

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR BIG MISSION

A Devotional Theology of Mission part 2

Acts 11

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

THAT is the Great Commission! We’re walking through a mini-series that’s looking at parts of the **book of Acts** to see how those lives and events help us to think about the idea of “mission”; how they help shape the way we live and breathe as citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus living in the mission of our King!

This isn’t a formal theology of missions (Missiology). It is a collection of little thoughts (“little” in the sense of *brief*) about our big mission! It’s a devotional theology of missions taken from parts of the book of Acts — observations and thoughts that answer the questions: What does living IN the mission of Jesus look like? What is the heartbeat of “mission”?

Last week we looked at portions of Acts 8 and 9 and saw what living IN the mission of Jesus looks like — what the heartbeat of “mission” is.

In our first installment we zeroed in on eleven little thoughts about our big mission found in Acts 8 and 9.

The overarching truth about our big mission is that **OUR MISSION IS JESUS’ MISSION**. We have been invited to be a part of His mission. The book of Acts begins with Luke saying that in his first treatise (the Gospel according to Luke) was a record of “all that Jesus BEGAN to do and teach”. The book of Acts is how Jesus **is** continuing HIS mission through the church — you and me — by the leading, gifting and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

We also thought about how

Mission happens along the way

Living on mission = “*Here I am, Lord*”

Mission is the natural response to meeting Jesus

Mission = Testimony by Transformation

Living on mission requires encouragers

This morning our launch point is Acts 11

Acts 11:19–26 (ESV) 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ 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, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ 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.

1. MISSION = INVADING BIG, DARK PLACES WITH THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

THIS little should shape the way we look at our mission in our horribly broken / dark world!

¹⁹ traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and **Antioch**, ²⁰ coming to **Antioch** ... preaching the Lord Jesus.

When we think of the major cities of the world, we think New York, London, Paris. In the 1st Century AD it was Rome, Alexandria, Antioch. Antioch was a big, dark, place. In Satan's war against the worship of the true living God on planet earth, Antioch was one of his crowning conquests! In the 1st Century AD Antioch ranked as the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. It was a stronghold of idolatry and the wickedness that accompanies it! Antioch was so dark — so corrupt — that it was actually described as a sewer that was polluting the capital of the pagan world, Rome, more than 1,300 miles away.

Sex was worshipped in Antioch. About five miles outside the city was the temple of Daphne, where sex was enthroned and worshipped through priestesses who were really religious prostitutes.

Antioch was home to hundreds of thousands of idol worshippers.

REMEMBER — Last we learned that Jesus came here on a mission: to seek and save the lost! He said that as the Father sent Him, He is sending us. If you're a Christian, you and I are a part of **THAT** mission. It's the great desire of the Holy Spirit to shine into the darkest places the light of the knowledge of the glory of the true and living God in the face of Jesus. We are a part of **THAT** mission!

The Mission of Jesus would invade THAT city! The Gospel would be **proclaimed** in **THAT** city and **penetrate** the darkness there. **A church** would be **planted** in **THAT** city. It was would be from **THAT** church in **THAT** city the Gospel would advance into Asia Minor and Europe and change the course of western civilization.

The Holy Spirit has left us the record of the Gospel invading that big, dark city because He knows that is easy for us to **feel overwhelmed** by the **massive** spiritual and moral darkness of fallen culture that **seems to be closing in** on us. He knows that it's easy to feel like we can't even begin to think of making even the tiniest dent in it. When we feel that way — remember: **Mission = Invading big, dark places with the light of the Gospel.**

Living **IN** the mission of Jesus / living **ON** mission with Jesus means that **you and I** should be **moving TOWARDS** the dark places — **even** the **biggest** and **darkest** ones because the light of the Gospel proclaimed and the light of Jesus shining through His people shines so brightly in a big, dark place. Think of iPhones in a darkened arena or stadium!

What a great day for us to hear from Joel about how Metro was a part of the Gospel of Jesus invading the darkness of the darkest neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey!

When you feel like there's no way the Gospel can break through the spiritual darkness in your own neighborhood — or your school or your workplace — remember: **Mission = Invading big, dark places with the light of the Gospel**

When you wonder if the Gospel can penetrate that hearts of individuals (spouse, kids, parents, friends) — remember this: You and I used to be miniature versions of Antioch

*Ephesians 5:8 NKJV For you **were** once **darkness**, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*

I'm a Christian today because someone living in the mission of Jesus invaded my life — he told me about Jesus and the *light of the knowledge of the glory of God shined* into MY DARKNESS *in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Our next little thoughts about our big Gospel tell us **HOW** the mission of Jesus advanced to THAT city — and **WHO** God used on that mission.

2. GOD MOVES US IN TO MISSION

Acts 11:19 Now those who were scattered

The sense of this Greek word is to “**move away** from each other — or **be moved** away from each other. In this case they were **being moved**.”

They were scattered.... **because of the persecution that arose over Stephen**

They **traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch**, as a matter of survival.

We don't want to miss this: They were in danger of being imprisoned, beaten and killed for loving Jesus and proclaiming the Gospel. While they were in the process of escaping — **along the way** (Mission happens along the way) they kept doing the very thing that made people want to throw them in jail, beat them and put them to death.

God still MOVES us INTO Mission that is waiting to happen. Sometimes He moves us internally — as we read His Word, as we are taught His Word (Danny Donnelly: Brother, you're preaching me out of Metro). And in those cases, we yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit and **we move**. We are **active** in it, deciding, making choices. We may or may not be aware of the mission God is moving us into; or the mission we do see isn't close to the what God is leading us into. But we're moving — and behind it all, **God is moving us into mission.**

But there are times when God moves us by allowing external things — things outside of our control — to move us. Loss of employment; changes in health; broken relationships (your own life or in the lives of loved ones). Unlike the former examples, we're not moving; we're **being moved**. It's not a move we want to make. It's not a move we understand. It's not a move we embrace. But we're being moved. Brothers and sisters, we need to remember, and we need to remind each other, that no matter what it is that is moving us or where it is we're being moved, God's got you! God's gone before you and there is mission for you **along the way** and there is mission waiting for you when you get there. There are men, women and children whose lives will be forever changed because God moved you into His mission

That's HOW the Gospel invaded the big, dark city of Antioch

Our next little thought about our big mission deals with the WHO of mission

3. MISSION INVOLVES A BUNCH OF NO-NAMES

We need to understand that by this moment in the history of Christianity recorded in **Acts 11** the Gospel has made its way from Jerusalem to

¹⁹**as far as Phoenicia** (in the area of present-day Lebanon, its primary cities being Tyre, Sidon, and Ptolemais) **and Cyprus** (which was 100 miles off the coast) **and Antioch** (approx. 300 miles from Jerusalem)

We know HOW they got there. They were scattered there!

But we have no idea WHO **they** were!

Look at the language Luke used —

¹⁹ **Now those** (no-names)

²⁰ **But there were some of them** (those scattered), **men of Cyprus and Cyrene** (no-names), **who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.**

The Mission of Jesus is carried out by a bunch of no-names

Both the HOW and the WHO of mission in Acts 11 is so counter-intuitive in a culture of celebrity and a culture of sophisticated strategies and marketing.

The Gospel advanced from Jerusalem to Cyprus and then to Antioch by way of “those” and “some” — not by Christian celebrities. It was advanced by “those” and “some” who had devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching, the fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers — but now they were **being moved away** from the apostles. Once scattered from Jerusalem they had no access to Peter’s Podcasts or the live streamed services from Jerusalem. The apostles’ doctrine was being carried in the hearts of the “those” and the “some!” The “no names” carried THE name! (Remember one of our little thoughts from last weeks study: Mission = Carrying the Name of Jesus). The “no-names” were now the containers of the Gospel t that had been proclaimed to them and explained to them!

We need to be so very careful to not allow the fallen culture of celebrity and sophisticated strategies to shape our understanding of mission.

There was no such thing as Christian Celebrities in the book of Acts. The first Christians recognized the authority of the apostles in the church and sat under their teaching — but the only big thing about the leaders in the early church was the target on their backs.

QUOTE: H.B. CHARLES *“We don’t necessarily need any more famous Christians. We need more faithful Christians”*

CLOSE WITH THIS — **The humility of Barnabas did WAY MORE than advance the mission of Jesus in Antioch.** Five times in the next 2 chapters we read about *Barnabas and Saul*. Each time it is in that order. What’s amazing is that there comes a moment in the book of **Acts** when it becomes *Saul and Barnabas*.

Barnabas the encourager would see that all of his loving encouragement of Saul was going to result in Saul taking the place of leader, and by the grace of God Paul would **define** the mission of Jesus in his **writings** — and **by his life** model what it looks like to leave and breathe the mission of Jesus!