

# Disciples Called Christians

by Paris Reidhead

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of every Christian being a witness for Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the need to focus on transformation and preparation rather than external circumstances.*

**Duration:** 26:33

**Scripture:** Acts 8:4-8, Acts 8:12, Acts 8:14, Acts 8:26-39, Acts 11:21, Acts 11:24

**Topics:** "Christians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a missionary who spent four years teaching and tutoring a young Indian boy in Spanish. During this time, the boy learned to read and came across the Bible, which led him to realize his sins and the need for a Savior. The missionary then pointed him to Jesus Christ. The speaker emphasizes that wherever the gospel is preached, some people will turn to the Lord, and this is evidence of God's presence. The sermon also mentions the importance of being a witness for Jesus and highlights the faithful ministry of missionaries like Donald Ward in Jordan.

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## Transcript

From Acts, the 11th chapter, beginning with the 19th verse. Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenis, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.

And much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch.

And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. The significant thing about this is the fact that there was a gradual enlarging of the testimony.

Certain of the disciples, scattered due to the persecution that arose about Stephen, went preaching. We had one entire chapter devoted to the ministry of Philip, and how that whole city in Samaria had turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. But there were others preaching as well.

As you read, you discover that the only ones that stayed in Jerusalem were the apostles. They abode at Jerusalem. Apparently there was only hiding space enough for them and their families.

And so they stayed there to be protected and to be cared for, because it was important that they should. And so those that went everywhere preaching the word were the deacons, as was Philip, and the lay people. These that had no special recognition as far as the church life was concerned, but were members of the body of Christ and under the control of the Holy Spirit.

The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord. The hand of the Lord was with them. Any ministry that is without the blessing of the hand of the Lord is doomed to be a disappointment and a grief and a heartache.

And it is true, however, that the hand of the Lord may be with one and yet not necessarily have a great number that believe. We discover that there are times and places for in-gathering. We think of some of the missionaries that have labored for many, many years, faithfully laboring, and the hand of the Lord has been greatly with them.

But the number that have come to Christ has not been tremendous. I think of Donald Ward, who labored so many years in Jordan. There with that alien religion of Islam that makes such terrifying claims upon the people.

You can't imagine how much pressure is exerted upon one when he commits himself to Islam. And so Donald Ward and his wife labored there in Jordan, and the hand of the Lord was upon them. It was truly a wonderful ministry.

And so we do not wish to suggest that the ultimate test of the hand of the Lord is the great number that believe. But the fact is that this is what happened here. We find in other places that, for instance, when Paul went into Antioch, there were not a great many that believed, but nevertheless the hand of the Lord was truly with him there.

They turned unto the Lord. You will find that wherever the gospel is preached, some will turn to the Lord. Some will turn.

For this is the evidence that God is in it. There are those other sheep that he said he must bring. And he's going to bring them through you.

This is that fellowship of witness that is so important through the entire book of Acts that the Holy Ghost used everyone who was a part of the body of Christ. Everyone upon whom the Spirit of God was to come was expected to be a witness for the Lord Jesus. And this is the case.

There were, in this instance, a great number who believed and turned unto the Lord through the ministry of what we, I hate to call, lay people. Nevertheless, the term is understood and one that we'll use simply because it designates exactly what we mean. They had no official recognition or office in the life of the Church.

They'd gone because the pressure was within and not obligation without. But notice also that there was even in this a larger fellowship. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem.

They were concerned about it, just as you ought to be concerned about ministries that are occurring here in our city. I think of the fact that this week our brother Holes in the Clarendon Road Alliance Church is engaged in ministry. From week to week we gather information concerning ministries.

And in a sense, all of the 1,100 churches of the Christian Missionary Alliance throughout this country are related to this particular testimony, as would be the case of all of the missionaries scattered abroad. This is where our hearts ought to include everyone that is brought to a saving knowledge of Christ through the extended testimony of our lives. Now let me ask you, do you have spiritual grandchildren? You've been a Christian for how long? For five years, for ten years, for twenty years? Do you have spiritual grandchildren? Some that have come to know the Lord through you, and then they've gone on to win others to Him.

This is a great encouragement, you know. When you find someone that's been in your ministry in years past, as a Sunday school teacher perhaps, some young person got a vision and a burden as you faithfully prepared week by week the lesson and communicated something of yourself Sunday by Sunday. And now they're somewhere witnessing for the Lord Jesus, perhaps as missionaries in some kind of full-time service, or just as you find here, witnessing for Him.

This is what the Spirit of God wants to say to us. This matter of witness is not to be considered as a professional task. If it is viewed as a professional task, then only those that have graduated from Bible school are qualified to witness for the Lord.

Only those that have certain credentials are authorized to witness for the Lord. And we must get back to the biblical position, which is that He gave evangelists and pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry. If we see this, then we will recognize that there was great concern on the part of the Church for these that had been won to the Lord, but they had not been present at the time they were born into the family of God.

The tidings of these who'd been turned to Christ, the tidings concerning this great number that believed, came to the ears of the Church in Jerusalem. They didn't have to send down and say, Oh, Peter, come on up here, there's some people that want to believe and don't know how to point them to Christ. They were prepared, they were qualified.

Well, this is exactly what we hold to be the biblical standard and the biblical plan. Every Christian a witness, every Christian a missionary, every one that is in Christ going out to bring others to Christ. This is what the Lord envisioned, a multiplication of witness, so that it wasn't gathering a group of Church attendants around a pastor, but multiplying the witness from the one who comes communicating himself to others that these others might communicate to still a larger circle.

I think of the missionary down in South America whom Clyde Taylor tells from time to time in his missionary ministry who had spent some 20 years laboring as was the plan in his society, preaching, establishing churches. And he finally became convinced that the biblical pattern was something else. It was making disciples.

And so he went to his mission board and said, Will you allow me to do what I believe the Word of God teaches? They said, No, you'll have to follow the pattern. Friends at home believed in him and so they agreed to support him in this venture, this thing which was quite a radical departure. So he lived in the city where he'd been, but he confined himself the first few weeks to just reading the Word and praying and developing his own heart and establishing himself more fully in the convictions of his mind and spirit.

One day when he would normally have been resting for that time in the city, the whole town closed as they do in the tropics very generally from about one until four. It was during a siesta and he felt impelled of the Spirit of God to leave and go out into the plaza into the little square in the center of town. There he saw an Indian boy with bare feet and using his big toe to make some letters in the dust and then he'd rub them out.

And after he came up and spoke, the boy said, you know what you're making? He said, I see it over on that sign. I'm making that. He said, you know what it says? He says, no.

Would you like to know? Oh, yes. He said, come tomorrow afternoon at this time and I'll teach you. And so he began by taking this man who was a graduate of all the training necessary for a missionary service by teaching Spanish to a little Indian boy.

But in the course of learning Spanish, he learned to read and that book he read was the Bible and reading the Bible, he read of his sins and then of a Savior and he became convicted of his sin and finally was pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for about, as I understand, now I would have to ask Dr. Taylor to give me the detail, but as I recall, for about four years, this missionary spent most of his time in tutoring and teaching and instructing this one boy. And then he was on his way, prepared, he'd received all he could, he had gone as far as he could, he continued to come, but now he was out teaching and was out preaching and witnessing as just a youth.

In the course of 20 years from that time, this missionary spent his 20 years with three young men. But when Dr. Taylor related this to us at the annual council down at Philadelphia some years ago, he said, one of these three young men is the editor of the outstanding evangelical magazine. The other has been instrumental in seeing some 150 churches established.

And the third is the outstanding evangelist in all of that part of South America. But he had taken literally this conviction that every person is to be a witness for Christ. This is what you see here.

Scattered abroad, sent away, there wasn't that the work was disrupted, they were now put into a new place. Just as you jump into a fire and break the sticks, all you do is scatter it. You take a club and hit a burning campfire with that stick.

Well, what you really have in a few moments is several fires. And this has always been the effect of persecution. Because where it has been understood that the purpose of church life, that is fellowship such as you have here on Wednesday night and Sundays and in all of the home study classes, that your end, your goal in all instruction, in all teaching, in all fellowship, is that you become mature, you become a spiritual adult, you become prepared to take your place as a functioning, contributing, witnessing member of the body of Christ.

Well, perhaps preachers have been responsible for the idea that the whole function of Christianity is to simply listen to what the preacher says and do nothing with it. Like, perhaps they've been contributed to

this spiritual delinquency of the people. I wouldn't be surprised.

Because this is extremely difficult. People do not want to be disciples. They would much rather become professional listeners than they would to become active participants.

You know, it's very difficult to get very many fathers out on the sandlot when their boys are playing baseball. And they say, Dad, come out and watch us play. Well, Dad's just too busy.

But if some friend downtown says, how about going out to the game, if he can be one of the 30,000 people sitting there on the bleachers paying \$2 for a seat, he's prepared to do that because it's now popular to be a spectator. And it's a little exhausting to be a participant. And so we find that spectator sports have become the norm of the country and so has spectator Christianity.

You'll have no more fire from the distribution of the brands than you will have had in the wood that was distributed. If you were moved someplace else, you're only going to carry the fire that was in your heart before you were moved. You're not going to get any particular fire by the move.

This is an illusion, a delusion. I know when I was finishing my work at Taylor, finding it so difficult to spend time in study and so difficult to spend time in prayer as I felt knew I must, then I could find solace in the fact that when I got to Africa, then I would begin to study. As soon as I got my feet down on African soil, then somehow stepping from the gangplank down to the soil, there would be a chemical chain shoot through me and I would go on that riverboat down to the heart of Africa in intrepid Livingston.

Well, I found when I got to Africa that the only thing that I had was just the sickness common to Egypt, that's all. That's all I had, just the same things that everybody else got when they got to Egypt. And I had the same apathy, the same indolence, the same coldness, and it was no change at all.

No travel won't change. Persecution doesn't change a person. You say, well, if we just had persecution, then we'd become real witnesses for Christ.

There's no spiritual benefit from persecution. There's no spiritual benefit from travel. You say, well, if we could just go into poverty, then we'd certainly become witnesses.

If we didn't have to spend so much, no, you'd be just what you are now. Well, if we could just get financially secure, then we would become witnesses for Christ. You see, the enemy is going to keep you under constant state of delusion that some other state, some other financial state, social state, geographical state, emotional state, organizational state, some other state is going to make you the Christian you know you ought to be.

And it's a lie. It's a lie from the father of lies. Because change doesn't do it.

Going to Africa won't make you a missionary. Going from your income to the income of the Rockefellers won't make you a missionary. Or going from a Rockefeller down to your income won't make them a missionary.

There is just no spiritual effect from such kind of travel, whether it's social or financial or geographical or organizational. You are tonight the sum of all of your desires and all of your hunger and all of your longing and all that you are. You are, and put you anyplace else and you're going to have to spoil it all by taking what you are tonight with you to where you're going.

And there's only one possible way to rectify this and that is to allow the Spirit of God to make the inward change necessary that you become what he wants you to be where you are. And we will deal with this awful delusion of hell that if we could just get into different circumstances then we would become different people. It isn't so.

It's never been so. It won't be so. There's no possibility of it ever becoming so.

Oftentimes people want to move. Pastors like to move from churches. They go from defeat into what they think is victory.

The only thing they carry is their defeat with them. And people like to go from business to this business thinking that if they do they'll become a success. But they've carried themselves.

This is the message of the grace of God that he changes people. He changes people. He'll change you.

He'll change me. And we've got to recognize we're constantly being changed. We're constantly being affected either by our environment and its eroding leveling effect grinding us down to the level of all around us or there's that work of the Spirit of God within us that's causing us to become what he wants us to be.

The answer to the ministry as we read here was there was a man, Barnabas, who had wealth and shared it, became a son of consolation consoling the church in their poverty. But when the church needed someone they had seen such wonderful change take place in Barnabas that the church sent him as far as Antioch for he was a good man full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. This is the answer to your circumstances.

This is the answer to your situation. This is the answer to your present location. It isn't going to be helped by a move.

No, don't ask for a transfer. That isn't going to be the answer. You ask for a transfer, you're going to spoil it all by taking you as you are with you to where you're going to go.

The only thing that will help is when the Spirit of God can work in us as he did in this man, Barnabas who used what he had. The only thing he had back there was money. So he sold it and provided for the people.

You see, what's that in thy hand? Throw it down. If you throw down what you've got God will add to it. And he did what he had and then God began to work in him.

And now we find the church recognizing such a wonderful change such a development, such an enlargement that when they want someone to go over here as far as Antioch because they've heard of Gentiles coming to Christ here's a man who is a good man in good report of those around him he's full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost. Something's happened to him in his circumstances then he was able to go with the blessing of the church and the anointing of God he hadn't said, oh, if I could just get up to Antioch then I'd become a real witness for Christ. No, this is too easy.

God wants to do the work right where we are and when he's done the work in us where we are then he can move us. The geography isn't important. Some people spend lives running from failure to failure to failure expecting that there'll be some magical metamorphosis in that new place but what's going to happen is they'll carry along what they were.

Oh, I think the answer for us is not to look over there socially over there financially over there organizationally over there over here. No, no. The answer for us is to look to him and say, oh God, but by thy grace and the power of thy spirit I'm but a useless clod that couldn't bear fruit.

But if you can just take me bad so bad that I needed a savior's dying love and by your cleansing blood and your grace make me good with goodness not mine own but yours unbeliever just simply saturated by it penetrated by it polluted by it. Oh God, if you can just give me faith and Lord, I have a a spirit that's been cantankerous and mean and rebellious and selfish and sinful and Father I bring myself to the cross fill me with thy Holy Spirit. Then it's all of grace and it's all of Christ and I haven't had to go organizationally somewhere else.

I haven't had to go financially someplace else. I haven't had to go socially someplace else. I haven't had to go geographically someplace else.

I met my problem right where I was because my problem was me Oh God deal with me then I'll be available to the church and I'll be available to the Holy Ghost and so there was a Barnabas he'd been prepared and there's always work for a prepared man or a prepared woman you say well what ministry will I have? Oh, there's no problem about that. What minister will God have in you? If he can have in you what he wants then he can have through you what he wants. This I see every believer every believer useful to the Lord in his place under his control under his direction.

This fellowship of witness was to be shared with the youngest the least known the least equipped naturally. There's not a thing that would make us think from the earlier references to Barnabas that he would be the one the church would send on this important mission but you see he's grown so much from Acts 4 to Acts 10 that God can trust him. Can God trust you with responsibilities today that you couldn't have born last week last month last year? Has something happened in you that's made you available to the Lord in ways you weren't before? This is what we see everyone and you're important in God's plan as someone to whom you're the best Christian they know and if God can deal with you in the areas that he needs to perhaps you'll be able to reach that one through you.

Let's look at it then from this point of view. Wasn't the apostles there in Jerusalem the evangelizing was done by these certain disciples scattered abroad and now they're able to take Barnabas for an enlarged responsibility because he's been enlarged by the Lord. He's called the son of consolation because he shared his money now he's called a good man full of the Holy Ghost and faith.

Wasn't that he just was generous now there's been spiritual maturity oh don't you want to grow up into Christ I do I cry out in my heart day and night Lord make me all that by thy grace you've intended me to be don't let me be satisfied with less than your best and you see when we finish a lifetime of praying like this do you know what we've done we've just graduated from kindergarten it's going to take an eternity to answer that prayer but oh that we might see it brought on and as far as we can while we're still here well I didn't intend to speak this long but I'm glad I did I hope you are let's go to the Lord in prayer

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