



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 35 Momentous Mercy
By Pastor Jody May 05/28/2023**

Acts 11:19-30 ESV

The Church in Antioch

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

[INTRODUCTION]

So far from Antioch we have just seen an intense work of the HS through a small group of Hellenistic Jews, maybe even two men, working out the first stage of this *1st Gentile Church Plant* which we called ***Effective Evangelism***. God had sent people, with **Cultural Confidence** and some Good **Gospel Intelligence** to evangelize people that looked like them and it went well under **God's Sovereignty**. It went so well that news reached back to Jerusalem which must



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have caused quite a stir for people who were not of the mind to take the Gospel to non-God fearers first (11:1-18 – old prejudices die hard).

They sent an old friend of ours now, Barnabas, and we saw how he instituted phase 2 of this church plant with a *New Believer Training Program* we called ***Devoted Discipleship*** which consists of 4 parts, **Accountability, Encouragement, Instruction, and Fruit**. All of that to produce in these people the **Image of Christ**, so that they are **not carried away** by the world (Eph. 4), which would always be a danger for them in Antioch.

Now we move onto this third and final phase of this new church plant, where there is an abandonment for the concern of self. Taking the place of once selfish motives is now a ***Momentous Mercy***. **What does that look like?** Well, it looks like a people that are more concerned about others than they are about themselves.

[ILLUSTRATION]

It's not every day we see an act of heroics or selflessness but 3 weeks ago Ron Nessman, was caught on camera catching a baby stroller rolling towards a busy intersection in California.¹ You might have caught that on the news but a woman had unfortunately not locked the wheels on the stroller only to discover that when after looking back in the car it began to roll away... Ron was a recent homeless man who had lost someone in 2018 and of which the result of that was him losing interest in life and choosing to live on the street. In 2023 Ron had recently returned to his family, was working through his problems, had just come from a job interview, and was feeling grateful for all his blessings. Upon seeing this situation Ron raced into action, his heart again full of the right kind of empathy. Upon one interview he implored people not to give him money, but instead could only talk about the horror of seeing that woman crying out in sheer terror as she was watching this tragedy play out before her eyes.

Now that's not a new story, we have seen things like this before, we have perhaps been on the receiving end of this type of generous work, and you may have even

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjSAo5BMBV8>



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been the one giving hope to someone in need. What most, if not all these situations have in common, is that for **Momentous Mercy** to take place, a type of Mercy that goes far beyond what is expected, is that was **precipitated** by a **changed or renewed heart**.

This has been the Christian calling card for the last 2,000 years to portray a Christ-like Mercy. Because of a changed/renewed heart they will go into the middle of a dangerous/traumatic event and will do things that look life-threatening to the rest of the world.²

In 165 AD, a plague known as the Antonine Plague (most likely Small Pox), spread from the Huns, to the Germans, and then throughout the Roman Empire, killing a quarter to one-third of the population.

During the Antonine Plague, Christians stepped in to serve those in need at great risk to themselves. When the Cyprian Plague (250 AD) hit Rome most of the population fled in an effort to distance themselves from the disease in self-preservation, Christians stepped out in faith to care for those in distress.

Christians, as **first named in Antioch** (11:26), are people that are not known by their ancestry, ethnicity, social status, nor occupation, we are known to be **radicals like our Lord**. When He forgives radically, we too hold no record of wrong (1 Cor. 13:1), when He trusts the will of the Father, we too obey without question (Jn. 14:15), and when He loves sacrificially, we too try to outdo one another in love (Rom. 12:10). All of that because our hearts have been changed, by His Momentous Mercy.

MM is the third characteristic, or third stage, of a totally regenerate church plant, as modeled by the first Gentile Church plant here in Antioch. MM has three components that we will look at here in the text: **Selfless Sacrifice, Generous Giving, & Corporate Commitment**.

1. Selfless Sacrifice

² <https://midtowncolumbia.com/blog/early-christians-and-the-plague>



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²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named **Agabus** stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

Ok so first up who invited **Agabus** to the party, talk about *Debbie Downer*. He couldn't help it the Spirit made him do it! Well, what is a prophet, and what is their role in the early church?

The gift of prophecy here takes the **form of prediction**. The prophet's chief function was to **reveal** moral and spiritual **truth**, to "**forth-tell**" rather than to "**foretell**"; but the interpretation of God's message sometimes took the form of predicting events.³ Agabus, just like Barnabas the encourager, and Phillip the Evangelist, and Saul the Instructor, he had a role as well called the prophet. He was the guy that kind of put it all together for people, and would be, "*Here's how your faith should play out, if you're sincere.*" The church needs these type of men to make things clear, they can make **good pastors**, they can tie together the things in the church, they look at the world and then point towards a direction that God is **showing** and point out the opportunities **growing**.

So, what is this famine he was talking about? What was it he was seeing and why bring it up to the church?

"This took place in the days of Claudius" - Claudius was emperor from AD 41 to 54, and there are several records of famines in his time (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 3.320; 20.51–53; 20.101). TNIV rightly translates *over the entire Roman world*, since the word *oikoumenē* ('inhabited world') could be used in that narrow sense (cf. Lk. 2:1; Acts 17:6; 24:5; Lucian, *The Octogenarians* 7; Josephus, *War* 3.29). **A great famine occurred specifically in Judea when Tiberius Alexander was procurator (AD 46–48), probably in AD 47.** A poor harvest (due to a massive flood) in AD 45 in Egypt was followed by a severe grain shortage and high prices in the region, and this state of affairs could well have extended to AD 47. Since Egypt was the

³ Edwards, D. M. (1979–1988). [Agabus](#). In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Vol. 1, p. 65). Wm. B. Eerdmans.



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‘breadbasket’ for the whole region, a drought or famine there meant trouble for the poor in Judea.⁴

You understand this scenario, don’t you? Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe, and because of a bad harvest it drove your food prices up all the way over here in the states. Agabus was putting the recent flood news together with what it would do to the region, along with the effect it would have in Jerusalem, along with the effect on a people who were now outcasts, and would have a problem taking care of themselves. His announcement was not to show how smart he was, he was telling of the tribulation that the church was about to endure. Now, this is where our story gets intriguing today.

²⁹ So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

After the bad news, they in turn didn’t seek to lay up supplies for themselves (inside trader tip) but instead turned what concern they had for those that were their brothers 300 miles away. You see the **HS** not only talks to prophets **He talks to everyone in the church**. The church of Antioch, without any coaxing from Agabus in the text, they look at each other and they know they have to do something. They know they will feel the effects of it too (the famine), but before they know what the cost would be, before having to tell Agabus they’ll have to pray about it, they decide to sacrifice a future comfort for someone else’s immediate need.

[PROBLEM]

I think many times this is where the rubber meets the road for Christians. People as new converts have experienced the love of Jesus, they enjoyed learning they have been loved lavishly, and they enjoy the aspects of a life redeemed by Grace, but to **practice selfless love is a test**. A love that thinks of others first, is the first test to see whether one’s heart has truly been changed or not. Tragically this is

⁴ Peterson, D. G. (2009). [*The Acts of the Apostles*](#) (pp. 357–358). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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where Christianity often stops for people, showing it was never real in the first place (the tares had grown up with the wheat and have chocked them out).

The 1st sign of a heart changed by **Momentous Mercy** is the display of a **Sacrificial Love**, a demonstration of the will displaying that it doesn't matter the cost, something must be done. When you believe that, it leads to the second trait of Momentous Mercy:

2. Generous Giving

²⁹ So the disciples determined, **everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.**

The intent of the verse is that this is not money taken from what the church had already put together, it was a decision that all made, not church leadership for the people. This is a voluntary offering, out of their individual profits, after already giving to each other, (see Acts 2:42) that now went to people they had never seen! This is **Generous Giving**; they were not concerned about saving their extra for themselves but spent it on people because Jesus had spent lavishly on them. What's more, **EVERYONE was giving according to their ability**, from the poorest to the richest, there were no excuses for not giving. Now that is a sign of changed hearts and HS conviction!

Saul who becomes Paul explains why this happens in a person's heart later in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

2 Cor. 8:8-9 ESV

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

[GOSPEL]

Generous Giving, where all people give according to their ability pushing on the limits of their comfort, is a giving empowered by Grace. The Lord chose to become poor (Phil. 2:8 *found in human form He humbled Himself*), to give us the wealth of His love, so that we may become rich and become His heirs. You see



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heirs of the Kingdom of God never look at their money as *'this is what I have'* but instead they know *'this is what I have to steward'* because it models how I was loved!

Let me tell you what this isn't. This is not people virtue signaling by putting an Ukrainian flag sticker on their car, because giving our nation's wealth away based on the back of taxpayers, that's giving out of a corporate collection taken by force. When you come to help others live for Jesus that is the selling of your fields (Acts 3), your investments for a better future, and you give as the Lord gives you and you don't publicize it.

Sign #2 of **Momentous Mercy** is a **Generous Giving** which is a sign of a changed heart because you realize that while you were still a sinner Christ died for you. You give out of your ability, you give out of your storehouses, and you view all possessions as stewardship opportunities. When that happens in a body of believers, unity flourishes, and they all act together decidedly.

3. Corporate Commitment

³⁰ And they did so, **sending it to the elders** by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

They were living out what the Apostle John would consider to be the test of true Christianity:

1 John 4:18-21 ESV

¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The church of Antioch was not threatened into Momentous Mercy, they were loved into it. Their hearts had been changed, and now the response was to love brothers and sisters they had never seen, they actually lived out what Christian Faith teaches, **we all are made siblings through the blood of Christ.**



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If I had to take all we have covered today and put it into one point here's what I would say:

- *Love isn't just declared and never lived but is defined silently by how we give.*

In case you r thinking to yourself Jody that sound a little like works-based Christianity, let me say Christians are saved by Grace alone, through Faith alone but you have to take that to its' conclusion: to **the Glory of God alone**. Therefore, their works will always display a measure of that Grace. So that challenge for us today is how do we display that without making it about us, while asking God to help us have a good heart while learning to be a little more **merciful**.

[CHALLENGE]

Selfless Sacrifice – Thinking of others first.

- Practice responding to an immediate need, and don't look around at others to fill it.
- We are starting up two separate groups for the care of the building. One for outdoor management and one for building cleaning.
- The immediate need is that this church is growing, and our influence is spreading, and our elders need to give some of the physical leadership away.
- We want all families to participate in some way committing to getting your families involved.
- We want to encourage you to practice sacrificing your normal family activities every once in a while, so we all can learn the value of membership responsibilities, and don't wait to put your name down to contribute to the physical need of property management.

**Generous Giving – Practicing a Steward's Heart.
From *Experiencing Generosity*⁵**

⁵ <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-give/> September 21, 2022.



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- Why? Because 79% of Practicing Christians Say Generosity Was Taught to Them. It is not engrained in us to do it, especially when we live in a world that preaches take care of yourself and use force when you can.
- Because 65% of practicing Christians have experienced generosity. Points to that fact that living out life as a follower of God demonstrates His plans for you to help others and to be helped at some point for Gracious Giving is a display of a Gracious God.
- It is anti-culture because it is never forced but encouraged and it displays a love for God that outweighs a love for worldly living.
- You start by teaching the family how to regularly give to the church, and then make everyone in the home a participant of gracious living.
- Every week let's by one extra food item for CAYA and bring it and encourage others to do so, use it as an evangelism tool and ask your neighbors to do the same.

Corporate Commitment – Sending support to other believers.

- We will be sending 2 representatives from HCC this year in October, to work the fields so that we can see Effective Evangelism take place.
- We will be supplying power to an out-building of the school and most likely do some more plumbing work as well.
- We will need an extra \$4,000 to send 2 people, we will not put it in our budget, but this will be practice for all of us outside our traditional corporate giving.
- We will also build a Missions Display in our lobby to we can chart our funds for the people of Ecuador, and display their stories, and to be reminded to pray for them constantly.

Momentous Mercy, be excited that you are given an **opportunity to demonstrate** the love of God to this world, and let us all be thankful that we have a family here who wants to do it together.

[PRAYER]

[COMMUNION]



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[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that was so loving that He chose to pour out on us Mercy instead of the Justice we deserved.

Go in the name of the Son, that endured the display of God’s justice on a cross and demonstrated God’s love to His people in His life.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that opens our eyes to the immediate needs of our brothers and sisters, and will open doors to share our stories with others.