

Acts 11:19-30

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 June 2025

Preacher: Tim Suffield

- [0 : 0 0] My name's Tim. I'm part of the team here. We are going to be continuing our preaching series in the book of Acts this morning.
- I'm in Acts chapter 11. I'm going to jump straight into it. So if you want to grab your Bible, turn to Acts chapter 11. I'm going to read from verse 19. Maybe I'll give you one sentence of context.
- So we've been seeing through this series in Acts, the believers in Jesus face lots of difficulty. We're about to see them be scattered all across the world.
- But we see that wherever they go, they tell their friends about Jesus. They tell people they meet about Jesus. And his word increases, and he is good to them. So as this starts, the last few weeks we've been seeing Peter have an interesting encounter with a man called Cornelius.
- But a few weeks before, we saw a man called Stephen stand in Jerusalem and tell people about Jesus and be stoned to death for it. And that's the context here.
- [1 : 0 3] It mentions Stephen right at the beginning. Because that happened, people started to run away. So let me read. This is Acts chapter 11 from verse 19. 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.
- But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, that's the Greeks, also preaching the Lord Jesus.
- And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.
- When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.
- For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.
- [2 : 1 4] And when he 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.
- Now, in those days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them, named Agabus, stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.
- This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
- Well, this is the word of the Lord. So what's going on? They are scattered, the people of God, due to persecution. In other words, they run away.
- Because they think if they stay put, someone might kill them. And they're probably right. But what they do is they run. They tell everybody they meet about Jesus. That's not fear.

[3 : 18] It might be practical, but it turns out to be the power of God, acting through terrible things that are happening, to send them into different situations.

And they just, they tell everyone they meet about Jesus when they get there. Now, these are all Jewish people who come to know Jesus. They start off by telling other Jewish people. As we've seen in the previous chapter in Acts, a few non-Jewish people, what the Bible calls Gentiles, have been saved by Jesus.

But then this group who arrive in Antioch, they just sort of tell everybody. And they find that lots of people who are not Jewish also come to know Jesus.

And they're like, oh my word, he saved them too. And they're full of the Spirit. And they're delighted. And they keep doing it. Seeing that the grace of God falls on anyone who will turn to him and trust him.

So they're in this place, Antioch. It is the third biggest city in the Roman Empire. This is a significant metropolis full of people from all over the world.

[4 : 21] And they find that just as they're there, they kind of gossip the gospel to people they meet. Lots of people get rescued.

You see, the church is the hope of the world. I wonder if you think of her like that. Jesus' plan to rescue the world is the local church.

It's you. It's a small group of people scattered around the hall because they don't want to sit next to each other because it's too warm. Who found their lives turned upside down by Jesus.

Is his great plan to turn the whole cosmos on its head so that one day he is all in all and all. Bow and kneel at the name of Jesus.

That's his plan. Now you might want to look around and think, I don't know if it's the best one. But it is his plan. We are his plan to rescue the world.

[5 : 26] And, actually more than that, the church, so this local church and indeed every other local church all around the world, worshipping Jesus today, are his beloved bride.

The Bible often uses this analogy of husband and wife. In the Old Testament, it would have been God and Israel. And they knew it becomes Jesus and the church. But, we're his bride waiting for marriage.

He loves you. He loves us. We're actually his favorite thing in the world is the church. Which, again, if you look at the church sometimes, you might think, I don't get it.

But Jesus loves us. We have to learn to see with his eyes. The church is his great idea. The church is his great idea. I'm going to kind of, hopefully, try and explore that over the next few minutes.

But, what happens first is that the people, they arrive in Antioch and boldly, they gossip the gospel to everyone they meet. They stop them and they say, as my friend Glenn Scrivener likes to teach people, they're just chatting and someone says, I'm struggling with this in my life.

[6 : 35] And they say, that's what I love about Jesus. You should hear about how he helped me with that. That's what I love about Jesus, they start saying to each other. Wherever they go, just dropping it into conversation and finding that people say, who?

And then they start to tell them the gospel. And it's here that they're first called Christians. That, by the way, is an insult.

It wasn't intended to be a compliment. They kind of needed a name because before that, they'd all been Jewish. So, everyone else just called them the Jews. But, all of a sudden, it's like, they're clearly not Jews because all sorts of different people are gathering together to worship this guy they call Jesus the Christ.

Okay. They call them Christians. Little Christs. And the church, it probably took 150 years or so. But the church went, you know what? That's a great name.

We'll have that. And then 2,000 years later, that's what we still call ourselves, little Christs. The followers of Jesus. They call themselves other things at the time.

[7 : 41] The believers, the way. But it's what the Bible says about us. John, in the book of Revelation, in Revelation chapter 2, says we will have a new name. And sometimes people get very het up about the idea of what new name is Jesus going to give me?

The new name he's given you is Christian. He's given you his own name. Such that we bear his name wherever we go. There's actually something quite weighty to that.

But it also means that we get to join his family. Because Jesus becomes our older brother when we say we'll trust in him. The father adopts us so that we can also call him father.

And he treats us just like we're the son. We're welcomed into God's family. And so he gives us his family name.

He calls us Christians. So they've been doing this. They've been gossiping the gospel everywhere they go. Which we need to get better at.

[8 : 46] They've been doing that everywhere they go. And the church down in Jerusalem, which is kind of the mother church, hears about this. And they think, okay, I think this is probably a good thing.

But we've also kind of heard that some of the Gentiles are joining in. And again, we're kind of cautiously open to this idea. But we'd like to check it out. So they send Barnabas, who later in the Acts is called an apostle.

They send Barnabas up to see what's what. And he is delighted. Oh, excuse me. The wind keeps turning my pages.

He is delighted. What does it actually say? He's glad. He saw the grace of God. He is glad. And he exhorts them to remain faithful to the Lord. So he rejoices.

But he notices a few things that they need. Lots more people become Christians. And he's like, ah, we need a teacher. So he goes and grabs Saul, who we last met as a man who had been once persecuting Christians.

[9 : 51] He was instrumental in Stephen, who we started the passage with, being stoned. Paul held everyone's coat so they could get on with throwing the rocks. And then he was traveling.

And he saw Jesus. He was struck blind by the glory of Jesus. Immediately came to follow him on the spot. Another believer was sent to him. And then his sight was restored.

And then we haven't heard about him since. And you might think that was like five weeks ago. I'm not that. But this is actually ten years later. Ten years have passed. What's Saul been doing?

He's preparing. Studying the scriptures. Learning philosophy. Though he was trained in those things already.

And Barnabas goes, you know what these people need? They need Saul. He's a teacher. He will come and teach them the word of God. So he comes to train leaders.

[10 : 47] He comes to teach all these new Christians the words. He comes to open the scriptures to them. Which for them would be the Old Testament. The New Testament hasn't yet been written. We're in the early 40s AD at this point.

And show them how the Bible is all about Jesus. So Barnabas comes and says, what you guys need is you need more of the word. And then, we're not told if Barnabas goes to get them.

But what we are told is, after we've got the guy come to teach the word, we have a bunch of prophets, including Agabus, come up from Jerusalem to Antioch. So the church needed the word and the spirit together.

And this Agabus, he prophesied a famine, which happened in about the years 45 to 47, which allowed the believers to prepare by being generous and giving money to poorer believers down in Jerusalem.

Because they responded to the prophetic word that said, there's going to be a famine. There was very bad famine a couple of years later. And so they repaid and were generous. Word and spirit together.

[12 : 05] And that's Jesus' great idea. That his church, his bride that he loves, he's like, I'm going to give you two things.

I'm going to give you my word, so you can read exactly what I think about pretty much everything. And figure out how you should live. And I'm going to give you my spirit to fill you and change you, so that I'm always with you like God in your bones.

He's like, that's Jesus' plan. Take a bunch of people who are broken and don't really have much to show for themselves, at least speaking for myself anyway, and gift them the very words of God and the very presence of God, and say, go and do it, guys.

Which could sound scary. It's actually a little bit like bring your kid to work day. I think the Christian faith. I don't know if you've ever thought of it like that. But imagine, particularly imagine if you worked quite a manual job.

And so there's maybe a guy who's a builder, say, and he's brought his son with him to work that day. I mean, you're probably not allowed to with health and safety, but ignore that for the purpose of the image.

[13 : 21] And his son is so happy to be there. And he's got a big hat on, and he's got the kind of fluorescent jacket that goes down to his knees on. And he's just so excited by helping Dad out. And Dad's like, we need to put a nail in here.

Holds the hammer. And his son just kind of wraps his hand very gently around it. And Dad knocks the nail in. But the little boy is like, I built this house. Because I kind of put my hand on my dad's.

That's the Christian life, right? That's Christian ministry. That's the church. Jesus says, yeah, go and take the well. But by the way, what I really mean is I'm going to do my thing. I'd really love you to come along and participate in it if you'd like to.

Because what happens when the little kid builds the house? That guy built a house. His dad is so excited. That is what the father lives for, right? He lives for the little boy.

He's like, I built a house. Dad isn't like, no, you didn't. I hit all the nails in. He's like, yes, you did. Look at what my son did. And that is how the father feels about us when we do stuff for him in the faith.

[14 : 26] He's like, well, I did it. He doesn't sit there thinking, well, I actually did it. Of course he did it. He does everything. He's not proud. He's about the only person that has a right to be proud. But he invites us to join with him and participate.

Put our hands on his. And the tools he gives us to do that with are the words and the spirit joined together. I'm not entirely sure where I'm going now, friends.

I've got some more notes. This is not the message that I prepared to speak. I'd written something which I'm sure was great and thought through and, you know, did what messages are supposed to do or technically and work from point to point.

And we wrote this this morning. I'd like to tell you a little bit. I have no idea if this is actually helpful, if I'm honest. But I'd say a little bit about what happened to me on Thursday. And then I may or may not talk about these two paragraphs I've got written down.

So we've been away, a number of us, here at the Commission Leadership Conference this week, which is the movement of churches that we're part of, one of the parts of New Frontiers. And on Thursday evening, a man named Mike Betts, who leads a movement called Relational Mission, which is another part of New Frontiers.

[15 : 44] He might be known to some of you. He was preaching, I think, very helpfully. Lots there that the elders need to chew on and we're keen to think about. I don't particularly want to talk about that yet. We need to figure out what we're doing.

But he welcomed the spirit at the end. And I had an encounter with God like I haven't had in ten years. And the phrase he kept using was, I'm ruined for anything but the manifest presence of Jesus.

And I very much feel the same. And in some ways, actually my initial reaction emotionally after this encounter with God was sadness.

Anger, anger, even, at the last ten years, at myself. At the many, we've been in three different churches in the last ten years. But at the kind of, what happens?

Why did we allow ourselves to grow lukewarm? Why did I allow myself to grow lukewarm? Ten years ago, we were in our late twenties in a pretty bonkers setting, to be honest.

[17 : 03] Because, you know, the elders thought it might be fun. I think I was an elder at the time. We fasted for 40 days because we kind of felt Jesus saying, this will be fun. It wasn't fun.

Actually, Helen and I didn't do 40 days. We had about three days a week for six weeks, which is not particularly hardcore. And then, funnily enough, if your church fasted for 40 days, the Spirit fell and turned everything upside down.

We planted churches and that's part of where we ended up in Birmingham. And all sorts happened. But before we got into all of that, we enjoyed such wonderful times in the presence of Jesus.

That I wasn't a Christian in the 90s when the move of the Spirit came. Many of you will remember it. I was in church, but I didn't become a Christian until 99. And I wasn't in a charismatic setting.

But I don't think it was quite that. But the way people tell the story is it was a little bit like that. This little taste just in our church for a few months. But why would we not seek that?

[18 : 11] Why would not always that intensity, sure. But why would we not seek the manifest presence of Jesus? Because he loves us. And he wants to be with us.

And he wants us to adhere deeply to his word. And then we find that as we do, that's when the Holy Spirit comes. And we find ourselves caught up on his mission and matured. I'm not 100% sure why I'm 12.

No, I know why I'm telling you this. I'm telling you this because as I walked out of that meeting, we ended up walking back to our hotel with Guy Miller, who some of you will know used to lead commission. He's recognized as an apostle among us.

I was just telling Guy about it. And he just looked at me and said, tell your church on Sunday. And so I am a man under authority. And I am telling you. I think he has more for us.

I really think he has more for us. The one thing God said to me in the middle of this encounter when I was kind of not really able to stand up and just bawling my eyes out, it was, don't settle.

[19 : 29] Don't settle. Don't settle. I don't think I thought I had. But don't settle. That is my, again, this is not coming with application.

This is just me saying, this is me and what happened to me this week. There might be application at some point. Don't settle. Don't settle. I wonder if he's saying that to anyone else.

We see in this passage two results of them being a word and spirit church.

They mature and they're sent. And I'm pretty sure that's what church is for. To worship Jesus. But we mature and we're sent.

Jesus gives us the word and the spirit so that we mature and we're sent. His desire is that, it says in Ephesians, that the church grows up into, excuse me, that's me, the church grows up into a mature person in Jesus.

[20 : 47] Jesus. That's his great desire for us. But also that we're sent to the ends of the earth and the end of the street.

We see at least an example of that in the story I read, that they respond to prophecy by opening their pockets in deep generosity.

That is an expression of maturity. Maturity is more than just generosity, but it's not less than. They want to help their brothers in Jerusalem. They kind of realize, I guess, that their money isn't theirs, that it belongs to their brothers, because it really belongs to God.

They get what Paul later writes in 2 Corinthians, that Jesus, though he was rich, became poor, so that in his poverty we might become rich.

And they let that get so into their souls that it even reaches their bank accounts. But it's not just that. He wants every part of your life.

[21 : 57] Skin deep Christianity is so dull. But he wants us to mature. And if you're new to this, that's great.

Keep following him. But if you've been following him for a while, I reckon he has more for you. I reckon there's something else he'd like to pinpoint. And then not only do they mature, but they're sent.

And that actually wasn't in that passage, but the immediate next thing that happens is that Paul and Barnabas are sent onto what we... Sorry, Saul. He's not called Paul yet. Saul and Barnabas are sent onto what we later call Paul's missionary journeys.

So essentially, they go all around the known world, all around the Mediterranean rim, and they plant churches everywhere. And why do they do that? Because they really love Jesus. Because he has got hold of them in the Word and the Spirit, and we send them.

It's not unlike us sending Vinnie... Vinnie's downstairs, but us sending Vinnie and Diana to plant a church in North Portugal. That, in some ways, more like the believers at the start. Circumstance sends them somewhere.

[23 : 10] And so they're like, all right, we'll plant a church. It's beautiful. There will be others in the room, I'm sure, who go church planting in some fashion at some point.

There will be others who are sent. But because we follow Jesus, the sent one, who the Father sent from heaven to earth, we're all sent. Not all of us to Portugal, but maybe just the end of your road.

But you are sent to bring the fragrance of Jesus wherever you go. To be part of God's mission to the world.

But there's no pressure because it's bringing kids to work day, right? There's absolutely no pressure at all. Jesus is just like, do you want to join in? It's not like, he won't accomplish his mission if you don't go do the thing.

Oh, he's the Lord. He can do what he likes. He'll get everything done that he wants to get done, but you won't get to join in with it. You're the one who'll miss out, not Jesus. Do you want to participate?

[24 : 17] Do you want to join in? Whatever the thing is he's asking you to do, and it will be as many different things as there are people in the room, but there will be something for everyone. When we get word and spirit together in Jesus' great idea, we become bold, we get matured, we get sent.

Because church is not for us. It's for the Lord. And it's for the person sat next to you that you come to share your gift.

And it's for the person who isn't quite here yet. But mostly it's for the Lord. Because he loves his bride. Okay.

I don't quite know what we're doing now, my friends. But I feel like I should be praying rather than talking. Jason, do you and the band want to come? And then we might figure out what we're doing, out loud in public, because that's okay.

We don't have to have it all together. Friends, I'm not, what I am definitely not saying is, Tim is the great anointed man who has had an encounter with God who would like to share it with you.

[25 : 31] That's not this. But I do know a great anointed man. His name's Jesus. And he would like to share his spirit with you. And I have some faith that if we pray, that might well be what happens.

How about we stand together, if you're able. Jesus, I'm not quite sure what I'm doing, to be honest.

I know, I'm probably not supposed to admit that. But, would you come and be with us? Help us as we try to lead. Friends, why don't, why don't you maybe open your hands to the Lord, maybe close your eyes, it might help.

Just if you have any sense, well you might not, maybe I'm just here and you're like, oh, Tim's a bit emotional today, okay. But, if you have any sense that, I would, there's something I want more of.

[illegible]

[28 : 12] Jesus, we ask for more. Thank you so much as your spirit gently rests on us. I could just see people starting to encounter you around the room.

But we ask for more.