**Unstoppable - wk 18 – The First “Christians”**

**Acts is Jesus: The Sequel. Luke Vol 2 – The “what now?”**

**Acts 1:8 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.”**

**What follows is supernatural growth and intense persecution. Yet they are unstoppable.**

**Last wk 10 yrs after Jesus’ resurrection the first gentile is saved.**

**Those not Jewish are coming to faith. Just as Jesus said.**

**The next part of this chapter jumps 3-5 yrs. Churches are now planted among gentiles. This is about the first one.**

**(show map) Acts 11:19 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. (Before the events of Peter & Cornelius – it was only among the Jews) gentiles.)**

**(Word got out – God is saving gentiles) 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, (show map) 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.**

**We are never told their names. 1st cross cultural missionaries (Gentiles) even before Paul. Not apostles, just ordinary men with a heart for the lost. Heroes of the faith - unknown.**

**Why Antioch as the first mission field? (pics)**

**It was only natural moving out from Jerusalem and strategic.**

**What is Antioch like?**

**At the time - ½ million people. 300 miles north of Jerusalem.**

**20 miles from the Mediterranean. Multiethnic community.**

**3rd largest city in the Roman Empire. (1-Rome and 2-Alexandria). Gateway to the east. Big business, commerce, and immorality hub.**

**Many Turned to God (Why?) 2 major reasons**

**\*\* The message was clear – they preached the Lord Jesus!**

**Acts 11:19 “telling them (preaching) the good news about the Lord Jesus.”**

**They did nor preach politics, experiences, traditions, signs and wonders, or a cult of personalities – they preached JESUS!**

**Different cultures – one Christ / Different locations – one Christ.**

**Different ethnicities – one Christ / There is only one cross!!!**

**They understood it’s all about the cross of Jesus.**

**Jesus was preached by faith and repentance – and God worked!**

**God opened doors and hearts - God convicts and redeems!**

**21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed (that is faith) and turned to the Lord. (That is repentance)**

**\*\* Unless the Lord’s hand is working – there will be no real fruit**

**Simply - The Lords hand was on it**

**Reason, debates, teaching, meetings, services, scheduled revivals and conferences… unless the Lord’s hand is working people will not turn.**

**You can turn their interests, get people to raise their hands, join a church, volunteer, take classes, and show up - but they cannot authentically turn to the Lord – without the hand of the Lord.**

**(John 6:44) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them… (1 Cor 12:3) No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.**

**The Lord’s hand was moving. Gods is redeeming among the nations!**

**22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, (you’ll never guess what’s happening?) and they (the apostles) sent Barnabas to Antioch. (from Cyprus)**

**23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad (again this is totally the work of God – let’s celebrate what God is doing!! He was not jealous or envious of it) 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.**

**Who is Barnabas? (Nickname – means son of encouragement)**

**As we walk through Acts it is difficult to imagine where we would be if it were not for him and his leadership - Who was he?**

**A cousin to John mark – Barnabas was a disciple of Jesus**

**Acts 4 – introduced and mentioned for his sacrificial generosity**

**Acts 9 - welcomed / helped the disciple Saul when no one else was**

**Acts 11 - a good man (character) full of the Holy Spirit and faith!**

**What follows is many more times - his influence is undeniable**

**The Barnabas Factor (What was it about Barnabas?)**

**24 “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith…”**

**I love this simple but powerful description of Barnabas.**

1. **He lived a life of good character**

**Good character, honest, trustworthy, reliable, lived an honorable life – had a good reputation with others.**

1. **He had a deep authentic faith in Jesus**

**He was rooted in a deep genuine faith in Christ. Man of faith and filled with eh Holy Spirit – fruit of the spirit and power.**

**He was the real deal.**

1. **He did not seek a name or title, only opportunities to serve**

**With the selling of his property, to helping Saul, now this… How can I help. Put me in coach – I’m ready wherever you think best.**

**He saw God working outside the box of his tradition - he was not scared off by the differences but focused on the essentials.**

1. **He lived with eternity in mind**

**23 He “encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts”**

**He encouraged them to stay true in light of what was to come - temptation and potential persecution.**

**\*\* He started with the end in mind. You will have trials and trouble – Jesus said so, but we have to look further than that – we look at the final destination = the kingdom of God.**

**It will all be worth it – all of it. He told them, “Remain true to the Lord w/ all your heart!” People will come and go – life will change – people will disappoint you – tragedies will try to sidetrack you – but the LORD is faithful - But remain true to the LORD!!**

**Barney is in Antioch for a long while - disciples them as one who knew Jesus and walked with the apostles. Many were, “brought to the lord” (24)**

**Acts 11:25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,**

**Recap Saul’s story to that moment… (timeline) saved 12 years ago – currently living in his hometown in Tarsus. Barny goes looking for him – no phone number or address – just goes.**

**Needing some help or possibly sees an opportunity to connect with an old friend and include him – He goes to Tarsus (map) and bring back his friend Saul (Still called Saul – btw)**

**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.**

1. **He was humble enough to include and ask others to help**

**He was not obsessed with being the one in charge or to get all the glory – he sought to include and empower others – example of a strong leader. We later see Barny pass the baton to Saul.**

**For Barnabas - reaching people was more important that keeping his position or title**

* + **We need to think like this - Nesting dolls**

**26 … 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.**

**Together they taught, encouraged and served at the very first gentile church. In the years to come Antioch church was known for its great teachers and apologist. Some of the greatest of the early church. Became gentile mission’s headquarters (Acts 13)**

**Notice - It was a group of gentiles that were first called – little Christs.**

**Called disciples (Acts1), believers and witnesses (Acts 5), brothers (Acts 6), followers of the way and saints (Acts 9) – now Christians!**

**Lit. “part of Christ” / “Christ’s ones” way of saying, Jesus people**

**First believed it was mocking – but followers of Jesus liked it.**

**Christian - Not Tedblair-ians / Furtick-ians / Osteen-ians / Sproul-ians / not your name- ian. We are Christ’s people! We take on the name of Christ. Don’t take the name if you’re gonna profane!**

**An interesting event and question**

**27 During this time some prophets came down (elevation) from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted (foretold) that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) (Historical – 41-54AD)**

**Christians are already shunned for being followers of Jesus – a season of famine would be exceptionally hard for them.**

**Something that comes up in Acts**

**What is a NT prophet?? (Acts 11, Acts 21, Acts 27, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11)**

**1 Thess 5:20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good,**

**In NT - It is a support gift. (1 Cor 12-14. A Holy Spirit prompted word from God – that is not equal to scripture, but points to God’s revealed Word - for the purpose of edifying the body – for the glory of God. God used it here to warn the early church.**

**Acts 11:29 The disciples, (in Antioch) 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. (They were pastors, teachers, couriers)**

**This new gentile church was determined to look out for their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**When they heard of the need – they responded. They sacrificed. The first recorded act of sacrificial giving of a church to help other believers. The missionary church supported the home church.**

**The point is not the prophet – but that**

**Generosity is evidence of the Holy Spirit filled Christian.**

**Generosity is a byproduct of the hand of God working. We saw this in the beginning of Acts as the church gave willingly and sacrificially to care for each other.**

**I think it is true today. When we walk with God – when we are led of the Holy Spirit – we are generous. We hold loosely to the things of this world and see people – we see the kingdom.**

**Acts 12:25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, (Taking the support gift to the elders) they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. (Barnabas cousin went back with them)**

**There they continued to minister and lead at the Antioch church for 6 more years. What follows…?**

**The big point of this section is this –**

**When the gospel is humbly preached, God moves – and lives are changed, needs are met, and hearts are freed!**