

Grace Fellowship Church

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Series: Acts

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### The Antioch Idea!

Acts 13-14

If you're here this morning and do not have a Bible with you, slip up your hand. We want to put a Bible in your hand. Open it up to Acts and chapter 13. We were in chapter 12 last week. If you didn't hear that one, the title of that message was *Worms Ate Him!* This is going to get me in trouble, but did you remember ever when you were a kid singing that song, "The Worms Go In, the Worms Go Out"? We won't do that. Anyway, that's about Herod.

Chapter 13: How many of you grew up going to Sunday school? Okay, then you probably sat through some Sunday school class about Paul's missionary journeys, right? How many did that? Somebody probably brought out a map, and they said, "Okay, this is Paul's first missionary journey," and they pointed over to Antioch, which basically as a city barely exists anymore, but it was one of the massive cities of the day. It is one of the four great cities of the day.

Then they probably showed you where they went down to a port, and got on a ship, and went across to the island of Cyprus, and you're going, *So what?* Then they went across the island of Cyprus and hit another port and went up north, and at that point, one of the young guys who was

an assistant got kind of upset with them. His name was John Mark, who later on wrote the book of Mark, and he got mad because this journey was like two years long, and it was a hard journey. They got stoned. They were hungry. They were on ships. It was messy, and then they went back and they came back down through and kind of followed their same route and they planted these churches.

Well if you ever sat through one of those classes and you just wanted to smash your head against a wall, I promise you I'm not going to do that to you this morning, but that thing that is normally categorized as Paul's first missionary journey, if you have your Bible open, that's chapter 13 and chapter 14. They usually talk about the fact that Paul had three missionary journeys, and this was Paul's first missionary journey.

Now the problem with that whole idea, aside from the fact tracing a map along roads we don't know and cities we can't pronounce that makes us unnerved (I don't know I could've done that without a GPS), but aside from that, there are some problems with it, and that is that it really wasn't Paul's first missionary trip. It wasn't.

As a matter of fact, if you look at Acts 9:13, this is just in case you're ever in one of those classes again, and they say, "We're going to look at Paul's first missionary trip," then you go, "Well technically it wasn't his first trip." This was *way* not his first trip.

What happened there in chapter 9, if you look at verse 13, as soon as he receives Christ, Ananias enters the house in verse 17, and he "...went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands

on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 9:17) Now look at verse 18. "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus." (Acts 9:18-19)

Now look at verse 20. "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." (Acts 9:20) So his first missionary trip was right where he was. I mean, *boom!* right in Damascus right away he gets really engaged. Now some people say, and it's true, that between now, right here in chapter 9, and chapter 10, there's like a 10-year window, and they sometimes refer to that as "Paul's silent years." Paul went off into the desert, and he spent this time in the desert, and he was kind of in this incubator of discipleship. Really there's nowhere in the Bible that gives us any indication that was really what was going on.

Look over to Galatians 1:15. That actually *is* Paul's first missionary trip. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." (Galatians 1:15-17)

Now Arabia would've been that whole area that would be called historically the Nabateans. It would be Jordan and Saudi Arabia and all that space down in there, and he went down in there, and he wasn't just kind of hanging out because when he comes back to Damascus in chapter 11

of 2 Corinthians, he says, "In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me..." (2 Corinthians 11:22) Now why was he doing that? Because Paul got everything so doggone stirred up down in Arabia, when he comes back to Damascus, they're ready to kill him. He has just stirred things up in amazing ways.

Something different happens here in Antioch. What happens is after this wild dream Peter has that the Gentiles are going to come into the kingdom... Look at chapter 11 of Acts, verse 17. He retells this dream about the lizard lunch, and this is what Peter's statement is: "If therefore God gave them..." that's the Gentiles, "...the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ..." now listen to this, "...who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17)

Here's what Peter says: "I don't have the courage to get in God's way. If God's doing something and God wants to do it, I'm not going to get in front of that Holy Spirit freight train because I'm going to tell you, you're not going to beat God."

People sometimes say, "Well people break the commandments of God." Now let me just tell you something; people don't actually break God's commandments; they break themselves against God's commandments. Think about just a whole big boulder, and the waves come rolling in, and they come up against that big boulder, and *boom!* and they crash. A lot of times people think of themselves as people who are breaking God's commandments. You don't break God's commandments. You just break your life apart *against* God's commandments.

Peter goes, "I'll tell you what, I am not going to get in the way of what God was doing," because he had given this gospel to people who were on the outside. "When they heard these things they became silent..." now you're going to hear from these guys again in chapter 15 because they're not going to stay silent forever, "...and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" (Acts 11:18)

Now if you're a Gentile, raise your hand. Okay, at least you know who you are. You know what a Gentile is? That's everybody who's not Jewish. So if you're not Jewish, this is you. Now in reality, the Gentiles are basically mutts. Okay? They're just mixed up. Now I know people get all worked up about the whole race issue sometimes, but I'm going to tell you something... You understand what a mutt is, don't you? I never had a dog with a pedigree growing up. People would say, "What is that dog?" and I'd say, "It's a dog. It barks. It has hair. It's a dog." They'd say, "Well what kind of dog is it?" I'd say, "It's a dog kind of dog."

Most of us, if the truth is known... Now I know some of you like to think about your pure pedigree. Listen, I went to a family reunion with a bunch of people yesterday, and you know what? Some of those people ought to be in jail. It's wonderful if you have some kind of great heritage and legacy, but most of us, at least in the United States, we really don't know who we are, so don't get too high and mighty. Here's what was going on: They were saying, "Listen, God has given this gift of repentance to the Gentiles."

"Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far..." and this is Libya, and Cyprus, and there you find Antioch, but notice what they do, "...preaching the word to no one but the Jews only." (Acts 11:19) It's hard to break out of religious patterns.

"But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene..." (Acts 11:20) Now Cyprus is where they're going to go on that first missionary trip. Barnabas is from Cyprus. The god that was worshiped in Cyprus was Aphrodite, and they believed she had come up out of the ocean, and they believed their little island there was the island of Aphrodite, and literally if you were a citizen of that island and you were a girl, sometime in your life by law of the island you would have had to serve time as a temple prostitute. So this was a messed up island. So these people who had come to faith, they were from a messed up culture, and then Cyrene, which was like south of Egypt.

"...who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke..." and notice this word here, "...to the Hellenists..." (Acts 11:20) The Hellenists were not your relatives of your Aunt Helen. The Hellenists were people who were kind of proud of the fact that they were Greeks and they were part of that whole Alexander the Great kind of movement, but they were real proud of their bodies, and they were philosophers, and they were proud of their educations. Literally, the word there is *hellenistes*. They were way out people.

"...preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:20-21) Now you know what happens here? What

happens here is the wrong people come to faith. They're not supposed to do this. They're outside the circle. They're not supposed to be doing this.

"Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch." (Acts 11:22) They're going to send somebody in there to check it out. "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus..." which is across the bay, "...to seek Saul." (Acts 11:23-25)

So he leaves this revival and he goes and finds Saul. "And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples..." now look at this, "...were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:26) What happened at Antioch completely changed the world. This is the very first place, and these are the very first people who were ever referred at Christians. If you have ever said to anybody anywhere anytime, "I'm a Christian," this is where it started (Isn't that amazing?) with the wrong people, with the wrong crowd, people who really didn't know any idea what they were doing.

By the way, when they used this term, they wouldn't have used the term as we use Christians; it's really they were the *messianic* people. The word *Christ* means Messiah, Anointed One. They were people who were messianic. They were believing in and looking for the Messiah.

Then it says in verse 27, "And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar." (Acts 11:27-28) That's a documented famine by the way in secular history.

"Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:29-30) Now look over here at chapter 13, because what happens here, this whole thing that happens in Antioch had never ever happened before. What happened at Antioch, and I'm not really good at this part, in chemistry they would call it *catalytic*. Any of you play with chemistry? I'm in over my head already.

If you put certain elements together, they impact each other in a way that they actually change what they are. It's catalytic. It can actually explode. I know this because I went to Tucker High School. (Yeah, go Tigers! Did they win this weekend? I think they may be undefeated.) I have a very good friend who burned down the chemistry lab. Yes, he certainly did. They had to call the fire department, and they had to come and put that out. It was 1970. Burned it up. There are certain little things you just don't do.

I'm going to go in even deeper over my head here, but if there are certain elements in a catalytic environment that are called inhibitors, or anti-catalytic ingredients, what happens is what would have become a catalytic environment is contained and inhibited. Here's what happened at Antioch: Those who would've inhibited what God was doing were back down in Jerusalem, and

they didn't know they couldn't do what they were doing. So they just did it, and it created a spiritual *explosion*, and the people back down in Jerusalem were going, "Wait a minute! You can't do that!"

Catalytic environments, once they become catalytic, creates something that happens that can't un-happen. You can't put it back in the box. Like an atomic bomb, if it goes off, you can't just go, "Can we get a mulligan on that?" It just goes off. There are atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs. One of them is fusion, and one of them is fission. Which one is fission? Atomic? Which one is fusion? That'd be the other one.

Now here's what happens in Antioch: Things just *explode*, and if you want to look at the two chapters, let me give you the big chunks. Here's what happens: In verses 1-5...that's the big chunk I want us to look at this morning, to chew into...that's the inception. That's when this bomb is built. They don't even know they're doing it, but this is where the beginning of the journey starts, there in 1-5.

Then in verses 6-17, this is where the geography happens. They go over to Cyprus, and it's kind of interesting because Cyprus is Barnabas' home turf. They start back over there where Barnabas is from. Then beginning in verse 16, and look at that. If you just kind of hold it in your hand and look over there (verses 16 all the way down through verse 47), that is Paul's first recorded sermon.

Now he has preached sermons before this. He has preached Christ, but we have no idea the content of what he's preaching. This is the very first sermon, and it would be well worth your time to spend some time just meditating in and marinating in that sermon because what that sermon is about is Paul starts all the way over here in Genesis with creation, and he starts chronologically just telling the story all the way up to David. Then he really jumps from David to Jesus.

Now there's a fair amount of space in there, but then he jumps all the way over here, and he gives them this chronological story of what's going on there. I'm actually in January (I'm praying about it. I'd like for you to pray with me about this), I'm thinking about doing a series chronologically through the Bible because people get so lost in the Bible, and what is going on here is because there are just terms we don't really know that much anymore.

Like in this event when he says, "You men of Israel." Now if you knew that event, and you were part of that story, Israel was the northern tribes that were carried off by Assyria that disseminated all over the world. At that point the men of Israel didn't even exist. He's saying, "God is re-gathering His kingdom."

Now look at verse 48. "Now when the Gentiles..." these are the mutts, "...heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord." Now look at this. This messes up people sometimes. "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48)

Now I know sometimes people kind of get weirded out by *appointed*. *Am I like one of the elect?* Okay, here's what you need to hear: If you want to be, you are. Okay? If you don't want to be, you're not. If you're going, *I don't want any part of that. I reject everything about that!* Okay, you're not.

If you're sitting there going, *I really want the Lord to redeem me*, well you're appointed. You're elected. You say, *Well how do I know?* Well the question is...*Do you want to be?* I mean, it's as simple as that. You say, *What does all that mean?* I have no idea. Not even a clue. I've read entire volumes on this. I have listened to probably everything Piper has ever said about this, but it really boils down to this...*If you want to be, you are* because the fact that you want to be means God has already put in your heart that "want to be." Now if you want to be, if you want in, you can get in, Gentile or not. "And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region." (Acts 13:49)

Now it goes then through here. I don't want to get into this, but you're going to start seeing the pushback that is going on there, and then you find that's the response there in 13, and then the second part of the journey is chapter 14:1-25. Now this is important. Look down to verse 25 because this is what happens. They go off on this journey for like two years, a thousand miles. All kinds of stuff happen.

"Now when they had preached the word in Perga..." (Acts 14:25) and they're going literally back around the same way they came. Verse 26: "From there they sailed to Antioch..." that's where it all started, "...where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had

completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together..." listen, "...they reported all that God..." now notice this preposition here, "...had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples." (Acts 14:26-28)

Now if you're taking any notes... I see some of you. You're getting like nervous that we're coming close to the end and you have not one blank filled. So I'm going to give you some, okay? This is important. The first statement there... *This is the first time that we see a church mobilized.* This is the first time we see a *church* mobilized.

You see previous to that groups of people who are mobilized because of the persecution, and there are disciples who go out, and there are people who go and do things, but this is the first time in all of history. This is that catalytic moment where instead of just a small group of people being mobilized, an entire church is mobilized.

I can't emphasize how important that is because here's what happens: Most of the time, the reality is most churches don't care about missions at all. I'm sorry, but that's just true. Even among churches that care about missions and global reach and even local reach, they're small groups of people who go out and do things outside the church, but this is the first time a church said, "We want to *all* be in this. We all want to play. We want everybody in the pool."

Now a few years ago if you had come to Grace, we really didn't talk about missions. We gave money to missions because you know why you gave money to missions? Because if you don't,

you get in trouble with God, amen? You do. God believes in missions, and so we'd sit down every year, we'd write out our budget, we'd put 10 percent in the budget, and then we'd give the money to missions, and missionaries would come and they'd say, "Hey, we'd like to come and talk and talk to your people," and I would go, "Nope. We give you your money. The power company doesn't want to come talk to our people. Why do you want to talk to our people? We pay you the bill."

You do know this. If you are a Christian and you have grown up in church, you have sat through the campaign programs, right? How many of you sat through the capital campaigns? You know everybody who grew up in church knows Malachi, don't you? You do know Malachi. "Open the windows of heaven. You are stealing from God."

I remember hearing those sermons and about stealing from God. I was like terrified out of mind. "Will a man rob God?" Then the preacher would tell some story about, "Would you rob a bank? Would you rob a guy with a gun? No, but you will rob God, and you are cursed with a curse. 'Test Me now if I will not open the windows of heaven.'" You go, *Okay*... You pay the bill!

Now I'm kind of being a little facetious about that, but that is true, amen? I'm being a little funny about it, but I'm going to tell you the truth. It's the only thing in the Bible God says, "Test Me. Give it a roll. See if I won't. Test Me. You give the tithe and see if I won't rebuke the devourer."

Has anybody seen a devourer around lately? Yeah, it's called the US government. Okay, I deeply apologize for that! Just pretend that didn't happen. Ten years ago, our houses were worth something. Okay, never mind.

Here's what He says: "See if I won't just keep the devourer away from you." So this is what we did: We paid 10 percent of our money to missions. You know why? Because I don't want the devourer chewing on the church! Now is that best motive in the world? Say no. No, it's a bad motive, but sometimes God is like a parent. You don't really care why they cleaned their room. Right? You're a parent. You say, "If you clean the room, I'll take you to the movies," and you know what? They go up there with a bad attitude and they clean their room, and you're just glad they cleaned it.

I think God is a Father and He just kind of blesses little baby steps sometimes. *I don't have the best attitude about this, but I'm going to do it.* Okay, you don't have to have a good attitude. We'll work on attitude later. Let's get action down. "I don't want to do my homework." You say, "I was thinking about taking a ride up to Brewsters, but I can't go until you get your homework done." They say, "All right." Okay, fine. If it works, it works.

Now I know you think God doesn't do that, but let me tell you something; there is a reason God talks about heaven in such glorious terms. Sometimes I think we try to be more holy than God. He goes, "You know what? There's a place that has golden streets." We say, "Well can I go there?" He say, "Yep, here's what you have to do." Maybe I have it wrong, but I don't think so.

This is the first time the church gets fully in, gets engaged. I remember when I just started recognizing that we as a church weren't really engaged, and it broke my heart, and I realized we weren't engaged in reaching the next generation, and I thought, *How can we all get in? How can we get in?*

If you weren't in, we couldn't do it. By the way, you who are high schoolers, if you weren't in, we couldn't do it. If you were not making disciples of middle schoolers, we couldn't do it. The whole thing in Clarkston couldn't happen unless literally hundreds of you go down there mobilized. One person, two people, three people? No. *Hundreds* of people and hundreds of you are engaged in reaching Muslim communities. I talked to a couple back there on the way out. They have Muslim neighbors they are loving and reaching out to.

Here's what happens in Antioch: It's the Antioch idea. It's where people stop seeing missions as just a personal responsibility and say, "This is the job of the church, and we want to be a mobilized church." There is a metaphor that comes into my mind when I think about this, and I prayed a lot over this whole passage, and it's the idea that the church is like a spiritual reservoir, and it's a wonderful thing to have a reservoir where you can feed from and where you can drink from, but the reservoir becomes a river that overflows its banks, and it ceases to be just a stagnant place, and it just *explodes* and overflows, and it becomes a spiritual resourcing center that takes back the city.

Our downtown campus, Matt Reynolds, who's the primary leader of that campus down there, 10 years ago wasn't even saved, didn't know Jesus, but you took him into this incubation of

discipleship at Grace, and many of you have commissioned your children. We've seen numbers of people move down to the city. We have a church plant going on in Monroe right now. Listen, we need to think not as just a reservoir but a river that resources.

Okay, let's look at this just quickly. Look at 13, and we're not going to be able to get it all, but I'm going to give you your blanks so you won't hate me. Look at 13:1. "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers..." (Acts 13:1) I'm going to come back and talk about that because we don't talk about prophecy, and it scares people to death when you talk about prophecy, but there were prophets and teachers.

Then you find five people who are named here. "...Barnabas, Simeon..." (Acts 13:1) Now you remember Barnabas. He's the son of encouragement. He's a glue guy. He really reaches in and holds onto people. "...Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch..." (Acts 13:1) which is a whole story in itself. This guy was family to the Herods. Can you imagine that?

When I was working through the Herod up there in chapter 12 last week, Herod would be an amazing mini-series. Can you imagine that? You couldn't even put it on TV. So he had been brought up with this horrendous crowd. "...and Saul." (Acts 13:1) These five really unlikely people.

Now look at verse 2. "As they ministered..." (Acts 13:2) and there are prepositions here I want you to pay attention to. Now you're probably reading out of the New Living because that's what I

really recommend and we use that here. I'm looking at the New King James. It says they ministered to the Lord, and the word is usually translated *worshiped*. It's the word we get our word *liturgy* from, but the primary thing I want you to focus in on is the direction they're facing in their heart. They're worshiping the Lord. They're worshiping, ministering "...to the Lord..." (Acts 13:2)

Let's keep going. "...the Holy Spirit said, 'Now...'" but notice it was after worship. It was after worship "...the Holy Spirit said, 'Now...'" dedicate, "...separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2) God was already at work in their life calling them. The church was worshiping and the Holy Spirit speaks into this, but the *to* comes before *for*. They worshiped. God is more interested in our worship than He is our work. He's more interested in the fact we are more delighted in Him, that we adore Him, that we love Him, that we are enthralled by Him than the fact we get out here and we churn out the work.

Sometimes I have people say to me, "I'm just really not into worship. It doesn't do anything for me." You do understand we haven't actually written one song about you. I'm sorry, but I'm really happy you think so highly of yourself, but worship is just not about you; it's about God. Nobody here when we were on the worship sets says, "I wonder what Jimmy's going to think about this." We haven't written any songs about Jimmy. Jimmy, if you like die and rise from the dead, we might think about writing a song about you, but this is about Jesus.

I hear people say sometimes, "I'm just not getting out of my devotions what I used to." Well goodness gracious, how terrible! Listen, devotions to whom? Who are devotions for? God! We're

devoted to God! The reason you're not getting out of devotions what you're supposed to get out of devotions is because that Book is not about you; it's about God! If you lift up your heart and you turn your heart toward Him in just sheer delight, what blessings you get back are just incidental, but they overwhelm you.

We ought to live our life in such a way that every step we take, whether we're eating apples or peaches... (I went by that Jay More Farm yesterday and had some fried peach pie and barbecue. You know, I had worship right there.) ...or whether you're just saying, "God, thank You that You made coffee beans. Isn't that a good idea? That's a great idea, God. This is amazing!"

You know what our problem is? We're overwhelmed with things that are underwhelming, and we're underwhelmed by things that we should be totally overwhelmed by. The church as a group is worshipping and as they are worshipping the Holy Spirit then speaks and He says, "Listen, I have a couple of guys here, and I have some work to do." You have the ministering *to* the Lord and the work *for* the Lord.

Look right here. They "...laid hands on them..." (Acts 13:3) You know what? I can't finish this sermon. This is just not going to happen today. It's just not going to happen. You're going to have to come back. Listen to me. You have somebody's handprints all over you. You do know that, don't you? Somebody's handprints are just all over you.

By the way, your handprints are all over somebody. There is this long history of the Scripture of placing hands on people and praying for them for their ministry, for their healing, for their salvation, for their leadership.

Let me give you the outline, and you can just come back. They laid hands on them. So you have *to* and *for*, then *on*, and they're sent out *by* the Holy Spirit. They're sent out by the Holy Spirit, and number five, when they come back and give the report, they talk about all God has done *with* them. Now it doesn't mean just God did something with them. God opened doors. God with them. God went with them and did stuff, and they're coming back and saying, "You won't believe what happened over there! Let me tell you about this," because God was with them!

It's my hunger, and it's my pain and my passion that we as a church could be mobilized to reach the world. Not that we just do church and do it efficiently and effectively, but why can't the idea that happens in Grace, why can't we be Antioch? Why can't what God did in Antioch God do again? One of the things that has to happen if that's going to happen is that we have to learn to hear from God. The Holy Spirit said.

Let's pray: Lord, thank You so much for You. Lord, we pray there would be a catalytic event, that we would come together in such a way that what happened just couldn't un-happen. Lord, we pray You will speak to us and that You will move among us as we turn our hearts toward You.