



## The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

# ACTS 11:19–30

“THE CHURCH”

JANUARY 28, 2024

## CONTEXT

The Book of Acts is the theological history of the church. In previous weeks, we explored how God's people (the church) have become where heaven and earth meet. The church is multiplying rapidly, and with it, opposition from the outside and obstacles from within. Despite the opposition, these followers of Christ are sown, not scattered, into areas and groups of people in need of hearing the Gospel.

However, the church's expansion is at another turning point that crosses barriers and exceeds everyone's expectations. The apostles/teachers are moving out from Jerusalem to "the ends of the earth." As they leave Jerusalem, they find people of all backgrounds and nationalities who see the authority of and desire to worship the one true God. Moreover, as these gentiles come to faith, they are filled with the Holy Spirit. This is evidence of God's power and His plan from the beginning. Because wherever the Gospel goes, it gives the people new identities and new priorities that make diverse people one.

## SERMON SUMMARY

This week, Pastor Jeff reminded us that all Christian communities resemble each other because they are all copies of the original community outlined in God's word. They gather to preach the word, reach out to non-believers, and be generous towards each other. However similar they are, not one community is the same. That is because the Gospel takes diverse people with no business gathering together and makes us one. This phenomenon shines bright in a world that, left to its own devices, only knows division and self-promotion.

Pastor Jeff explained from our text on Sunday how this happens. The Gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, reverses the norms of the world and gives us:

**New Identities:** Instead of being identified by our different cultures, classes, ethnicities, and philosophies, the Gospel gives us a common identity in Jesus Christ. Being joined with Christ through faith means that our new identity transcends our differences and binds us into one new family.



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**New priorities:** The Gospel shows us what it looks like to embody both grace and truth in a way that encourages and expands the church. But it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can hold these extremes in tension. In the text, Barnabus demonstrated these qualities while humbling himself in partnership with Saul, all for the community's good and the Gospel's expansion.

Pastor Jeff challenged us to investigate these two realities. We must ask ourselves where our most profound identity lies so that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we may be united as one and grow into Christ's likeness.

## DISCUSSION

### Read Acts 11:19-30

What jumped out to you from the text?

Barnabas and the church proved the Gospel has the power to hold opposites intact.

The church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, proves diverse people can become one.

Barnabas, in the power of the Holy Spirit, proves we can become like Jesus, holding grace and truth together to encourage and expand the church.

To grow in these areas, let's investigate the factors that make them so hard to do. Then, we will be better equipped to seek the Holy Spirit's power to embody them today.

### Church Diversity

- Why do we, as humans, naturally divide ourselves along lines of ethnicity, culture, class, and ideologies?
- What benefit do we think we gain when we divide over these issues? (i.e., Comfort, ease, safety?)
- What challenges are we attempting to avoid by avoiding people different from us?
- But when we avoid unity with diverse people, we also lose out on benefits. What are some of the benefits that come from a diverse community?
- History has shown us unity among diversity is impossible when we rely on our human strength. Therefore, if it is impossible, what does that imply is needed for this to occur in our church?
- What could we do as a community to better root our shared identity in Jesus so we can grow in unity/diversity?



*This document can be used for either personal or group reflection.*

*Group facilitator: you do not need to ask every question but can select the best ones for your group dynamic.*



## Barnabas

For us to collectively become one in Christ, we all must grow individually. Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," is an exemplar for us. He modeled, in the power of the holy spirit, the type of faith and love we should pursue for the racial transformation of our community.

- What do you think makes it hard to embody both GRACE and TRUTH to the encouragement of others?
- Which side of the spectrum do you naturally embody more easily, grace or truth?
- Why is the opposite quality hard for you?
- What is one thing you could do today, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow in that opposite quality?

According to his name, Barnabas held in tension grace and truth. Embodying those qualities, he knew how to encourage his fellow believers truly. He also demonstrated humility, partnering with others who were gifted differently than him, all for the encouragement and expansion of the church. Pastor Jeff describes this encouragement as "empathetically insisting on the truth of God's word in a way that heartens others."

- What does this type of encouragement practically look like in everyday life?
- What would we need to change about our lives to live this out better?
- How would that impact our faith community if we did so?
- How would this impact our world?

## Application

- What is your biggest takeaway from Pastor Jeff's sermon?
- What is one thing you want to implement this week in the power of the Holy Spirit?

## Pray for:

- Holy Spirit's help to root our shared identity in Jesus? Help to respond to God's activity.
- The Holy Spirit helps to embody grace and truth for the encouragement of our church and the advancement of the Gospel.



**PREPARE FOR  
NEXT WEEK:**

Read Acts 12:1-19