

Disciples Called Christians

By Paris Reidhead*

Acts, the 11th Chapter, beginning with the 19th – 26th verses:

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

The significant thing about this is the fact that there was a gradual enlarging of the testimony. Certain of the disciples, scattered due to the persecution that arose about Stephen, went preaching. We had one entire chapter devoted to the ministry of Philip, and how that that whole city in Samaria had turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. But there were others preaching as well. As you read, you discover that the only ones that stayed in Jerusalem were the apostles. They abode at Jerusalem. Apparently there was only hiding space enough for them and their families, and so they stayed there to be protected and to be cared for, because it was important that they should. And so those that went everywhere preaching the Word were deacons, as was Philip, and the lay people: These that had no special recognition as far as the church life was concerned, but were members of the Body of Christ, and under the control of the Holy Spirit. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. The hand of the Lord was with them.

Any ministry that is without the blessing of the hand of the Lord is doomed to be a disappointment and a grief and a heartache. And it is true, however, that the hand of the Lord may be with one and yet not necessarily have a great number that believe. We discover that there are times and places for ingathering.

We think of some of the missionaries that have labored for many, many years, faithfully laboring, and the hand of the Lord has been greatly with them, but the number that have come to Christ has not been tremendous.

I think of Donald Ward who labored so many years in Jordan, there with that alien religion of Islam that makes such terrifying claims upon the people. You cannot imagine how much pressure is exerted upon one when he commits himself to Islam. And so Donald Ward and his wife labored there in Jordan. And the hand of the Lord was upon them. It was truly a wonderful ministry. And so we do not wish to suggest that the ultimate test of the hand of the Lord is the great number that believe, but the fact is that this is what happened here. We find it in other places for instance, when Paul went into Antioch, there were not a great many that believed; but nevertheless the hand of the Lord was truly with him there.

They turned unto the Lord. You will find wherever the Gospel was preached some will turn to the Lord. Some will turn. For this is the evidence that God is in it. There are those other sheep that He said He must bring, and He is going to bring them through you. This is that fellowship of witness that is so important through the entire book of Acts that the Holy Ghost uses everyone who is a part of the Body of Christ. Everyone upon whom the Spirit of God was to come was expected to be witness for the Lord Jesus. And this is the case. There were in this instance a great number who believed and turned unto the Lord through the ministry of what I hate to call lay people. Nevertheless, the term is understood, and one that we will use simply because it designates exactly what we meant, that they had no official recognition or office in the life of the church. They had gone because the pressure was within and not the obligation without.

But notice that there was even in this a larger fellowship. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem. They were concerned about it, just as you ought to be concerned about ministries that are occurring here in

our city. I think of the fact that this week our Brother Holz in the Clarendon Road Alliance Church is engaged in ministry, from week to week we gather information concerning ministries. And in a sense all of the eleven hundred churches in this Christian and Missionary Alliance throughout this country are related to this particular testimony, as would be the case of all of the missionaries scattered abroad. This is where our hearts ought to include everyone that is brought to a saving knowledge of Christ through the extended testimonies of our life.

Let me ask you. Do you have spiritual grandchildren? You have been a Christian for how long? For 5 years, or 10 years, or 20 year? Do you have spiritual grandchildren? Some that have come to know the Lord through you, and then they have gone on to win others to Him. This is a great encouragement, you know, when you find someone that has been in your ministry in years past as a Sunday School Teacher perhaps, some young person got a vision and a burden, as you faithfully prepared week by week the lesson, and communicated something of yourself Sunday by Sunday, and now they are somewhere witnessing for the Lord Jesus. Perhaps as missionaries in some kind of fulltime service, or just as you find here, witnessing for Him. This is what the Spirit of God wants to say to us, this matter of witnessing is not to be considered as a professional task.

If it is viewed as a professional task then only those that have graduated from Bible school have qualified to witness for the Lord, only those that have certain credentials are authorized to witness for the Lord, and we must get back to the Biblical position which is that He gave evangelists, and Pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry. If we see this, then we will recognize that there was great concern on the part of the church for these that had been won to the Lord. But then had not been present at the time when they were born into the family of God. The tidings of these who had been turned to Christ, the tidings concerning the great number that believed came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. They did not have to send down and say, "O Peter, come on up here. There are some people that want to believe, and we do not know how to point them to Christ." They were prepared. They were qualified. Well, this is exactly what we hold to be the Biblical standard, and the Biblical plan. Every Christian a witness, every Christian a missionary, everyone that is in Christ going out to bring others to Christ. This is what the Lord envisioned, a multiplication of witness so that it was not gathering a group of church attendants around the pastor, but multiplying the witness from the one who comes, communicating himself to others, that these others might communicate to still a larger circle.

I think of the missionary down in South America of whom Clyde Taylor tells from time to time in his ministry. He would spend some 20 years laboring as was the plan in his society, preaching, establishing churches, and he finally became convinced that the Biblical pattern was something else. It was making disciples. And so he went to his mission board and said, "Will you allow me to do what I believe the Word of God teaches?" They said, "No, you will have to follow the pattern." Friends at home believed in him, and so they agreed to support him in this venture, this thing that was quite a radical departure. So he lived in the city where he had been, but he confined himself the first few weeks to just reading the Word and praying, and developing his own heart, and establishing himself more fully in the convictions of his mind and spirit.

One day when he would normally have been resting, for at that time the city and whole town closed as they do in the tropics very generally, from about one until four, during the siesta, and he felt impelled of the Spirit of God to leave and go out into the Plaza, into the little square in the center of town. There he saw an Indian boy, with bare feet, and using his big toe to make some letters in the dust, and then he would rub them out. After he came up and spoke to the boy, he said, "Do you know what you are making?" He said, "I see it over on that sign. I am making that." He said, "Do you know what it says?" "No." "Would you like to know?" "Oh, yes." He said, "Come tomorrow afternoon at this time and I'll teach you." And so he began by taking this -- this man who was a graduate of all the training necessary for a missionary service, by teaching Spanish to a little Indian boy. But in the course of learning Spanish he learned to read, and that Book he read was the Bible, and reading the Bible he read of his sins, and then of a Savior, and he became convicted of his sin, and finally was pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for about, I understand now, I would have to ask Dr. Taylor to give me the details, but as I recall for about four years this missionary spent most of his time in tutoring, and teaching and instructing this one boy. And then he was on his way, prepared. He had received all he could. He had gone as far as he could. He continued to come. But now he was out teaching, and was out preaching and witnessing, as just a youth. In the course of 20 years from that time, this missionary spent his 20 years with three young men. But when Dr. Taylor related this to us at the missionary meeting of the Annual Council down at Philadelphia some years ago, he said, "One of these three young men is the editor of the outstanding evangelical magazine, the other has

been instrumental in seeing some hundred and fifty churches established, and the third is the outstanding evangelist in all of that part of South America. But he had taken literally this conviction that every person is to be a witness for Christ. This is what you see here: Scattered abroad, sent away, it was not that the work was disrupted, they were not put into a new place, just as you jump into a fire and break the sticks, all you do is scatter it. You take a club and hit a burning camp fire with that stick; well what you really have in a few moments is several fires. This has always been the effect of persecution, because where it has been understood that the purpose of church life that is fellowship such as you have here on Wednesday night, and Sundays, and in all of the home study classes that your end, your goal in all instruction, in all teaching, in all fellowship is that you become mature, you become a spiritual adult, you become prepared to take your place as a functioning, contributing, witnessing member of the Body of Christ.

Well perhaps preachers have been responsible for the idea that the whole function of Christianity is to simply listen to what the preacher says, and do nothing with it, like perhaps they have been contributing to this spiritual delinquency of the people. I would not be surprised, because this is extremely difficult. People do not want to be disciples. They would much rather become professional listeners than they would to become active participants. You know it is very difficult to get very many fathers out on the sand lot when their boys are playing baseball, and they say, "Dad, come out and watch us play." Well, Dad is just too busy. But if some friend downtown says, "How about going out to the game?", if he can be one of 30 thousand people, sitting there on the bleachers, paying \$2 for a seat, he is prepared to do that because it is now popular to be a spectator, and it is a little exhausting to be a participant. And so we find that spectator sports have become the norm of the country, and so has spectator Christianity.

You will have no more fire from the distribution of the brands, than you will have had in the wood that was distributed. If you were moved someplace else, you are only going to carry the fire that was in your heart before you were moved. You are not going to get any particular fire by the move. This is an illusion, a delusion. I know when I was finishing my work in Taylor, finding it so difficult to spend time in study, and so difficult to spend time in prayer, as I felt and knew I must. Then I could find solace in the fact that when I got to Africa, then I would begin to study, as soon as I got my feet down on African soil, then somehow, stepping from the gangplank down to the soil there would be a chemical change shoot through me, and I would go on that river boat down into the heart of Africa, an intrepid Livingstone. Well I found when I got to Africa that the only thing that I had was just the sickness common to Egypt, that is all. That is all I had, just the same things that everybody else got when they got to Egypt. And I had the same apathy, the same indolence, the same coldness, the same, and there was no change at all. No, travel won't change. Persecution does not change a person.

You say, "Well, if we just have persecution then we would become real witnesses for Christ." There is no spiritual benefit from persecution; there is no spiritual benefit from travel. You say, "Well, if we could just go into poverty, then we would certainly become witnesses. If we did not have to spend so much..." No. You would be just what you are now. Well if we would just get financially secure, then we would become witnesses for Christ. You see, the enemy is going to keep you in a constant state of delusion that some other states, some other financial state, social state, geographical state, emotional state, organizational state, some other state is going to make you the Christian you know you ought to be, and it is a lie. It is a lie from the father of lies, because change does not do it. Going to Africa won't make you a missionary, going from your income to the income of the Rockefellers won't make you a missionary, or going from a Rockefeller down to your income won't make you a missionary. There is just no spiritual effect from such kind of travel, whether it is social or financial, or geographical, or organizational. You are tonight the sum of all of your desires, and all of your hunger, and all of your longing, and all that you are. You are, and put you any place else, and you are going to have to spoil it all by taking what you are tonight with you to where you are going. And there is only one possible way to rectify this and that is to allow the Spirit of God to make the inward changes necessary that you become what He wants you to be where you are. And we will deal with this awful delusion of hell, that if we could just get into different circumstances then we would become different people. It is not so. It has never been so. It won't be so. There is no possibility of its ever becoming so.

Often times people want to move. Pastors like to move from churches. They go from defeat into what they think is victory. The only thing, they carried the defeat with them. And people like to go from business to this business, thinking that if they do they will become a success. But they have carried themselves. And this is the message of the Grace of God that He changes people.

He changes people. He will change you, change me, and we have got to recognize we are constantly being changed. We are constantly being affected, either by our environment, and its eroding, leveling effect, grinding us down to the level of all around us; or there is that work of the Spirit of God within us that is causing us to become what He wants us to be. The answer to the ministry, as we read here, was here was a man, Barnabas, who had wealth, and shared it, became the son of consolation, consoling the church in their poverty, but when the church needed someone they had seen such wonderful change take place in Barnabas, that the church sent him as far as Antioch, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And this is the answer to your circumstance. This is the answer to your situation. This is the answer to your present location. It is not going to be helped by a move. No, do not ask for a transfer. It is not going to be the answer. You ask for a transfer, you are going to spoil it all by taking you as you are with you to where you are going to go. The only thing that will help is when the Spirit of God can work in us as He did in this man Barnabas, who used what he had; the only thing he had back there was money, so he sold it and provided for the people. You see, "What is that in thy hand? Throw it down." If you throw down what you have got, God will add to it. And he did what he had and then God began work in him, and now we find the church recognizing such a wonderful change, such a development, such an enlargement, that when they want someone to go over here as far as Antioch, because they have heard of Gentiles coming to Christ, here is a man who is a good man, in good report of those around him, he is full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost. Something happened to him in his circumstances, and then he was able to go with the blessing of the church, and the anointing of God. He had not said, "Oh, if I could just get up there to Antioch then I would become a real witness for Christ. No, this is too easy God wants to do the work right where we are. And when He has done the work in us where we are, then He can move us. The geography is not important.

Some people spend their whole lives running from failure to failure, to failure, expecting that there will be some magical metamorphosis in that new place, but what is going to happen is that they will carry along with them what they were. Oh, I think the answer for us is not to look over there socially, over there financially, over there organizationally, over there, over here. No, no. The answer for us is to look to Him, and say, "O God, but by Thy grace and the power of Thy Spirit I am but a useless clod that could not bear fruit. But if you can just take me, bad, so bad that I need the Savior's dying love, and by Your Cleansing Blood, and Your Grace make me good, with goodness not mine own but yours; unbeliever, just simply saturated by it, penetrated by it, polluted by it, O God, if you can just give the faith. And Lord, I have a spirit that has been cantankerous and mean, and rebellious and selfish, and sinful. And Father, I bring myself to the Cross. Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit; then it is all of grace and all of Christ, and I have not had to go organizationally somewhere else, I have not had to go financially someplace else, I haven't had to go socially someplace else, I haven't had to go geographically someplace else. I met my problem right where I was, because my problem was me. O God, deal with me, and I will be available to the church, and I will be available to the Holy Ghost." And so there was a Barnabas. He has been prepared.

And there is always work for a prepared man, or a prepared woman. You say, "Well, what ministry will I have?" Oh, there is no problem about that. What ministry will God have in you? If He can have in you what He wants, then He can have through you what He wants. And this I see. Every believer, every believer, useful to the Lord, in His place, under His control, under His direction. This fellowship of witness is to be shared with the youngest, the least known, the least equipped, naturally. There is not a thing that would make us think from the earlier references to Barnabas that he would be the one the church would send on this important mission. But you see he has grown so much from Acts 4 to Acts 11, that God can trust him. Can God trust you with responsibility today? that you could not have borne last week? last month? last year? Has something happened in you that has made you available to the Lord in ways you were not before. This is what we see. Everyone. And you are important in God's plan. There is someone to whom you are the best Christian they know, and if God can deal with you in the areas that He needs to, perhaps He will be able to reach that one through you. Let us look at it then from this point of view.

It was not the apostles there in Jerusalem. The evangelizing was done by these certain disciples scattered abroad, and now they are able to take Barnabas for an enlarged responsibility, because he has been enlarged by the Lord. He is called the Son of Consolation, because he has shared his money. And now he is called a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith. It was not that he just was generous. Now, there has been spiritual maturity. Oh don't you want to grow up into Christ? I do. I cry out in my heart day and night, Lord, make me all by Thy grace you have intended me to be. Don't let me be satisfied with less than your best. And you see when we have finished a lifetime of praying like this, do you know what we have done? We have just

graduated from kindergarten. It is going to take an eternity to answer that prayer. But oh that we might see it brought on to as far as we can while we are still here. Well I did not intend to speak this long, but I am glad I did. I hope you are. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

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