

## 28—Acts 11.19-30—The Hand of the Lord Was with Them

### I. Introduction

- a. What does UHBC do? If I ask you what do coffee shops do, you will say, “They make and sell coffee.” What about a grocery store? They sell groceries. You get the idea. I don’t mean to equate the church with a business. We do not have anything for sale. But the church is supposed to be made up of people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that faith bears fruit. If we do not do anything, is our faith dead?
- b. What are the acts of UHBC? We should be people who worship and serve the Lord. From the beginning, worship and serve are inseparable. In fact, the word in Hebrew means both. In other words, that which you serve is that which you worship. I believe the Bible teaches that the church is to glorify God and serve him.
- c. Being a Christian in America is becoming too complicated. The pressure to be the expert on everything and have the latest and greatest whatever puts me outside of the norm these days. It’s a lonely place. I don’t mean to say we should not deal with the complicated issues of our lives but there are many of them for which we may not have good answers for. This text calls me back to the basics and I’d like for us to be good at these.

### II. Main Point

- a. The Kingdom of God continues to advance as the gospel is shared, disciples are made and they bear fruits of good works. The simple pattern of what the church should continue to do.

### III. Outline

- a. Sharing the gospel
- b. Making Disciples
- c. Fruit Bearing Faith

### IV. Exposition

- a. This first point is so easy to see. In fact, the Book of Acts or what risen Lord Jesus did, what the Holy Spirit did, and what the apostles did, must be expanded to what the church did because it wasn’t merely the apostles doing the work. In fact, several ordinary, unknown disciples are doing the work of sharing the gospel.
  - i. Luke begins this section with now or therefore which connects us back to what just happened. As a result of what we have seen the last couple of weeks with God sending the gospel to the Gentiles and the conflict against Peter for taking them the gospel NOW that it is settled among those circumcised, Jewish believers, it seems others proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles.
  - ii. Luke identifies those proclaiming the gospel as having been scattered from the persecution of Stephen.
    1. V. 19--“They passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word.”
      - a. Phoenicia is a coastal region north of Galilee. Cyprus is an island 100 miles off the coast of Judea. And Antioch is in Syria some 300 mile north of Jerusalem.
      - b. Much of the ministry of Jesus was as he passed through various places.
      - c. Much of the spread of the word came from disciples passing through cities.
      - d. As I thought about this word, which is used often in Acts, it describes our work. Some of this in our text today was due to the persecution. They were run out of Jerusalem but they were not silent. But also, we look for opportunities as we travel about each day.
      - e. And in a general sense, this is our life. We are just passing through. (Ps. 90:12) So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

- i. Our citizenship is in heaven and we await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - f. So that's the setting of where this takes place. I think it's amazing to see the Lord work in his disciples in such a city as Antioch.
    - i. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Only Rome and Alexandria of Egypt were larger. It had some 500,000 or more people living there.
    - ii. It had a river access to the Mediterranean Sea which would be like us saying we had an international airport.
    - iii. This city seems very strategic for the spread of the gospel.
- 2. And indeed, that's what those who were scattered were doing.
  - a. In verse 19 and 20, three times the obvious action of the church is speaking the word, spoke to the Greeks, and preaching the Lord Jesus.
  - b. If you want to be reminded of what the church does, here is the repeated theme—speaking the word of God to people as they go.
    - i. The SBC president, Bart Barber did a poll recently.
      - 1. “Dear pastor-friends: which do you think is easier to motivate church members to?”
        - a. Give Money 93% of 639 votes
        - b. Share the gospel 7%
      - ii. I don't know your experience with sharing the gospel but I've been in an SBC church my entire life where it was a frequent topic of discussion. A few observations.
        - 1. Some start off pretty naïve and share with just about anybody until they encounter that person who asked questions, we didn't have answers for. People normally do not do things they are not confident in doing. If you were to ask me to come do your taxes, I would say no.
        - 2. So, confidence that I have the right answers is a big deal to most folks. But that can be fixed. However, fear is harder to overcome. They are often combined but not always.
          - a. Some know all the right things to say but they are afraid they will harm their relationship with others.
        - 3. Both work better when you go with someone else. And it takes practice.
        - 4. I'm offering to go with you. I'm sure there are others who would do the same. Please speak to me after the service and we will get something set up.
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  - c. This is part of what Christians and churches do. They share the gospel. The gospel isn't just for you.
- iii. In this text, we see more evidence of the Lord's work in taking the gospel to the Gentiles.
  - 1. Some of those who had been scattered because of persecution spoke the word to no one except Jews.
    - a. As we have already noticed, this was a hard transition. But it is the pattern of Book of Acts as Paul will say later, to the Jew first then also to the Greeks.
  - 2. But in V. 20 it says there were some of those who had been scattered who spoke the gospel to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus.

- a. There are no stories of visions. They seemed to take Peter's lead in this that God was granting repentance to the Gentiles.
  - iv. Look at verse 21. It says of those who were preaching the Lord Jesus to the Greeks the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.
    - 1. We have seen this several times throughout Acts. As a result of doing the things Jesus commanded his disciples to do, great numbers of souls are being saved. The Great commission is being fulfilled to make disciples of all nations by first sharing the gospel.
    - 2. But let's circle back to "the hand of the Lord was with them."
      - a. This is one of those images that we have seen at numerous places in the OT. Let me remind you of a few of those.
        - i. In Exodus 9:3 the hand of the Lord is against Egypt during the plagues. There God displayed his omnipotent power.
        - ii. When the Philistines defeat Israel in 1 Samuel 5 and take the Ark of the Covenant, the hand of the Lord is against them as tumors begin to show up on them.
        - iii. Notice the power and authority God has over the king to accomplish what he desires through Ezra. In (Ezr. 7:6) Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.
      - b. I mention this because I want the hand of the Lord with UHBC. The image is so comforting.
        - i. The Lord's power and grace will be with us as we who are fearful and lacking confidence sharing the gospel.
        - ii. This is the work of the Lord. We are his messengers. Our responsibility is only to deliver the message with faith, hope and love. We have no control over what happens. Share, love and trust!
      - c. That doesn't mean you will have immediate success. It may take a while. They may never believe. It might be that many trust in Christ and turn to him.
        - i. We are just farmers sowing the seed of the gospel.
        - ii. Farming is much like ministry. If you have a bad crop, you don't sell the farm you plant it again.
  - v. News spreads to the church in Jerusalem that many Greeks were turning to the Lord.
    - 1. They send Barnabus to Antioch; not an apostle.
      - a. But isn't that part of the simple process we are seeing over and over in the book of Acts?
        - i. Before we see what he did in Antioch, let's see what kind of man he had become.
          - 1. We know already that he was a generous man having sold his own property and given it to the apostles to distribute as needed.
          - 2. V. 24 says he's a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.
            - a. At some point he heard the gospel and trusted Christ and turned to him. He gathered with the church in Jerusalem. Sat under the teaching of the apostles. They had been commissioned to teach others how to observe all that Jesus commanded which would have included the command to make disciples.

- b. In other words, the church has sent someone who is faithful and equipped for the work of the ministry. Not just whoever will go.
  - b. What will Barnabus find in Antioch?
    - i. It says in v. 23 that he saw the grace of God and he rejoiced!
      - 1. What is that? What did he see?
        - a. He saw evidence of God's grace in the people.
        - b. It seems that he observed faithfulness because he exhorts them to REMAIN faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.
        - c. He saw the hand of God working among them to bring many to faith in the Lord Jesus. And he encouraged them to keep doing it.
      - 2. Do you see evidence of the grace of God here? Do you see the hand of the God at work?
        - a. Some of you might give a broad answer that cannot even come close.
        - b. Some of you will see and know of many evidences of grace among us.
        - c. Do you see faithfulness with steadfast purpose? Do you see unfaithfulness? Some of both?
        - d. We have work to do. And that work includes sharing the gospel.
- b. But not sharing the gospel is not the only problem. I believe making a disciple includes evangelism but it cannot stop there. When someone repents and trusts in Christ, they need to be baptized and taught. That gets us to the second simple act of the church: Making Disciples.
  - i. As a result of the disciples in Antioch remaining faithful to the Lord in the task of speaking the gospel to lost sinners, it says in v. 24 "a great many people were added to the Lord."
    - 1. We've heard Luke use this phrase already. Back in (Acts 2:47) And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
    - 2. Here and in chapter 5 it says they were added to the Lord. The church is the Lord's. He purchased her by his blood. The gospel brings a person into union with Christ.
  - ii. As a result of many coming to faith in Christ, Barnabus leaves to look for Saul.
    - 1. Why? For the very purpose of making disciples.
    - 2. Notice the link. The great many people who were added to the Lord in v. 24 are those being taught in v. 26.
      - a. (Acts 11:26) <sup>26</sup> and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they gathered with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.
        - i. The gathering had the purpose of teaching disciples who Christ is and to be like him.
          - 1. These new believers are called Christians because they are in Christ. They are becoming like him. They are submitted to him. He is Lord of their lives.
  - iii. I can't say discipleship has been completely missing in the church today because we have SS and bible studies and singing songs to one another and preaching. But there's more to do.
    - 1. It follows the pattern of Jesus with his disciples.
      - a. It's being with each other in various life situations.

- b. It's formal and informal. Taught and caught by example.
    - c. The group is small and devoted to meeting together.
    - d. They are expected to do this with others when they have been disciplined.
    - e. Accountability is necessary. One who can be corrected and spoken with clearly.
    - f. It's a place where you can be wrong but helped to see what is right.
    - g. It's a place where you can get angry but no one is giving up.
    - h. It's a place where you learn and unlearn somethings that might be very hard and painful.
    - i. These relationships make you vulnerable to the messiness in your life.
  - 2. From someone who has been through all of that and have walked with several through it, you just cannot improve on Jesus' method of making disciples.
    - a. For those standing on the other side wondering if it's worth it...yes. But it's also commanded by our Lord.
    - b. It's like learning to read. Most everyone wants to do it but it's hard work. I watched our kids hit wall after wall and wanted to give up. But none of them would consider wishing they had not pushed on through the pain now.
  - iv. I think the lack of teaching those who believe the gospel to observe all the Jesus has commanded is the real problem. We've thought that once someone makes a profession of faith, they are good to go and there's nothing more to do. That's just not true.
- c. That gets us to the last point of the simple acts of the church: fruit-bearing faith.
  - i. Much of this we have already seen in those sharing the gospel with others. Barnabus was full of faith. He encouraged the disciples to remain faithful. They taught the disciples how to be faithful in discipleship.
  - ii. Now we get to see their faith put to the test as a famine is coming.
    - 1. In v. 28, A prophet by the name of Agabus stood up and foretold of a great famine over the inhabited world.
      - a. We are given some time markers for historical reference.
  - iii. But what I want us to see is the response of the disciples who have been taught to observe all that Jesus commanded.
    - 1. We should want to see evidence of faith.
    - 2. This is at least what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself.
    - 3. Additionally, it's also laying up treasures in heaven by giving sacrificially and generously.
      - a. It says in v. 29 the disciples, having heard this, determined everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.
      - b. (1 Jn. 3:17-18)<sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
  - iv. They sent the relief to the elders by the hand of Barnabus and Saul.
    - 1. This is the first mention of elders in this context. They are the leaders of church in Jerusalem, now; not the apostles.
    - 2. By the time of this famine which occurred around 46 A.D. this was some 13 years after Pentecost. Apostles did their job of raising up faithful leaders. Even the Apostle John drops the title of apostle for elder in his letters.
    - 3. We will teach more about this as we go but this is the same office as pastor. In the NT, elder, pastor, and bishop are synonymous for the same office for which each term describes what the office does.
    - 4. The church in Jerusalem is led by the elders or pastors. There are more than one—elders. This is the pattern of the NT for the church.

5. Why do I bring this up?

- a. I'm doing what I just preached on—discipleship. I'm teaching the bible. We have some things to learn from this and this is the beginning of that process.

V. Response

- a. Members of UHBC. You have an assignment. Make a list of neighbors that are not followers of Jesus. Begin, if you aren't already, praying for them. Through you, we will connect with them and share the gospel with them. I'm not saying you haven't done that but let's do it again.
- b. I want you to begin meeting with another member to read through 1 Thessalonians together and talk about it. If you need help getting connected with someone, please let me know.
- c. If you are not a follower of Christ and you would like to explore what it means, I'd love to meet with you.