

WEEKLY REFLECTION

Just as Jesus declared at the beginning of Acts (1:8), we've seen the gospel travel around Jerusalem (Acts 2), Judea, and Samaria (8:4-8, 14-17). It even started to break Gentile ground with the Holy Spirit's descent on Cornelius and his household (10:44-46). But it's in Antioch that it starts to explode amongst the Gentile believers, as the hand of the Lord was with those who brought the good news to the city, and "a great number who believed turned to the Lord." (11:21)

It's in Antioch that the gospel was first taken directly to Gentiles. (v.20) It's in Antioch that Barnabas first established a ministry partnership with Paul (v.25-26), setting the scene for the gospel to make its way to the ends of the earth. And it's in Antioch that we see a first display of missionary spirit, in the church that would eventually become an important base for Gentile missions (v.29-30).

As the third largest city in the Roman empire, Antioch was surpassed in population only by Rome and Alexandria. It was at the crossroads for military and commercial traffic, making it a locus for eastern and western cultural exchange. Beyond that, it was the recipient of people who were willing to step out of their comfort zones for the sake of the gospel. Scripture tells us that the majority of those who fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch spoke the word to no one except Jews. (v.19) Only a few unnamed believers chose to preach to the Gentiles (v.20). Without their courage and the bravery of many more like them, we might not know Jesus today!

True to their name, the first Christians (v.26) acted as "little Christs" when they went where God called them, obeying Him and what He asked of them. Will you do the same today, church, and allow the hand of the Lord to rest on you? To work through you and bring about a city-wide movement of the gospel?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Where is the farthest you've been away from home? What brought you there, and what was your experience during your time away?

QUESTION TWO:

The city of Antioch had a reputation for business and immorality. Although Cornelius and his household received the gospel with joy, we should keep in mind that Scripture describes him and his family as "God-fearing" and "devout". How much more impressive, then, the explosive spread of the gospel in an utterly pagan city!

What characteristics did the church of Antioch possess? How did they contribute to the rapid spread of the gospel among them? How can we learn from the church in Antioch, to further the spread of the gospel in Hong Kong?

QUESTION THREE:

When the term "Christian", "little Christs" or "(belonging to) the party of Jesus" was first coined, it was probably out of ridicule and scorn. Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names. However, the church of Antioch appreciated being compared to Jesus so much that the name stuck.

We have seen many examples of Christ-like behavior in this week's passage, from the unnamed believers who first targeted Gentiles, to Barnabas the encourager, and the church's willingness to send aid to Jerusalem. Which one of these would you want to emulate in the coming week, even though you may suffer ridicule for it? How can you move past the fear of being scorned or rejected, and live for Christ?