

March 11/12, 2006

The Unstoppable Church
Tools in the Master's Hand
Acts 11:19-30
Pastor Mark Kremer

What kind of a person has profound influence on a city? What kind of a person can make a difference in the lives of people? Does it take someone powerful...someone wealthy...someone with position? What exactly does it take for someone to be a person of prevailing influence in their world?

Raja was a rickshaw taxi driver in the city of Bangalore, India. He was a follower of Jesus. And as he drove his motorcycle taxi through the crowded, busy, dirty streets of Bangalore, God began to show him that there were people who were left on the side of the road: people homeless, people who were dying, people who had no family, no place to go, some who were mentally ill who were hurting themselves and a danger to other people.

God moved in Raja's heart and he began to bring those people into his own home. He would dress the wounds. He would feed and clothe them. He would share Jesus with them. What started as a trickle became a stream and turned into a flood until his home was overrun with people from the streets of this city of 6.5 million people.

Through some other Christian people in Bangalore they found a piece of property. And there today, Raja has what is called the Home of Hope. Dozens and dozens of people at any one time find the Home of Hope to be their dwelling place. Many of them spend their last days on earth being cared for and loved, fed and clothed by this compassionate spiritual man. Over 150 people have died in his care—happy, clothed, ready to meet their Maker.

I had the privilege just a month ago to be at the Home of Hope—to drive into that compound, to see people who were crazy now clothed and in their right mind, to see happy little children, to see men and women lying in hospital beds with a smile on their face having met Jesus and being taken care of the way every human being deserves to be cared for.

I will tell you that Raja, the rickshaw taxi driver is making a profound difference in his city of 6.5 million—so much so that the police now bring to him any person they find on the streets of Bangalore who has no other place to go. He is a man of prevailing influence in his city. Literally the culture of his community is being transformed, because for the first time in that culture somebody took notice of the refuse of society and said, “No, they have value and worth.” And a city is being changed by a rickshaw taxi driver.

Is that an anomaly? Is Raja just a Jesus freak—someone so extreme and out of the ordinary that we could only put him in a separate category by himself? Or does he represent what God wants for you and for me—that we would be ordinary people of prevailing influence in our world?

Well, I think we find the answer in our continuing story in the Book of Acts, where we pick it up today in Acts chapter 11, verse 19. We might put a subtitle on this section, “The Church Breaks Out.” What started as a stream, as a trickle of influence of God's people, of Christians, in this Jesus movement is now breaking out both geographically and culturally and crossing all kinds of boundaries.

We have tracked over the last number of chapters the work that happened through the apostles. We've tracked Peter over these last chapters and the difference he was making in Jerusalem and then as God prompted him to go to Caesarea and cross that boundary—that artificial boundary there that God could only work in Jews. And Peter was working now with the Gentiles. That's where we ended in verse 18 last week.

What we're going to pick up now is: Luke takes us back to Acts chapter 8 when the persecution broke out in Jerusalem, and we're going to go and travel down a whole different path—that simultaneously to what has been happening over the last chapters that we've been studying, a whole different thing was happening in another place through other people that now we're going to read about.

In other words, Acts is not laid out for us sequentially, but it's different offshoots of this movement of God's Spirit in different parts of the world. And we pick up now and go back to what was happening from the time that persecution broke out with the stoning of Stephen. We're going to look at what God did in a whole different direction. And we're going to see some additional boundaries—some additional barriers—that the Church broke through as they sought to build God's unstoppable Church.

Beginning in verse 19:

So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. (Acts 11:19, *NASB)

You'll see on the map behind me where Phoenicia is (which is modern-day Lebanon and Syria), and you see Cyprus (the island in the Mediterranean) and then Antioch (which is in modern-day Syria close to the border of Turkey).

Antioch was a significant city, but these people who were scattered were unnamed. These are just ordinary men and women who were a part of the church in Jerusalem. And you'll recall that the church in Jerusalem was built on people who were Jewish people who had come to Jerusalem at the Day of Pentecost for the Festival of Pentecost. Remember, that was the Jewish Festival of Firstfruits. And on that festival, God the Holy Spirit came upon the church and thousands were converted. But they were from all over the place. They were from Cyprus, they were Jews from Phoenicia, from Antioch, from all different parts of the world.

But what happened is that they stayed in Jerusalem, right? They were so caught up and they wanted to be taught and learn about their new faith that they ended up staying in Jerusalem until that persecution broke out and scattered them back to their homes, back to the places they had come from. And that's the movement now of these people—unnamed ordinary men and women, laypeople, if you will, not the leadership of the church—who are going, and wherever they go they're proclaiming Jesus. They're just bearing witness to what God has done in their life.

They're doing exactly what Jesus commanded: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel, the good news of life through Christ." And that's what they're doing. But again, they're speaking only to Jews, but they've crossed some considerable distance geographically that the Church is expanding, now up to Antioch, which is some 300 miles from Jerusalem.

Now notice in verse 20 another boundary is crossed.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Now there were some folks who actually didn't go back to their home area but went to another place. They felt called by God to go to Antioch. Cyrene is in what is modern-day Libya, way on the north coast of Africa, And of course, again, Cyprus is that island nation. It was actually where Barnabas was from, if we remember him back in the story, and we'll pick him up in a minute.

They traveled to Antioch and they began to speak to the Greeks. Now they didn't even know about what was going on with Peter back in Jerusalem and going to Caesarea and all that. This was not something that was orchestrated or led by the leadership of the church. This is just a prompting of the Spirit of God to begin to reach out and cross those boundaries and speak to Greek people about Jesus Christ. And they did that in the city of Antioch.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. (v. 21)

There was a tremendous amount of responsiveness among the Greek non-Jewish people to this message. Now Antioch was a very significant place for this to take place. Antioch was the fifth largest city in the world. It was a city of some 300,000 people. So if you think of a city like Lincoln, plus another 50,000 or so, you have the population of Antioch some 2000 years ago.

It was a major cultural center. It was a pagan place—it was a place of pagan worship. These were Greek people, but there was a large Jewish population there too. And so suddenly we have this picture of Jewish converts in Antioch and a whole bunch of Gentile converts in Antioch. And there are large numbers of people responding to the message of Jesus—because the Lord was with them. God's hand was moving through these ordinary men and women who were proclaiming Christ.

I think it's easy for us sometimes to think about the church being built and expanding on the shoulders of leaders—that leaders are dictating and ordering and concocting schemes and strategies. And no doubt there is God's call just to plan and strategize about how we can take the gospel to the ends of the earth. But in many cases it's happening just like it did with Raja in Bangalore, India, and like it happens in your world when God uses you. He uses ordinary men and women who are just obedient to this prompting of the Spirit of God and share their faith with people wherever they go. And God gives the fruit.

God's hand is on every one of us if we know Jesus, right? We possess the Spirit of God. And the Church has been primarily a church that's built on laypeople and the work of God through ordinary men and women.

In this particular story, as we're going to see, the church, the official organized part of the church, the leadership of the church, simply comes along and supports this movement of God's Spirit that's happening through the lives of believers who have now come to Antioch, this very significant city in the Greek world.

Notice verse 22:

The news about them [*“them” being the large number of people who are responding to the gospel*] **reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.**

Do you remember Barnabas? We first saw him in Acts chapter 4. When this crush of people that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost received Christ, they lingered there and stayed

to be taught. They had needs, and there wasn't enough money to feed them and to take care of them. So people began to sell their property and give away their possessions in order to provide for the needs of these people that had come from all over the world who are now a part of the church at Jerusalem.

Barnabas in chapter 4 is mentioned as one of the very first people who sold his property and brought the money and laid it at the disciples' feet. No doubt it was property that he had from Cyprus (because that's where he was from). So Barnabas was that kind of a guy. His name means "son of encouragement."

We see him next in Acts chapter 9 where he comes alongside of Saul, whom nobody would associate with because of how violent and angry he was and how much he deposed the Church. But Barnabas was the guy who came alongside of Saul and brought him and introduced him to the rest of the leaders of the church and said, "You know what, this is an authentic fellow-believer in Christ."

Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement." He's an encourager. He's a person that comes alongside of and builds people up. And so, wisely, at the news of God's movement up in Antioch, the leaders said, "We need to go check it out and find out if this is authentic, if this is real, if this is of God. Who's the best person to go? You know what, I think it's Barnabas, the encourager...Barnabas, the one who is wise...Barnabas is one we can trust." And so they sent him off.

Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. (v. 23)

Barnabas gets to Antioch with this now large number of people. They are infants in their faith. They're not mature believers. It's a fledging church and there are no leaders. There's just this spontaneous work of God and His Spirit there. And so they're doing the best they can to keep sharing their faith. And more people keep coming.

Barnabas gets there and he says, "You know what, this is of God." He saw the same evidence of a transformation in their lives that he had seen in the lives of other believers in Jerusalem and the other places where the Church had gone. "This is real; this is authentic. These people are genuine believers in Christ. We see the evidence of God's Spirit in their life."

And so what did he do? He encouraged them to remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it's very significant that it tells us exactly what he did: He told them to determine with all their heart to cling to Jesus, to stay focused on Jesus.

You know, as Barnabas would have come into this church, he would have seen a boatload of problems in the lives of these people. These were people who were being saved out of a pagan culture. And you can be sure that in as short a period of time that they had been believers, not all the problems of their life had been fixed and solved. They were not mature; they were messy. No doubt there were a whole lot of sin issues in their life that needed to be dealt with and worked on.

But Barnabas didn't focus on all those things that needed to be changed. He didn't try to fix them. He didn't try to get them to follow the Jewish Law so they'd fit in and be acceptable back in Jerusalem. He just said, "You know what, remain true—determine to remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep focusing on Him."

Because Barnabas knew what hopefully we all know this morning: that when we fix our gaze on Jesus Christ—when we cling to Jesus—He does the transforming work and changes our life over a period of time. Little by little He begins to work on us. But if we focus on all the things that we need to change and work on and we lose sight of Jesus, we've lost the whole thing. So he encouraged them to determine in their heart to remain true to Jesus Christ, that He would be their first love and the focus of their life.

Verse 24 is very interesting, because Luke here adds a little personal note about the kind of person that Barnabas was. And he can do that because Luke was from Antioch. In fact, Luke was a Gentile. Luke probably came to faith in Christ through this movement of God's Spirit through these laypeople who had come and established the church in Antioch. Luke got a chance to meet Barnabas and to be with Barnabas when Barnabas came up to Antioch. And so in verse 24 he adds this little personal note:

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. (v. 24a)

You know, what an awesome description to have spoken about you. Wouldn't you all like to be known as someone who is a good person, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith? If people who know you well were to describe you, what would be the words that they would use? And I think, *Man, if I could aspire to something in my life, it would be that people who know me well would say, "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith—full of God and full of faith, trusting God every step of the way.*

That's the kind of person Barnabas was. It's why God was able to use him as such an encourager in the church—because of his character, because of the kind of person that he was. And again, he adds the note at the end of verse 24:

And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. (v. 24b)

So there was this initial harvest as these laypeople came into Antioch and shared their faith. And hundreds, probably thousands, were converted—large numbers, it said. And now as Barnabas comes and begins to teach the church and encourage the church, many, many more people are added and become Christians, become followers of Jesus. There is this growing number of folks, and as often happens when there is an outbreak of God's Spirit in a place and people are being converted, it can become a little overwhelming.

And here is Barnabas, one leader amongst probably thousands of believers, and he's trying to teach them and encourage them and help them reach their neighbors and answer questions about Jesus. I think Barnabas is probably feeling a little bit overwhelmed. He doesn't quite know what to do. So he begins to think, *Who could I bring to have help me in this ministry?* Well, notice in verse 25:

And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers. (vs. 25-26a)

This is now some seven or eight years after Saul's conversion that we read about back in Acts chapter 8. Again, sometimes I think we lose sight of that. There is a considerable time gap that has happened there in the story. We've only gone about three chapters but it's seven or eight years later. And you remember that Saul was being persecuted and they sent him back to his home town of Tarsus (which is up in modern-day Turkey, not far from Antioch). For seven or

eight years Saul just matures and grows in his faith. No doubt he was speaking about Jesus in his hometown. And there is some evidence that he was persecuted even there while he did it.

But you know, God kind of just set him aside so he could grow and mature and be prepared for the mission that God had before him. It's a very good and important principle of discipleship. Sometimes we elevate people too quickly. We stick them out front too soon—before they've had a chance to grow and mature. God wisely had Paul go off into obscurity and grow and mature, so at just the right moment he could be brought back in and become a major leader in the movement of God among the Gentiles.

Now again, Barnabas was there with Saul in his first days after he had met Jesus on the road to Damascus. And what's interesting is that God did something very unique and unusual for Saul. He not only saved Saul, but at the very time of salvation He also told him what his mission in life was going to be. He said, "You are going to be the apostle to the Gentiles. You're going to take the message of Jesus to the Gentile world." And Saul had known that from the first days of his walk with Jesus—that that was his calling. But you know what, Barnabas knew it too.

So now Barnabas, being the intelligent good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, says, "You know what, I know just the guy who needs to come here to Antioch and help in the establishing of this church"—a church that is now made up of both Jews and Gentiles, but a massive movement of Gentiles to Christ. And so he goes to Tarsus and he brings Saul back, who would become the apostle to the Gentiles.

The Antioch church, because of the work of Saul and Barnabas, becomes the sending church for the movement of the gospel into all of Europe. This becomes home base now. From here on out in Acts, whenever Saul and his companions come back from a trip to share the gospel and plant churches, they always come back to Antioch. This little fledgling outpost grows to be the sending church, the center of the movement of the Church into Europe.

Now you think, *Oh, big deal. You know, Antioch, where's that?—off in, you know, Syria, Turkey, somewhere, far from us.* But you and I need to understand something: God orchestrated that the gospel would flourish and grow and thousands would be converted in Antioch and that it would become the sending place to reach all of Europe.

In fact, men and women, this morning you and I are sitting here because of what has happened in Antioch. God could have sent and had a massive movement of people to faith in some other direction: off into Asia, off into Africa. But by God's sovereignty and plan, He worked in Antioch, and then through the church in Antioch on into Greece and Macedonia and into Italy and on into Europe. And you and I are the beneficiaries of knowing Jesus Christ and having the gospel come to us because of that movement of the Spirit that direction.

If this had gone some other way, you and I could be in the same place the people of India or Indonesia or Africa are some 2,000 years later: still waiting to hear the message. Dozens of generations would have come and gone in those 2,000 years without ever having a chance to know Christ. This is our spiritual history. The church at Antioch becomes a tremendous church of faith and mission as they begin to reach out and share beyond their own borders and send out Saul in just a few chapters in our story. They again "taught considerable numbers," as it says in verse 26.

And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (v. 26b)

I'm going to come back to that in just a minute. Verses 27-30 give us another little episode in

the early life of this church that's very amazing, very interesting. It says:

Now at this time [*during the same time, probably during that year that Barnabas and Saul are teaching*] **some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.** (vs. 27-28)

Now prophets in the New Testament typically were ones who just told the message; they proclaimed the message; they clarified the gospel and the truth for people. Occasionally God would give unique insight and knowledge to men to be able to predict the future. John saw a vision and gave us the Book of Revelation that's a book of prophecy of what's still to come. But this is not common in the New Testament church. Much more so, prophets were confronting issues and needs that perhaps people didn't see.

But in this case, God gave this man (that we don't ever hear about again—Agabus) a special insight into a future event—that there was going to be a famine and that the church back in Jerusalem, the home church, was going to be deeply affected by that coming famine. And Luke, being the great historian that he is, adds that this actually happened during the reign of Claudius. We know that there were a number of years of failed crops in Judea and that there was a considerable amount of suffering in Judea during the reign of Claudius because of failed crops and bad weather. And so, predicting this in advance, notice the response of this fledgling church filled with new believers in verse 29:

And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.
(vs. 29-30)

Now I find that to be absolutely amazing. These Gentiles (primarily a Gentile church, although there were certainly Jewish people there also, but primarily Gentiles) who are new in their faith, 300 miles from Jerusalem, know that the church at Jerusalem was made up exclusively at this point of Jewish people (Jewish people who hated them, and people that they hated). But their bond in Christ—the unity of the Spirit that came about between Jew and Gentile as a result of the work of God in their life—caused them to be moved with compassion to actually be generous out of their own resources and provide for this church at Jerusalem.

No doubt that came about because some of these people who had initiated and started that church shared about how the church at Jerusalem had supported them for several years while they stayed in Jerusalem after Pentecost. And now these people, out of the generosity of their heart, take out of their own possessions as anyone had the ability.

Nobody told them, “You know, we're all going to have to give.” They each one freely chose to give out of whatever means they had. Those who had a lot could give a lot. Those who had little gave a little. They gave in proportion to their means, but they cared enough about these people they never met—about a famine that was yet to happen—to take an offering and send it with Saul and Barnabas back to the church in Jerusalem to bless these leaders who were going to suffer.

This gives us one of those indicators of authentic faith. Authentic faith always leads to generosity. Authentic faith always leads to generosity—generosity with your time, generosity with your talent, generosity with your resources. One of the marks of the Spirit of God in your life and mine is that we're becoming people of generosity: people who freely give all that we are and have for the sake of the kingdom. And that's exactly what happened in this story.

Now let's go back and think about what we've read here for just a couple of minutes. What strikes me about this particular account of the breakout of the Church into this whole new area and to a whole new culture is that it was led by a very diverse group of people—many different people with different giftings got involved in the mission.

You have these unnamed people who were just out sharing their faith, and God, through them, causes thousands to come to faith in Christ. You have the encourager who needs to come along and be there to help teach and instruct. You have Saul, the one who is now ready, and he comes on the scene. And this is his first episode really in full-time ministry. And Barnabas was there and brought him along and encouraged him and helped him get started. And then you have these prophets who are used by God—many of them unnamed even—but they were there to encourage and help. And then you have these unnamed people in the church who, out of the overflow of their heart, are generous and begin to give.

You get the picture that this now is a movement of ordinary men and women—people like you and me—people who have jobs, who have families, but know Jesus. And that's made such a profound difference in our life that we become people of prevailing influence, that we give ourselves, that we ask the Holy Spirit, "God, what's Your call on my life? Where do You want me to serve? What can I do to build Your kingdom? How can I help build the unstoppable Church?"

Ordinary men and women who have prevailing influence because they are clinging to Christ. They are clinging to Christ and nothing indicates that more than the end of verse 26 when it says: **"And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch."** In other words, there was such a movement of God there at Antioch that the culture had to figure out some way to label, something to call these people. And so they chose to call them Christ-followers, Christ-ones. Christ was so central and the focus of their lives that that's the descriptive title that was given to them as a group: they are Christ-followers.

It's interesting how 2000 years later the name Christian has been so muddied, so now lacking in significant meaning that it's not necessarily associated with people who love Jesus and do the works of Jesus and care about the world, but it's thought of in many other ways—many of them derogatory.

And it begs us to ask the question: What would the unbelievers in your life who know you well put as a label or a descriptive on your life? What kind of descriptive or label would the unbelievers that know you well put on your life? What would they put on my life? For some of us, they might call us church-ians instead of Christ-ians. They might call us religious. They might call us rule keepers. They might have all kinds of labels. They might just call us mean. But the Christians in Antioch were known throughout their city as Christ-followers: marked by the presence of Christ.

To be a person of prevailing influence means that you cling to Christ, that you're kingdom-minded. These people who were scattered because of persecution certainly could have gone right back to their own old business and picked up where they left off and said, "Wow, that was

kind of a cool thing that happened down in Jerusalem. We really got a buzz out of that spiritual experience. But now, you know what, we're scattered; we don't have all that fellowship anymore. We'll just kind of drift back into our old way of life and slowly forget about Jesus." But you know what, they were kingdom-minded people, and wherever they went they proclaimed the message of Jesus and sought to lead people to Him.

Prevailing people of influence are kingdom-minded. And I think they're winsome. You see the winsomness of followers of Jesus in this story, don't you? They're attractive. They're irresistible because they have the very mark of Jesus on their life.

And then they're generous. People of prevailing influence are Christ-clinging, kingdom-minded, winsome and generous. And people like that—ordinary though they may be—can be used mightily by God, both individually and collectively as a church to change the world. Prevailing people of influence are world-changers. They're people like Raja, who you would never suspect in a million years could change a city in a pagan country like India.

You know, God is working and moving among us as a body. And I don't know, but I hope that every one of us are open to the Holy Spirit and saying, "God, what is Your call on my life? How have You called me to be a prevailing person of influence?" And that's an individual call that each one of us need to ask God to give us and then to follow as He directs us.

But we collectively have also been on a mission to take steps of faith to make a difference in our world. We have people in our church, the Janovecs, who are seeking to reach the 5000 Iraqis that live here in Lincoln, Nebraska, and plant a church among them.

We established last fall the North Pointe Community Church. I talked to Andy yesterday. Over 200 people from our body went there to help make that church a reality. But he said, "You know, the most exciting thing is that more than half of the people now coming are not from Lincoln Berean. They're from north Lincoln; they're from the community." People's lives are being changed. They're averaging over 350 people on Sunday morning, where there was no church seven months ago.

He told us in December about the man who had just come out of prison, who God radically transformed his life. He's now getting involved in ministry at the church; he's serving. And now he's bringing his family who don't know Jesus. Andy said they've got boatloads of problems, but they're coming every week now and God is at work in this family.

And you know what, I think Dick and Andy obviously took great steps of faith. They are prevailing people of influence. But do you know what makes the church in north Lincoln, North Pointe Church, what it is today are the 200 people from here who went. Ordinary men and women. They lead the Sunday School; they teach the children; they work with the youth; they greet; they make the coffee; they reach out to their neighbors. They are building the church in north Lincoln. They're people of prevailing influence.

Another really amazing thing that we have had a chance to be part of over the last ten years is the work in the inner city of Lincoln, if you want to call it that. More than ten years ago Brad Bryan, who was a part of our college ministry, felt called by God to get to the inner city of Lincoln and begin to work with youth there who didn't have a chance to know Jesus. And as he worked with them and saw kids come to faith, he said, "You know, we've got to have a church here. We've got to have a prevailing presence in this community." And he began to pray and work on that.

Now seven churches, in a show of unity, have come together to support and help establish Abiding Grace Church in Lincoln. And God is changing people's lives through that church. Listen to the story of Tonya and Alonzo who are part of that church and ministering there as we continue to take steps of faith to be a people of influence. (Video)

Those are things that are happening, but God is still doing more. He's calling some additional folks to launch out into one of the most difficult parts of our own country to reach. And there's a whole group of families that are going to launch in a new church-planting effort. Take a look at what they're going to face. (Video and sharing by Kris about plans for the Boulder,CO/Front Range church plant.)

I'm going to invite you to stand with me as we pray and ask God:

Lord, how do You want me to be a person of prevailing influence? Lord, make me one who clings to Christ, is kingdom-minded, winsome, and generous. Give us one pure and holy passion, one calling for our life that would make a difference in this world we pray. Amen.

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Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
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Pastor Mark Kremer

Opening Discussion

1. Do you live with the awareness that God is doing something significant in our world today and that He wants you to be involved? What increases your awareness? What prevents you from having this awareness?
2. What is the connection between the story of the unstoppable church in Acts and what is happening in Lincoln, Nebraska today?

Bible Study

1. How did the persecution that broke out with the stoning of Stephen accomplish God's purposes for His church?
2. What would likely have happened to the church in Jerusalem if the followers of Jesus had not been scattered?
3. Review the expansion of the unstoppable church from Acts 2 through Acts 11. What have been the major milestones along the way?
4. What new boundaries are crossed in this episode (Acts 11:19-30) of the expansion of the church?
5. Is it significant that these “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” are unnamed?
6. What was the content of the message they preached? Has it changed since Acts 2? Is it delivered differently to different audiences?
7. What was the response to this message in Antioch? How does this response compare to earlier responses of people to the message?
8. What can we learn about the rapidly expanding church from the response of the leaders in Jerusalem (See Acts 11:22.)? What was the role of the apostles (or the leadership) in this new work?
9. What do we know about Barnabas from this passage and from his earlier introduction (See Acts 9:26-27.)? What kind of man was he? Why do you think he was the right man for this job?
10. What do you think Saul needed to learn or grow in during the 7-8 years between his conversion in Acts 9 and Acts 11:25 (See also Galatians 1:11-24.)?

11. Why do you think Luke tells us in 11:26 that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch?” What does this tell us about the church there?
12. What was the role of a prophet in the New Testament? Why was a prophecy such as the one in Acts 11:28 important in the life of the early church?
13. What is significant about the gift from the church at Antioch to the church at Jerusalem?
14. How many different individuals or groups played a role in this story? What was unique about the contribution of each?

Application

1. What is the connection between you hearing the gospel and the story of the church at Antioch?
2. Has God called every believer to be involved in building the unstoppable church? How does He direct your involvement in proclaiming Christ and building the church?
3. What should we expect when we make ourselves available to God and His purposes?
4. What are the evidences of being “on mission: in your life? What are the indicators when you are not?
5. Who do you know who is a gifted encourager? Who have been some of the encouragers in your life? How are you encouraging others?
6. If unbelievers who know you well were to give you a descriptive label or name, what would it be and why?
7. What needs to change in your life to wear the name Christian (or Christ-follower) well? What needs to change in the church today?
8. Do you believe generosity is an important evidence of a devoted Christ-follower? Why or why not?
9. How responsive are you to the needs of others in the body of Christ? How responsive are you to the needs of those who *don't* know Christ?
10. What are the barriers to generosity in your life?
11. What is God calling you to do to build the unstoppable church? Is your involvement important? What is He calling us as a local church to do?
12. Are you available and eager to respond to the direction of the Holy Spirit in building the unstoppable church?