him still going on with his eyes on the Lord. He had learned to cleave to the Lord. He purposed in his heart to serve his Lord.

You see, if we don't stay close to the Lord, we'll soon get cold. You know, most of us have got central heating now and we don't know much about sitting around a lovely coal fire on a cold evening.

But you know, when you do that, sometimes, as the fire burns, a big chunk of coal, burning coal, can fall out onto the hearth. And if you watch it, it doesn't take very long. And that roar, that red, glowing mass becomes grey and black and cold.

[24 : 57] And if you want to stay warm and hot in the service of Jesus, stay in the fellowship, stay near the Lord. Because alas, there are too many cold and black Christians today.

They've lost their first love as the church in Ephesus was told by Jesus. This was the counsel that they got.

See that you cleave to the Lord. But notice, not only had he an exhortation for them, he had education for them. He saw there was so much to be done in ministry that he couldn't cope himself, but he knew someone who could.

He knew a man who was schooled in the scriptures, who had been saved and who now loved the Lord Jesus. And off he went to Tarsus and he brings Saul back.

And for a whole year, he and Saul of Tarsus teach the people there, there was continued teaching.

[25 : 57] They didn't learn it all the first week. It took over a year to get where they came to when people began to say, hey, these are Christians. Now you can have lots of services and meetings and perhaps no one comes.

Or you have lots of meetings where everybody comes, but nobody is learning anything. But here were Christians who were there and they were listening and they were developing and they were taking the counsel they got and they were taking seriously the message that was being proclaimed. And for a solid year, they sat under the instruction of these faithful teachers. They had no written New Testament. It wasn't penned at that time, as you and I have.

You have the Bible. You have the Old Testament. You have the New Testament. Tell me, are you a learner? Are you truly a disciple? faithful in the Christ's kingdom? Do you feed on the word of God? Do you know what God's word is saying to you? Have you learned God's will? Is there a time that you have set aside so that God's word gets a chance to get into your heart and into your life and into your mind and that you can think about it?

[27 : 15] You remember what was said to Joshua? He was given the great charge of leading Israel into Canaan. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.

Then shall thy way be prosperous. Then shall thou have good success. Be a studier and a meditator on God's word. You know, one of the things that appalls us today, at least I find it, as the ignorance of the world generally and sadly much in the church of the word of God.

You think of some of the most brilliant young people in our land. You see them on University Challenge. You see they can answer the most abstruse questions on all sorts of amazing subjects, but ask them who is Jacob's brother and they'll tell you it's anybody but Esau.

They just don't know the scriptures. Do you know the scriptures? Do we read it? Did you read your Bible today? And this taught them many things.

You see it's not so much that we know the Bible but we must do it. I think it was Graham Scroggie who said God gave us the Bible not that we would increase our knowledge but that it would change our lives.

[28 : 34] Do we apply it to our hearts? When that happens and the Holy Spirit is blessing us then the beauty of Jesus will begin to appear in lives that will be made like Jesus.

Change from image to image into the likeness of Christ under the power of the Holy Spirit and his word. One of my great heroes in the Bible is Ezra. He was a priest and he's a clerk and he had some very ordinary business to do to teach and read the scriptures to the people.

but you know there's a wonderful verse about him. It's Ezra 7 10. It says for Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

There's the secret of that man's life. One of the finest preachers in America died just last month, Adrian Rogers of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

I looked it up on the internet. You can find it. Love worth finding LWF dot org. You can find it there. You'll find the testimony to this man's life.

[29 : 49] And this is the verse that they said to provide his life. Rejoice my heart to see that someone else had found it because it's meant a lot to me. Ezra had prepared his heart. That's prayer.

To seek the law of the Lord. Bible reading and study and to do it. That's obedience. And to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. That's service and evangelism.

And you see the course that they followed. They were encouraged to live for Christ and that is how they were encouraged in their Christian life.

Encouragements and exhortation. We need to encourage Christians. other Christians. Encourage each other. Iron sharpens iron. So the man sharpened by the countenance of his friend.

Speak to your friends about Jesus. Speak to them about how they're getting on in their Christian life. Sometimes we need a prod from a friend when we're slipping back to get back into the word and back into being faithful to Jesus.

[30 : 51] But lastly, there is the new life exhibited. I think it's exhibited in three ways here. first, there is the love that they had for their Lord.

Barnabas saw the evidence of the grace of God and was glad. And the first evidence of the grace of God in a saved soul is that they do something that they couldn't do before.

And that is, they love the Lord. We love him because he first loved us. says 1 John in his first letter. And the love of God is shed abroad in the Christian's heart by the Holy Spirit that is given to us. And how is love shown? Is it just an ethereal thing, a nice feeling that we have for someone else and for the Lord?

Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. That is the evidence of our love of Jesus. It's our obedience to his word.

[31 : 59] And this is the driving force, the new driving force of the new life. I love him who loved me and died for me. And I must not disappoint him. I must live to please him.

I will serve him. That is why the Christian wants to read his Bible. Because God has something to say to him. Now some of you young people doubtless are in love. And when your letter comes from your boyfriend or girlfriend or fiancé or whoever and it plops through the door and you say, oh that's from her.

I'll see that later. Is that what happens? Of course anything else is left and that's the first one that's opened. Why? Because she loves you and she's got something to say to you.

Or he loves you. He's got something to say to you. And you want to know. God has given you his letter. Don't leave it aside. Do you love him? You'll show her your love by your attention to his word and your love of doing his will.

Secondly, they had a love for the lost. We read there that much people that as they were being built up in their faith, much people were being added to the Lord as they began to cleave to the Lord with all their heart.

[33 : 13] And what's more than this, the church became a new center for evangelism, for the spread outwards of the work of the gospel. And they became the first church that set about sending an overseas foreign mission.

And that, in chapter 13, tells how God entrusted them. And I think that's the important thing. It was distinctly the Holy Spirit that said, you separate these men and send them.

And they were sent forth, it says, by the Holy Spirit. God entrusted them with the first mission to go overseas with the gospel. And they sent Barnabas and Saul supported by prayer.

They had a heart for the lost. And we read just a little bit of how God blessed that mission. And why do you think God was blessing that mission? Not only because he sent them, but because there was a praying church behind them.

Do you pray for your missionaries? Do you know, I'll tell you something as a return missionary. In many of our churches, I hear prayer very seldom do I hear people pray for the missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland who every one of us should know by name and know what they're doing and know what their problems are.

[34 : 28] We can testify, we lived in a violent place. There were fifteen houses around where we were. Every one of them was burgled except ours. Neighbors had their vehicles hijacked on the road.

We never knew when it was going to happen to us and it never did. And we believe that there were people standing with us in prayer and blessing the work. And we saw things happen in the lives of people in Africa.

I didn't see in my ministry in Scotland. If God makes you a missionary church, remember those who are out of sight. Bear them up before God.

Call on the power of God to come down and bless them. And lastly, they had a love for the needy. We read that there news came to them of a famine that was going to take place later on which actually took place in the time of Claudius. And it says then the disciples every man according to his ability determined to send relief to his brethren in Judea of which it says also they did.

[35 : 41] they're full of good ideas of what we should do. You know we should be doing this. We should be giving to that. Do we get on and do it? I like that verse. These words this they did.

Sending their gift by Barnabas and Saul. So one of the marks of the Christian church's arrival in the world was that the widows and the orphans suddenly found there was a body of people who bore the name of Christ who cared for them and who worked for them and who organized themselves as Stephen and his colleagues were organized as deacons to minister to them.

And think of the hospitals and so on and institutes in our nation that bear the name of Christian people because they had the ministry of Christ in their heart.

When Jesus speaks of those who have clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the hungry and given water to the thirsty and entertained the stranger, he says, that's the mark of your Christianity. He says, you see, as men as much as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. And also he says, and as much as you did it not to these my brethren, you did it not to me.

[37 : 09] Are we like Jesus? Do we love others for the sake of the one who loved us in all our need and loved us to that awful death on the cross?

Their new life was exhibited in their love for God, their love for the lost, and their love for the needy. Just like Jesus. no wonder those who saw these lives in that heathen environment had a new name for them.

These are the Christ ones. It was something new. It was written all over them. Now what about you and me? What name do we deserve? Called Christians.

Doubtless Jesus filled their talk. People heard them talking about him. Nor a bunion. They're all the responsible tinker of Bedford. What his life was touched by first of all was hearing women in the marketplace talking of the loveliness of Christ and awakened that hardened soul to a ministry, to a work of grace in his heart that produced the author of the Pilgrim's Progress and so many other things.

Do we speak of Jesus? You see it's a life that was full of him. You see he was their Lord. You see if you look at this passage you'll find the clue.

[38 : 35] He was their Lord. Not the preaching that they heard. It was about the Lord Jesus. Verse 20. It says the hand of the Lord was upon them.

In verse 22 they turned to the Lord and they were urged to cleave to the Lord. You see many people then were added to the Lord.

In that congregation in that community he was Lord in the life. And where Jesus Christ is Lord then you will see the result in a life that is surrendered to him when he's in charge he's on the throne.

Is he Lord in our lives? Is he Lord in our congregations? Is he Lord in our church? You know if he is not Lord of all he is not Lord at all.

May God bless our meditation on his word. Let us pray. Gracious Lord we bless you for the thrilling news of the advance of the church in these early days.

[39 : 42] We know you have not changed. We know your word is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. Lord we know Lord that the word of God is able to build us up and to give us an inheritance with them those who are sanctified.

Lord we pray that we may see in our day that powerful gospel changing lives and building us up. May it be the dominant thing in our lives that we may adhere to God's word and that Jesus may reign as Lord and King in every heart hear us O God pardon our sin for Jesus sake Amen We sing in closing in Psalm 119 verse 43 in the traditional Psalms the word of truth out of my mouth take now not utterly for on thy judgments righteous my hope shall still rely so shall I evermore so shall I keep forevermore thy love continually and sith that I thy precepts seek I'll walk at liberty I'll speak thy word to kings and I with shame will not be moved Psalm 119 verses 43 to 48 to the tune Belmont mor enacted for my name For all my judgment's righteous, my hope does still rely. So shall I keep forevermore thy law continually and save that I thy precepts seek. I'll walk at liberty. I'll speak thy word to kings and I with shame shall not be moot and will delight myself always in thy laws which I love.

[43 : 13] To thy commandments which I love, my hands lift up, I will.

And I will also meditate upon thy saturn still.

Now may grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest with and abide upon you each one, both now and evermore.

Amen.