

"They Were Called Christians"

Acts 11:19-30

Male or female. Rich or poor. Conservative or progressive. White, Hispanic, Asian, or African-American. Wahoo, Hokie, or Duke. Every day it seems that our culture becomes more focused on these types of labels that define our identities and lead to segregation and stratification in our society. Over 50 years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. stated, "I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours in Christian America." In 2018 his words continue to ring true.

Acts 11 presents to us a picture of the church in Antioch that transcends the labels that divide. Instead we see in Antioch a body of believers united by their ultimate identity: Christian. Is it any wonder then that this diverse congregation became the sending church for Paul and Barnabas' first cross-cultural missionary endeavor?

1. The Gospel crosses geographic and national barriers

- Vs. 19 "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch"
- Acts 13:1 "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

2. The Gospel crosses language barriers

- Vs. 19 says at first "speaking the word to no one except Jews."
- Vs. 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"

3. The Gospel crosses cultural barriers**4. The Gospel crosses economic barriers**

- Vs. 29 "the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea."

"When the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it."

~ Martyn Lloyd-Jones

5. The one identity that truly matters

- Vs. 26 "...In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians"
- **Revelation 3:12** "I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem...and my own name"
- **Isaiah 49:16** "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands"