

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR BIG MISSION
A Devotional Theology of Mission part 3
Acts 11:19-26

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

THAT is our BIG mission! This morning we’re in our 3rd installment of a mini-series that is essentially a collection of “little thoughts about our big mission”; thoughts born in my devotional reading through the **book of Acts** while Valerie and I were on vacation.

The Holy Spirit inspired a man named Luke to give us a selective history of 1st century Christianity (authentic Christianity). The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record the way 1st century Christians lived and the way 1st century Christians **lived in** the mission of Jesus to shape the way you and I process the idea of “mission” in the 21st century — to shape the way 21st century Christians live and breathe as citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus living in the mission of our King!

This 3rd installment is actually the unfinished part of last week as we began to look at **Acts 11:19–26**

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.

QUICK REVIEW

1. Last week's first little thought about our big mission should shape the way we understand our mission in our horribly broken / dark world!

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

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

Antioch was a very BIG and very DARK place. 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.

In our very first installment of this devotional theology of mission we learned foundational truth about our big mission: Our Mission is really Jesus' mission. Jesus came to **seek and save the lost!** God, who IS light, didn't retreat from the darkness of our world — He moved into it to seek and save the lost! . 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. Before Jesus returned to heaven, He said that *as the Father sent Him, He is sending us*. EVERY Christian is a part of THAT mission!

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.

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*.

That little thought about our big mission was followed by the **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.

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. as He speaks to us in the course of a day. 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). 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 easily embrace. But we're being moved.

God LOVED that very big, very dark city of Antioch SO much that He MOVED His people into that darkness — so that the light of Jesus would shine in that very

dark place; the light of Jesus shining through them, and the light of the Gospel proclaimed by them.

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. We NEVER want to miss the reality that our present discomfort is all about the mission of Jesus. We don't want to miss the beauty and the blessing of the mission because we can't see past our personal discomfort. There are men, women and children whose lives will be forever changed because God moved you into His mission

So we know HOW those 1st century Christians invaded the darkness of Antioch: They were *moved* — they were *scattered* there! But we have no idea WHO they were! Last week's final little thought about our big mission dealt with the WHO of mission

3. MISSION INVOLVES 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.

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

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.

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 our first study: Mission = Carrying the Name of Jesus).

The "no-names" were now the containers of the Gospel that had been proclaimed to them and explained to them!

QUOTE: H.B. CHARLES *"We don't necessarily need any more famous Christians. We need more faithful Christians"*

THIS MORNING we're picking up in our fourth little thought about our big mission from [Acts 11](#)

4. THE MISSION OF JESUS REQUIRES THE HAND OF JESUS

²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

This thought is going to come at us a number of times from a number of different angles along the way in this series —

Gospel work is God work!

It is God alone who can reveal to a man or woman the emptiness and fatal nature of idols. It is God alone who convicts men and women of the sin of setting up idols in the place of God — setting up their *Kingdoms of One* over and against the Kingdom of God. It is God alone who can shine into the heart of a man or woman the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. It is God alone who can forgive sin and give life to those who are spiritually dead. The reason a bunch of no-names were a part of the Gospel advancing is because the hand of the Lord was with them.

You can turn people to a human personality without the hand of the Lord; you can turn people to a church sub-culture without the hand of the Lord. But you can't turn people to the Lord without the hand of the Lord.

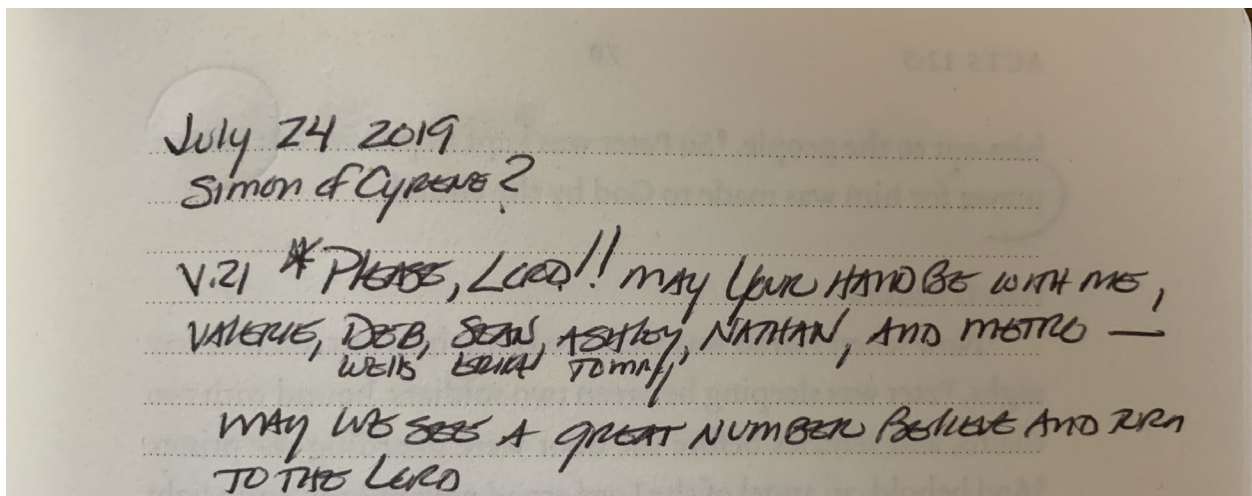
When the hand of God is upon us impossible things get accomplished! The book of Nehemiah is such a great living example of that. The book of Nehemiah is essentially the story of **One Man's Passion for the Mission of God**.

***Nehemiah 2:8** And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.*

***Nehemiah 2:18** And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work*

The phrase "the hand of the Lord was with them" is a reference to the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

Mission = our utter and desperate need for the power of the Holy Spirit; for *the hand of the Lord to be with us*.



I pray that these little thoughts about our big mission are shaping the way we live and breathe. A couple of weeks ago I said I said that it would be great if before our feet even hit the ground in the morning for us to say to Jesus: "Here I am Lord!" We could add to that little prayer: "May Your hand be on my life today!"

5. MISSION HAPPENS IN RESPONSE TO MISSION

Acts 11:22 The report of this (a great number who believed turned to the Lord) came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem ²².... and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Their report travelled 300 miles back to Jerusalem.

The Gospel had been proclaimed — men and women believed and turned to Jesus — and a church was birthed.

The report of men and women living in the mission of Jesus in Antioch moved the church in Jerusalem to respond and engage in the mission of Jesus in Antioch by **sending Barnabas**.

MISSION HAPPENS IN RESPONSE TO MISSION — From the very beginning of Metro we moved into mission in response to mission. Our mission in Brazil had its origin as the response to what John Hwang's report of what God was doing at the CC Bible College in Campo Mourao and in the city of Curitiba and Sao Vincente. In part — Brian Brodersen's ministry in the U.K. was in response to the reports I shared with him about what God was doing in England. Our mission in Cornwall was birthed out of Brian Brodersen's report of what God was doing in Creation Fest. Teams went on mission into Russia as the response to the reports of the needs reported to us by Far Reaching Ministries. Our plan to send a team to Scotland in October is the response of J.D.'s report of what God is doing in the hearts of the young adults at Gate Church in Dundee.

When you share your personal stories of what you have seen God do as **you** are living on mission others are moved to respond in mission.

6. MISSION = NURTURING AND BUILDING

Acts 11:22-23 they sent Barnabas to Antioch.... 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,

The very first followers of Jesus remembered how Jesus said that HE was building HIS church — that His church would be built upon the rock solid foundation of who He is — the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. **(Matthew 16:16-18)**

Those men who were with Jesus on that day in Caesarea Philippi knew exactly what the newly birthed believers and church in Antioch needed. They had seen 3,000 come to faith in Jesus on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and 5,000 thousand more in Acts 4. They devoted themselves to teaching them about Jesus! **So.... they sent Barnabas to Antioch** to do the same thing.

How did Barnabas nurture them build them up? Barnabas exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose!

Acts 11:23–24 KJV Who, when he came.... exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Exhortation brings encouragement and courage by pointing people to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus said that HE was building HIS church. If you're a Christian, you and I are a part of **that** mission.

Hebrew 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

*Jude 20 (NLT) But you, dear friends, must **build each other up** in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit,*

Acts 11:24 NLT Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith.

People were moved forward in their love for Jesus by this man's life and words. It is awesome to be around people who love Jesus and love each other; to be

around those who are excited about the Lord. That fuels and advances men and women in the mission of Jesus.

Acts 11:24 And many people were (added to) the Lord.

You **don't** have to be *full of the Holy Spirit and faith* to **fill a church**. But you **have** to be *full of the Holy Spirit and faith* to see men and women **added to the Lord**.

The church in Antioch was flourishing and living on mission. More and more people came to know Jesus. **So many** that Barnabas was moved to another mission. Which leads us to our 7th little thought about our big mission

7. HUMILITY ADVANCES MISSION

Acts 11:25–26 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.

Acts 11 is some 10-14 years after Saul's conversion and some 7-11 years after Barnabas took Saul of Tarsus to meet the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

Barnabas was a blessing to the mission of God in Antioch. But he knew that the mission of Jesus in Antioch was beyond his own gifting and resources. He knew that for the church in Antioch to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus he needed help — and the **FIRST** man he thought to ask was Saul of Tarsus. He knew that God had especially gifted and called Paul to teach and proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was so convinced of the need and so convinced Saul was the man to meet the need that he went to Tarsus to look for him; literally *to hunt him up*. One commentator said “the original word suggests a laborious search on Barnabas' part.”

(Me and Danny in Bradford — *I know what I do — I know what you do. What you do is beyond my gifting — what you do will enable the people I've been called to pastor to flourish*)

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!