

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

Acts 11 - Antioch

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¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11-NIV)

Bobby Flay. Iron Chef. Gordan Ramsey. Top Chef. One of the phenomena in the food industry is rise of cooking programs and cooking celebrities. Even the average home cook can find recipes on the internet but even more importantly, they can watch videos as to how to make a Michelin star meal.

But not just a delicious meal, meals that you used to find only in fine dining, now can be served nightly on your dinner table-beef wellington, molten lava cake. Eggs Benedict.

But what if all you did was collect recipes. When people come to your house, you show them 100's of amazing recipes, crepes suzettes, southern fried chicken, and alligator gumbo.

You are so excited to show your friends how you have catalogued your recipes, put the recipes in order according to sweet and savory and even identified the recipes by which ones fit with each season.

Would you be impressed? Would you be willing to pay top dollar for them to reproduce that bonanza of recipes at your house? Would you whip out your iPhone and start taking pictures of this unbelievable catalog of recipes? No. No. No.

What would you do? You would ask, where is the food? I thought you were cooking tonight. Where is the white chocolate mousse you bragged about?

And I heard your specialty at Christmas is minced meat, cherry chutney?

In many ways God's people, Christ followers go to church every weekend and collect recipes, we call them sermons.

Recipes without cooking are like having sermons without transformation.
Sermons without change.

There are the rivers God's people crossed. They are the names of the gates that Joshua marched around. There are people that Jesus healed. The 4 P's and the 5 forces.

Sermons but, no transformation. When you are going down for the 3rd time, how is knowing the name of an Israeli river or Jerusalem gate going to keep you from drowning?

Recipes but no beef wellington. Recipes but no molten lava cake. Recipes but no eggs benedict. Having recipes without doing any cooking impresses no one.

What? You are afraid if you cook, it might not look like the recipe.

If you cook it, you might become an iron chef, and you don't want to show up your spouse.

Come on stop making excuses for not cooking and start making some fabulous food. Stop collecting sermons and start experiencing a supernatural Christian life full of Holy Spirit power.

When Christ followers neglect change and transformation it leaves them drifting out to sea without a rudder or sail. The net result is that you are tossed around at the mercy of the waves and wind.

Discovering God's purpose for your life from this text today, is the most important discovery you will make this Labor Day weekend. So, don't just listen to a sermon, learn from the sermon how to experience an amazing transformation.

Ok, lets meet these new Gentile believers that are added to the family of God in Antioch. Let's read right from the text.

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. (Acts 11-NIV)

The death of Stephen is not easily forgotten from chapter 8. Those Christians who give their life for martyrdom will never be forgotten.

Prior to Stephens death, Christianity had stayed close to family, close to Jerusalem, close to home. With the death of Stephen Jewish-Christians traveled as far as Phoenicia (150 miles), Cyprus (250 miles) and even all the way to Antioch (300 miles).

Jerusalem to Antioch is the distance from Wichita to just past Colby, Kansas. Notice the text tells us that those who took the gospel north because of persecution only spread the word to Jews.

The theme of the book of Acts is Acts 1:8 (NIV), ⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

If you decide to live in the power of Acts 1:8, and the supernatural that goes along with it, the net result in your life will be Acts 8:1-that time a great persecution came against the church.

Nobody likes persecution, but Jesus said it will happen to His disciples.

If you obey Acts 1:8, then you can expect Acts 8:1. All who live Godly in Christ will suffer persecution. That is a promise of God. Do you like the promises of God, live for Christ, and suffer persecution.

You will be laughed at.

You will be marginalized.

You will be rejected.

Let's meet some of these followers of Jesus in the church of Antioch. These are Christians who were **persecution-escapees** who fled and stopped running in Antioch. Persecution is like stomping on a fire with your boot and trying to put out the fire, but all you end up doing is spreading fiery embers all around.

²⁰ *Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11)*

Antioch was one of the most beautiful cities in the Roman empire and one of the largest with a population of over 500,000. Antioch enjoyed a Mediterranean climate of balmy air and rose fragrances filled the streets. This is possibly the home of Luke the author of Luke-Acts. Antioch was wealthy and people moved from all over the Roman world to share in its wealth.

It was cosmopolitan in the arts, religion and enjoyed global banking. Antioch was strictly pagan and filled with many temples. These temples featured ritual prostitution, the moral practices of those in Antioch were in the tank.

This is the first church where Gentile believers filled the pew and made up the leadership. The church of Antioch was the first predominantly Gentile church.

The church grew so fast, that it was completely absent of traditional Jewish practices. Manners, clothing style and hair length, which was so important to Jews, was tossed out the window, for the sake of fellowship with Gentiles.

Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians ate together, worshipped together, studied God's word together and fellowshiped together. For the first time, Jews and Gentiles worshipped around a simple mutual faith in Jesus Christ as they blazed a trail that would become the model for Paul's many missionary journeys ahead.

Churches like Antioch would pop up all over the Roman world like Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatian, Philippi and eventually in Rome itself.

Antioch church provided a model recipe for new faith in Christ free of Jewish law. I see **3 ingredients** that I want to possess as a Christ follower attending a Gentile church called Bethel Life Center.

They lived in God's grace.

They studied God's word.

They were generous with God's money.

Who wants to be that kind of Christ follower?

If you are unsure of where to focus your growth efforts, are unsatisfied with your faith, faith seems more floundering than fantastic, more wobbly than wonderful, more puny than powerful let me give you the **ingredients** for the best recipe of faith straight from Acts 11.

A Christian faith that will change the world of Antioch.

Who wants to make a difference in your world?

Who wants seekers and investigators to be attracted to your faith?

Who wants to win over temptation, pride, and anxiety?

If you want that kind of faith then, you can join the membership of the Antioch church. Oh, men sit on the left. Ladies wear a head cover.

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full

of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11-NIV)

When Barnabas went to church in Antioch, he noticed something remarkably different than churches back in the synagogues of Jerusalem. These Antiochian Christians seem to know nothing of the strict Jewish code of Moses.

Why? because they have grown up outside the influence of Judaism. Remember for the longest time Jews could **not stand** Gentiles, but now **they are standing** in worship together.

...he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:23b-NIV)

Barnabas worshipped God with thanksgiving as he declared to God, I have seen your grace poured out on the Gentiles. I have seen your new people of faith, free of a bunch of dos and don'ts. **(glad and encouraged)**

God I am available to offer encouragement without guilt.

God I am available to offer training without pressure to perform.

God I am available to be there alongside in their hour of need.

The Antioch church offered God's gift of grace to all who wanted it. God's invitation to you today is to ...**Allow** others to see the grace of God in you.

^{23a} *When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, ... (Acts 11-NIV)* You are saved by grace, but you serve in grace.

Grace is receiving unlimited favor although you have done nothing to deserve it. Did you know? Grace is not enjoyed or even wanted by everyone. It disturbs so many. It seems too good to be true, or they would rather work for everything they get.

God's grace, when it is fully welcomed and deeply embraced, it transforms people and rearranges the human heart profoundly and permanently. Grace removes self-sufficiency, one rung of the ladder at a time. Plank by plank. Confidence in self and pride cannot co-exist and co-labor in a grace filled heart.

God's grace when it finds a home in your heart, turns you into a gracious person. God's grace when you own it and it arrests you, turns you into a forgiving person. A quick to forgive type of person.

No other religion offers **free forgiveness** and a **new life** for those who have done nothing to deserve it.

Every religion is a bartering system; if I do this, God will do that. I am either saved by works (what I do), emotions (what I experience) or knowledge (what I know).

Christianity has no hint of negotiation. Because of sin, man has no grounds on which to negotiate. All religions say, “you, can save you.” Jesus announces, “you can’t save yourself, bad plan. My death on the cross can save you. Best and only plan!”

On the basis of this truth, Christianity towers over every other religion in the world. And it all happens by grace. A grace created by God and freely given to man. Grace is a gift not an achievement.

Nobody-not Buddha or Mohamed or anyone else can offer grace. It can only be offered by God the Father whose son Jesus Christ died an atoning death and offers grace freely. Freely to all who believe and receive.

Grace means that there is nothing you can do to make God love you any **less**-not racism, not murder, not pornography, not stealing, not gluttony and not even betrayal. Grace means that God already loves you as much as an All-Forgiving and Inclusive God can possibly love.

And the opposite is true-there is nothing we can do to make God **love us more**. Ok, let’s read on.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11-NIV)

Antioch was known for being pleasure seeking. Promiscuous sexually. It was the red-light district of the eastern Roman world. Perhaps only surpassed by the Corinthian church. It was a moral cesspool, so these new believers needed the moral truth of God’s word.

Hey, if you are Christ follower, and living together, either get married or separate.

If you are a Christ follower, no sex before marriage, that is part of God’s plan for marriage, it is a covenant marriage, keeping the marital bed pure.

The Antioch church unleashed the power of God’s Word.

These Antiochian believers got rocked every weekend by God’s word.

Think about when you first became a Christian. Like every week, you were either troubled by God’s word, healed by God’s word or tortured by God’s word, because you wanted the gift of salvation and forgiveness of sins, but giving up those areas of your life...

.... was now about deciding if you will live making it a priority to look like Jesus, act like Jesus, feel like Jesus, love like Jesus.

You only believe that part of God's Word that you will obey.

Appreciate that God has given you Bible teachers to grow your faith.

Solomon reminds us that God's word get us moving. We see this in Eccl 12:11, it is like a goad and a firmly embedded nail. God's word gets us moving and God's word is firmly embedded into our lives.

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails — given by one shepherd. (Ecclesiastes 12:11-NIV)

The Bible is more than a book of history, poetry, and stories of Jesus. The Bible can unleash God's power:

The Word of God-gives life, builds faith, produces change, disables discouragement, dismembers pride, heals hurts, builds character, transforms pain, overcomes anxiety, it demolishes depression, scares the devil, activates miracles, infuses joy, invites hope, releases power, cleanses the mind and offers eternal life. Hurray for God's word.

²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11-NIV)

The church at Antioch was a generous church. A giving church. They were eager to support their brothers and sisters in the mother church. The church could not stop the famine from happening, but it could provide relief for those in need.

The Jewish believers from Jerusalem had brought the gospel to Antioch, so Antiochian Christians should respond out of the gratitude of giving.

This insight is not talked about enough in church: if your family and life has been blessed by the local church, you are to bless the local church back with material blessings.

Galatians 6:6 (NIV) Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

How does this work today for Christians? It was only right that the Gentile believers in Antioch send material help to their Jewish brothers in Jerusalem.

The Antioch church allowed their giving to be a source of God's provision.

The pattern of giving for New Testament Christians has been modeled by the Jews for 1000's of years. It is called the law and love of the 10%. Let me show you. In the Old Testament, one story sets the pace. Sets the stage.

A famine was taking place and God's people were starving to death. It even got so bad that people were doing the cannibal thing. So, God shines the spotlight on a little widow, who is going the city gate to gather few sticks and cook a last meal for the family and then die!

She meets Elijah at the city gate, and he tells her to go home and cook him a meal, and he will come to her house and eat with her.

¹³ Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son." (1 Kings 17-NIV)

Remember this thought- Feed me first. Elijah is telling the widow to feed him first. **But** first make a small load of bread for me...

Now tuck that away, feed me first. We need to learn that money does not have little legs, and it just gets up and runs away. Money does not have a soul.

Your money behaves because God is your source, and your job is your resource. God is your source; your earning potential is your resource.

Your bank is your resource. The government is your resource. Your dividends, stocks and retirement are your resources.

God is your source; Textron and teaching is your resource.

God is your source; truck driving and telemarketing is your resource.

God is your source; therapist and tailor is your resource.

God is your source; lawyering and laboring is your resource.

God is your source; army and amazon is your resource.

God is your source; baby sitting and baby delivering is your resource. Say it with me. I will say it first, then you!

God is your source, everything else is your resource.

Now, that is a head popper. This teaching is the core to managing your money. This teaching is essential to making your money behave. This teaching is essential to paying your bills.

In the Old Testament part of the bible, God as your source is the ground level to making your money behave. So, here is my question (s) for Bethel Life Center, as we conclude, ...for Danice and me, ...for the leadership of BLC,

...for the body of believers who call this home, whether you gather weekly in person or for those who are on-line,

Pastor Ken: Will Bethel Life Center be racially inclusive in offering God's salvation?

Bethel's response: Yes, at Bethel Life Center I will be racially inclusive in offering salvation to all.

Pastor Ken: Will Bethel Life Center be radically inviting in offering God's grace?

Bethel's response: Yes, at Bethel Life Center I will be radically inviting as I live out God's grace.

Pastor Ken: Will Bethel Life Center be responsible to invest daily in God's Word?

Bethel's response: Yes, at Bethel Life Center I will be responsible to invest daily in God's Word.

Pastor Ken: Will Bethel Life Center be redemptively invested in giving my time, treasure, and talents for God's purposes?

Bethel's response: Yes, at Bethel Life Center I will be redemptively invested in giving my time, treasure, and talents for God's purposes.