

# PLOT TWIST

**When God Surprises His People**

## Part 4: The First “Christians”

### INTRODUCTION — Welcome to Sin City

Antioch...

- Third-largest city in Roman Empire (next only to Rome and Alexandria).
- Estimated population between 300,000 – 500,000.
- Cosmopolitan centre for trading and sports.
- A mosaic of cultures.
- Called Antioch the Beautiful; Antioch the Great; The Queen of the East; Antioch-by-Daphne

### DINE IN – The Gentile Pentecost

**Acts 11:19-30**

Christian = *christianos*

Christians = *christianoī*

= Christ's people; Christ-followers

**Mark 3:6 ; 12:13  
Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16**

### TAKE OUT – I'll Have That to Go Please

#### TAKE OUT #1 – Stop Your Whining

Many conservative Christians today act like complaining about our culture is a fruit of the Spirit. We whine about how bad things are now, and how difficult it is to follow Jesus in this decadent world. We stoop to fear-mongering about our rights and freedoms and Judeo-Christian societal norms being taken away. The church in Antioch rebukes us for our lazy, faithless, asinine attitudes. Our brothers and sisters from the past challenge us to move forward with a sense of purpose and possibility, no matter how bad we think things are – Jesus is Lord, even in our own 21<sup>st</sup> Century Antioch.

#### TAKE OUT #2 – Making Disciples

Throughout Acts, the church's numerical growth is directly linked to its spiritual growth, which in turn is linked to the priority of teaching. There is no clear dividing line between evangelism and discipleship, outreach and inreach. As Christ's people learn and grow, we a) become better equipped to communicate our faith effectively, b) become more excited about the depth and riches of the gospel, which motivates us to tell others, and c) become stronger and more steadfast in the face of suffering. Your commitment to your own education is a gift you give yourself and others.

#### TAKE OUT #3 – The Priority of Compassion

The primary mark of spiritual maturity in the teaching of Jesus and the early church is a commitment to compassion (also see **Galatians 2:1-10**). Whatever else we are becoming, our priority as a church must be the formation of compassionate lives.

### CONCLUSION – It All Started With Suffering

**Acts 8:1-4**

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### HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS

#### Warming Up...

1. In the first century, the idea of Jews and Gentiles uniting together in faith and life was unthinkable. What are some groups in our world today that would take a miracle to become united together as one family?

#### Look To the Book...

2. Take some time to review the story of the Antioch church in **Acts 11:19-30**. A) What verse, lesson, or idea stands out to you the most? Talk about it. B) The message the early Christians proclaimed is called “the good news about the Lord Jesus”. In your own words, what is this message? C) Barnabas led the way in radical generosity in Acts 4, helped Paul find acceptance with the Jerusalem Apostles in Acts 9, and here invests a year of his life into the new believers in Antioch alongside Paul, who he invites to partner with him. He is the only person in Acts that Luke describes as “good”. He is also “full of the Holy Spirit and faith”. Do you know a Barnabas in your life? The text is written in such a way as to put Barnabas forward as exemplary for all readers. Brainstorm: What is one area of your life that this week you could intentionally become more like Barnabas – “Son of Encouragement”? D) Prophecy refers to the communication or illumination of God's word to people. This can include (but is not restricted to) foretelling the future, as with Agabus. Some theologians believe prophecy may be happening in the church regularly without always being identified as such. Can you think of some examples?

#### So What?...

3. Review TAKE OUT #1. Can you think of some specific examples of ways the church today makes excuses for poor evangelistic success? The church in Antioch was begun through the active witness of ordinary Christians, not super leaders. Talk about your own experience in sharing the gospel with others.
4. Review TAKE OUT #2. What are you doing to contribute to your own spiritual growth? Share ideas of what helps you grow. What changes could / should you make?
5. Review TAKE OUT #3. In what ways do you participate in active compassion? A) Mission 2 giving? B) Volunteering? C) In your personal life? Talk about ways you're showing compassion and things you could do to improve in this area.

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Notes are available online at [themeetinghouse.ca/teaching](http://themeetinghouse.ca/teaching)