



CELL GUIDE

TOPIC The Antioch Factor

SPEAKER Benny Ho

THEME Pray for Our Nation

DATE 20 & 21 Oct 2018

MESSAGE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Ps Benny Ho opened with the passage in Acts 11: 19, 25-26 which speaks of the rapid, sudden, spontaneous expansion of the gospel beyond the Jews. There was no grand masterplan except that the Lord said: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The turn of events led to Saul of Tarsus embarking on his journey of world evangelism and the Word of God spreading to Antioch. In Paul's day, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire and had a large colony of 'Greek' (non-Jewish or Gentile) population. Antioch was a key shipping port but pagan worship was entrenched in it. That made it difficult to plant a church there.

However, Antioch became home to the first Christian church outside of the land of Israel and was the first place in which followers of Jesus were referred to as Christians.

PRINCIPLES FOR AN ANTIOCH CHURCH

Tracing the evolution of the Antioch church in Scriptures shows that God's heartbeat is for the Gospel to be shared beyond the Jews so that there is a harvest of believers. The disciples were initially so comfortable in Jerusalem that they did not reach out to the Gentiles until a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. We see in Acts 11:19 after Stephen was killed, those who had been scattered by the persecution travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, but they were spreading the word only among Jews.

The Lord sent a revival where the Gospel is spread to the Gentiles for the first time. Men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. Barnabas was sent to check out the rapid expansion of believers in Antioch and he, in turn, fuelled the revival to a greater extent.

When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Yet, he did not claim credit or use it as a stepping stone for himself.

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. In

those days, it was not easy to look for someone unlike the current day where there is technology and transportation which allows us to get from one place to another in a short time. Yet Barnabas took great pains to locate Saul. Ps Ho explained this was because Barnabas knew that the destiny of Saul to be the Apostle for the Gentiles and his Kairos moment had come, which is the beginning of Saul's ministry.

For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. There was no mention of who planted the Antioch church though it was likely to be the ordinary believers and the church grew to about 25,000.

FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR AN ANTIOCH CHURCH

1. Growing Through Evangelism

Share gospel through evangelism: The secret of success in the Antioch church is seen from Acts 11:21 "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

2. Grounded in Discipleship

Saul needed Barnabas to mentor him. It takes time to make disciples and this involves life transformation (2 Tim 2:2). We see from Acts 11:26 that the believers were so Christ-like that they were called Christians.

3. Governed by the Holy Spirit.

The Antioch church was driven by the Holy Spirit and they welcomed the prophetic word. In Acts 13:1-3, prophets and teachers worked together. Both Jews and Gentiles, and people of different social backgrounds; the unity in diversity was exemplary.

4. Geared Towards Missions

The Antioch church took apostolic authority and sent off Barnabas and Saul for their missionary work. (Acts 13:2-3)

OBEDIENCE – THE KEY VIRTUE

Ps Ho stressed that the key virtue that stood out in the church then was obedience. Starting from the obedience of Stephen who was stoned to death; followed by the obedience of the ordinary believers; the obedience of Paul and Barnabas and finally the obedience of the Antioch church, which culminated in the first missionary journey where the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

Ps Benny Ho closed with the story of how Wenzhou in China became the Jerusalem of China as a result of the obedience of a one-legged Scotsman named George Stott. Stott learnt that Hudson Taylor was looking to recruit missionaries for China and he responded in 1860s. He planted churches and spread the Gospel. As a result of his obedience, today Wenzhou has the fastest growth in the number of Christians and churches in China.

Ps Ho also reminded us of Billy Graham's prophecy over Singapore as the Antioch of Asia. He exhorted BBTicians to be a part of the Antioch church and to fulfil the calling of God.

QUESTIONS

1. Who is your Barnabas? How has he/she influenced your spiritual growth and journey with God?

2. Ps Benny Ho gave 4 marks that defined an Antioch church, share one that you find most challenging. Prayerfully commit this to the Lord.

3. As we approach Christmas, it is a great season for us to reach out to our oikos. How can you contribute towards BBTC being the Antioch church in Asia?