An Effective Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 August 2021

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0:00] So maybe you've heard the humorous expression that some people make things happen, others watch things happen, and still others are left wondering what happened.

We see they have great outreach to their communities. They have an impact also that crosses the globe.
And some churches can see other churches where God is moving like that in a powerful way, and they can wonder, well, why isn't that happening here in our church?
And so Acts chapter 11 introduces us to the church of Antioch, and that was a church that God was using in dynamic ways. Things were happening there. Verse 21 introduces that church beginning and how it grew dramatically under the leadership of both Paul and Barnabas.
It was in Antioch that the name Christian was first being used to describe followers of Jesus Christ.
The church was made up primarily of volunteers who, verses 27 through 30 reveal, gave generously of themselves to send relief to their Jewish brothers and sisters as they were facing a severe famine.
[1:29] What made this church so impactful was how they were submitting themselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Both the leaders and the congregation of the church in Antioch were described as being spirit-filled in chapter 11, verse 24, and then in chapter 13, as we'll see in verses 2, 4, and 9.

What characterizes, though, a spirit-filled church is the question that we should ask when we think about what they were doing. Put simply, a spirit-filled church is one in which all of its members are living in obedience to God's will.
Since God reveals His will and His word, a spirit-filled church is a church that is marked by a deep commitment to Scripture.
And so chapter 13 marks a turning point in Acts. The first 12 chapters, if you remember from all these past years as we've been studying this book, focused on the ministry of Peter.
The remaining, though, chapters focus primarily on the ministry of Paul and the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world. And it was from the dynamic, doctrinally sound, growing and thriving and spirit-led and controlled church in Antioch that that ministry was unleashed.
[2:53] And so the question that I ask you tonight for our study is, do we want to be that same kind of church? And I hope that you would answer yes.

So then the question becomes, well, how do we become that kind of church? And so the main idea for this evening's study is that effective churches are churches that are led by the Spirit.
Effective churches are churches that are led by the Spirit. So the next question then is, how can we know that we are being led by the Spirit as a church?
And so in these verses, we see five marks of a Spirit-led and a Spirit-filled church or congregation. Five marks of a Spirit-led and Spirit-filled church.
The first is godly leadership. Godly leadership. So look at verse 1. Now, there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers.
[3:54] Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manain, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. So strong, effective churches have godly leaders.

And the church at Antioch was no exception. There are five men that are mentioned in these verses who were godly men and whose leadership was marked by their being led by the Spirit.
Luke begins by describing some of them as prophets and teachers. So we know from the New Testament that prophets played an important role in the early church.
Like the apostles, they were preachers of God's Word, and they were responsible in the early years of the church to instruct local congregations. Sometimes, we see in Scripture, they received a new

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

revelation from God.
One of them that plays prominently in Acts is a prophet named Agabus. In Acts chapter 11, verse 28, it says there of him that one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.
[5:01] In Acts 21, later on in verses 10 through 13, he shows up again. And it says, So both of those texts reveal that the prophets received practical, but not necessarily doctrinal revelation like the apostles did.

And so the question that we have is, well, do we still have prophets today? And no matter what you might be listening to late night on TV, people declaring themselves, men and women to be prophets, don't trust them.
In one sense, though, every believer should be a prophet in the sense that we are called to proclaim the Word. And that's something that a prophet does. He proclaims the Word of God. But I believe that with the completion of Scripture, that office has ceased and it's been replaced by those who currently serve as pastor teachers and evangelists who serve as elders and overseers of the church today.
Teachers are leaders in the church who have received the giftedness and ministry of helping others understand biblical truth more clearly. Teachers are different, I think, from preachers in that their instruction takes place in smaller, more intimate settings or one-on-one.
So you're talking about discipleship, you're talking about Sunday school teachers, you're talking about small group leaders. They explain more than they proclaim. While not all teachers are preachers, I think that all preachers should be teachers.
[6:49] Paul tells Timothy that elders must be able to teach in 1 Timothy 3.2. He tells Titus that elders must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it in Titus 1.9.

So Antioch had five men who were both preachers and teachers of God's Word. And it was through their ministry that the church was built up in the faith.
Barnabas is one of those five men. We've already been introduced to him in the book of Acts. He was a Levite, if you remember, from the island of Cyprus. His name, Barnabas, means literally son of encouragement.
And it served as a great description for the kind of man that he was. If you recall, it was Barnabas who convinced those who were skeptical of Paul. And I'll say Paul and Saul.
I'll just mix and match those. So if I say Saul, I mean Paul. If I say Paul, I mean Saul. So don't be confused. And I think with this crowd, you understand that. That's not going to catch you off guard.
[7:53] But if you remember, they were skeptical of Saul and his conversion. And it was Barnabas who took Paul from Tarsus and who involved him in the church and who spoke up for Paul and who incorporated him into the work that was being done in the church in Antioch in chapter 11, verses 25 through 26.

Again, it was Barnabas who, along with Saul, were the ones appointed to carry the church's contributions for the relief of the Judean church in Jerusalem. So we see that he was a well-respected and entrusted leader in the church.
We don't know much about Simeon or Lucius or Manain. Luke notes that Simeon was called Niger, which means black. That may indicate that he was a dark-skinned man, which we know, though, from that region that all of them had a dark complexion.
So this could likely mean that Simeon was from Africa, that he was an African. Some people think that this Simeon is the same Simeon who helped the Lord carry his cross, but there's no concrete evidence that supports that to be the case.
Lucius is connected to Cyrene, which is a city in North Africa, but nothing else is known about him.
Next is Manain, and I hope I'm saying his name right. Luke mentions that he was a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch.
[9:15] That's Herod Antipas. That's the Herod of the Gospels. And so what we learn from that is that he was brought up alongside Herod the Tetrarch.

So if your Bible has the, if you have the King James Version or the New American Standard or the NIV, it says that he was brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. So suntrophos, that word brought up can literally be, or it can be translated foster brother.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

So it's likely that this man was reared with Herod Antipas in the household of Herod the Great. Somewhere though along the line, he was saved and he abandoned whatever earthly privileges no doubt came along with being a part or connected to such a prominent family.
Saul or Paul needs no introduction. Through his efforts, the gospel spread throughout the Gentile world. And so these five men were the shepherds who led the flock of Antioch with such great effectiveness.
But again, I think it's interesting for us to note that three of those five are guys that we don't know a whole lot about. Yet here their names appear in Scripture.
[10:32] We don't know much about who they were. We don't know a whole lot about what they did. But the thing that we've got to understand is that God knew who they were. And God knew what they were doing or what they had done.

And that's what truly matters in the end. And so we should thank God for all of the nameless leaders that the church currently has, that the church has been blessed to have in the past.
Their service to the Lord, while it may have gone unnoticed by many in the world, it's never gone unnoticed by Him. And it's had continuing results to this day.
So the second mark of an effective church is that they are spiritually disciplined or spiritual disciplined. So godly leaders and spiritual discipline.
Look at the beginning of verse 2. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, godly leaders should be spiritually disciplined leaders.
[11:31] These men were preoccupied with the same spiritual disciplines as the apostles. In Acts chapter 6 verse 4, it says of them that they will, or they said that they needed to devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word when they established the office of deacon.

So worshiping, ministering, serving, it all comes from the same Greek word that means to discharge a public office. It describes one who is discharging the public office of a priest or priestly service.
In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it describes the priests who ministered in the tabernacle. Serving in a leadership role in the church must be viewed as an act of worship to God.
Such service consists of offering spiritual sacrifices to Him, including prayer, including the oversight of the flock, God's people.
It includes studying and preaching and teaching the word. In order to serve the church well, leaders in the church must primarily see their ministry as an act of worshipful service to the Lord.
[12:47] Those who lead in the church must not forget that they serve God primarily by ministering to people. If you take God out of that equation, though, then leaders become more tempted to become people pleasers.

We serve God by ministering to people. And we can't forget that again because we can become people pleasers. Monty Hale, our DOM, said yesterday in our Forge meeting, if we want to be people pleasers, then we should sell ice cream.
And I think that's true. Most people are pleased with the ice cream man when he comes through the neighborhood, right? But that's not our calling. The Lord must be the object of our ministry as leaders.
In serving Him, we will serve others in the way that they truly need. The Bible frequently connects fasting with times of persistent and passionate prayer. So they were worshiping and they were fasting.
But Scripture does not command believers to fast. However, Jesus assumed that His followers would fast. For example, in Matthew 6, 17, He said, But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.
[14:07] In Luke 5, verses 33-35, And they said to Him, The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. But yours eat and drink.

The Pharisees challenged Him. And Jesus said to them, Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.
So fasting is done for the purpose of setting aside food in order to concentrate then on spiritual issues. And sometimes it's the case that those spiritual issues are so heavy that you actually even lose the desire to eat for a time.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Spiritual discipline, again, indicates that the leaders were devoted to serving the Lord, and they were devoted to serving the church and executing the will of God within it.
So godly leaders who exercise spiritual discipline, and then the third mark of an effective church is that it engages in missions. Engage in missions.
[15:16] So look at the rest of verse 2, going through verse 5. The Holy Spirit said, Men who are spiritually disciplined will see God extend their mission field.

God chooses to advance the gospel through those who are actively serving Him already. He is not likely to take idle Christians, dust them off, and entrust them with such important works.
Saul and Barnabas, we know, were deeply involved in serving the Lord already when the Lord called them and set them apart to further advance the gospel.
God chose experienced, proven men for this very important work in ministry and mission to the Gentiles.
Look at what the Holy Spirit says again. It's He who sets apart. It's He who calls. They are His to command, and the command is given that they will continue to serve the Lord.
[16:51] As I was thinking about that, I was remembering about four years ago when I came here to serve as your pastor and sharing that news with my previous church, and a lot of them wanted to know, well, why?

Why are you leaving? It seems like everything is going fine. Why would you leave us? And so I would try to tell them, well, because God's calling me to go. And when I would say that, they just have these blank stares like, well, that can't be it.
You know, it's got to be something else. And then, no, when God says go, you go. You don't have much choice in the matter. And if you don't go, it's going to be miserable for you until you do go.
Another principle to pull out of these verses is that God sovereignly calls people to ministry. He calls men to pastor. And I believe He calls women at times to marry men who enter into the pastor.
And I've heard of multiple women who talked about the fact that they knew that they would one day marry a pastor. And what a pastor's wife does is incredibly important for him and also for his church.
[17:54] The church did not choose Saul and Barnabas for this task. I think they probably would have been the last two that they would have been willing to let go.

Why would you send off these two? I mean, this is the cream of the crop. But eventually, they did because the Lord was going to have His way. Again, if I had a Paul or if I had a Barnabas in my church, I would not want to see them go.
And as a matter of fact, I've prayed for a long time that our church would be that kind of church, that church that God is calling people into the ministry, whether that's pastoring or into the mission field, and that we would be that church who sends them out.
And I'll tell you that I think I'm starting to realize my prayers being answered. They soon will be answered. And I'll confess, I almost don't want them to be answered because I like these people. And I don't want to see them go. But that's selfish. And I understand that they are God's command. And I nor anyone should get in the way of that. Another principle for us to learn here is the importance of being patient, waiting for God's timing.
[19:09] The Antioch church did not draw up some kind of a mission strategy about how they were going to reach the Gentiles more effectively. Instead, they were carrying out the ministries that God had already entrusted to them.

Then, when the Spirit spoke to them, they listened and obeyed. And so it's important that we understand that doing God's will in the present will better enable us to discern what God's will is for the future and the future of His church.
The leaders of the church understood what the Holy Spirit was commanding them to do. And we don't see that there's any kind of grumbling, that there's not any kind of resentment. There's no questioning God.
Are you sure that it's Paul and Barnabas? What about these other two over here? God was calling them. And again, there was no grumbling for many of them saying, well, why wasn't it me?
You know, Lucius isn't heard saying, well, Lord, what about me? Why don't you call me for this special reason? Again, the Holy Spirit demanded their best. And this church obliged to send out their best.
[20:15] Again, these men fasted and prayed. No doubt this time their fasting and prayer was focused on the success of Saul and Barnabas's ministry. And so having prayed for them, the

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Antioch church sent them off.

Sent off can also be translated. They let them go or they released them. It is clear that it was the spirit, again, not the church, who set them apart and who called them to go and to serve as missionaries.
Since God had sent them, all the church could do was cut the cord and let them go, having prayed for them. Again, this truth is reiterated in verse 4, where Luke says that they were being sent out by the Holy Spirit.
It was the spirit who called them, set them apart. It was the spirit who sent them, using the church to do that. Saul and Barnabas then left Antioch and they went down to Seleucia, which is located about 16 miles north or away from Antioch near the mouth of the Orontus River.
Seleucia served as the port of Antioch. And once there, they took passage on a ship and they set sail for Cyprus. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, and it's about 60 miles wide.
[21:29] In New Testament times, it had two major cities. One was Salamis, which is the chief port city in the main area of commerce, and the other was Paphos, which was its capital.

So Saul and Barnabas may have chosen to begin their journey in Cyprus because according to Acts 4.36, that was where Barnabas was from.
And so that was familiar territory to him. Also, it was close to Antioch, probably two days journey at most. And further, Cyprus had a large Jewish population.
And so for all of those reasons, it made for an ideal point of outreach for Paul and Barnabas to begin their first missionary journey. Arriving at the main port city, Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.
And we see that this is or would become Paul's custom. He would go first to preach to the Jews whenever he came into a city. And again, Cyprus had a Jewish settlement large enough to support probably several synagogues in Salamis.
[22:41] And so what they would do is they would travel from synagogue to synagogue and they would proclaim the gospel. And we also see that they had a third companion who was with them, who was John.

This is John Mark who came along to assist them in this ministry. John Mark was a native of Jerusalem. Acts chapter 12 tells us that he was also Barnabas's cousin.
He had likely left Antioch with them and again was a member of this missionary team. However, we'll see that he would desert them and would return to Jerusalem.
And his desertion would later be the source of a conflict between Paul and Barnabas that would see them go their separate ways in Acts chapter 15.
The fourth mark of an effective church is that it will encounter spiritual opposition. It will encounter spiritual opposition.
[23:44] Verses 6 through 8 say, When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

He was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elimus the magician, for that is the meaning of his name, opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
So there was one incident of spiritual opposition. And then we'll see another one in verse 13. If you want to look there. Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Pergia and Pamphylia.
And as I mentioned, John, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. So one thing we've got to understand is that when God's people seek to advance his purposes, satanic opposition is unavoidable.
Paphos was a hub for the worship of Aphrodite. And it hosted a three-day festival to her in which people from all over the island would come.
[24:54] In fact, people from distant countries would come to take part in this pagan festival. So here in this capital, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark encountered a magician.

Now a magician during this time was a term that was used not only to describe someone who dabbled in the dark arts, but also was used to describe those who were well-versed in astrology and astronomy and agriculture and mathematics and history, much like the magi who came and visited Jesus a few years after his birth.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But again, many magicians were involved in various occult practices and were famous for their supposed ability to interpret dreams.
And for that reason, many political leaders or people of political influence would have some kind of magician close by. Such was the case of Bar-Jesus.
Bar-Jesus, that name, means son of salvation. So it's ironic that here a guy who says he's the son of salvation is actually a very evil man, a magician.
[26:04] But Luke adds that not only was he a magician, he was also a false prophet. And so somewhere along the line, Bar-Jesus had attached himself to the Roman proconsul, a proconsul as a governor, and was being used by Satan to influence him in dark and demonic ways.

Sergius Paulus was the proconsul. Luke describes him as an intelligent man. It's interesting that an artifact has been recently found on the north coast of Cyprus, and it contained the inscription that said, in the proconsulship of Paulus.
So that adds, again, further credibility to Scripture's truthfulness. Sergius Paulus was interested in learning more, though, about this new religion that was sweeping across the island that he was governing.
This greatly concerned Bar-Jesus or Alimus, and Alimus, that name means magician. And so he wanted to get in the way of what God's men were doing.
And again, here we are reminded, again, of the reality that when we share the gospel, when we seek to lead someone to Christ, it's not merely an academic exercise of apologetics or making successful sales pitches to them.
[27:32] Rather, and truthfully, it's a war. It's a war against the forces of hell. Saul and Barnabas were engaged here in spiritual conflict, in spiritual battle, in spiritual warfare, with Bar-Jesus for the soul of Sergius Paulus.

But Satan has other means to attack the spread of the gospel. He works also to infiltrate the church and to derail it from its mission by causing us to get in conflicts about all different kinds of things that end up not really mattering in the long run.
And again, we see that that's the case. And it's the case with John Mark. Whatever was happening, all of this was just too much for John Mark to take in. And so he left them.
He deserted them. And he went home. Though later, he would be restored. So we'll see in chapter 15, there's this conflict.
Barnabas says, let's give John Mark a second chance. And Paul says, nope, we don't have the time for that. You know, this mission and this work is too important for someone to hightail it and to head home.
[28:43] And so there was conflict that saw them go in their separate ways. But later on in Paul's ministry, we have this note that he gives to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, verse 11.

There he says that Luke alone is with me. Get Mark. This is John Mark. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.
So even when we have those conflicts within the church, I think it's better to try to work towards resolutions, to stay on the same page.
But even when those conflicts create some kind of division, maybe that person leaves the church, there's always hope for restoration. There's always hope that later on we will see clearly and we will get back on the same page to advance the gospel together.
The fifth mark of an effective church is that it will experience spiritual victory.
[29:42] It will experience spiritual victory. So there'll be opposition for sure, but make no doubt that there will be victory over that opposition. Look at verses 9 through 12.

But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him, bar Jesus, and said, You, son of the devil, you, enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?
And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time. Immediately, mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.
Then the proconsul believed. And so isn't it interesting here again, we see, and I love it, when Satan opposes God and his people and his mission, God uses that to save people, right?
Satan thought he was winning when Jesus was dying on the cross, and obviously, in the end, he realized that it was the death blow, that the Son of God died to save sinners and rose again on the

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

third day.
[31:04] And so here, he's got his man in place to try to prevent Sergius Paulus from hearing the gospel, but Paul, filled with the Spirit, because God is mightier than the enemy, looks at him intently.

And that's one of those things where, I know I've had this conversation before, but when we get to heaven, if there's some way that we can go back in time and see some of these events that happened in Scripture as if they were happening in real life, you know what I'm saying?
If there's some room where it's just like on screens, we can see David killed Goliath, we can see, more importantly than that, the day when Jesus rose from the grave. This is one of those things that I think that I would like to see.
Show me when Paul looked at that deceitful man and called him out and caused him to go blind. It was really the Holy Spirit who caused him to go blind, but you know what I'm saying.
So again, with that, Satan's emissary had been defeated, and Sergius Paulus was saved. One other thing I think we need to learn from their encounter is that Satan is not someone whom we should fear.
[32:16] The Lord does not want us to live in fear of his conquered enemy. Don't be afraid either of his emissaries. Stand firm.

Be courageous. Proclaim and trust that God will take care of the rest when you do so. Throughout Scripture, we see time and time again that when God's people are opposed by Satan's forces, they end up prevailing in the end, not because of who they are, but because of who God is.
One thing, too, I heard recently, I heard it at Falls Creek, which I thought was a great point. You know how Satan will often want to lie to us and make us feel like, well, you know, you're so sinful, who are you to share the gospel with people and throw up our past in our face?
And our speaker said, whenever Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future. And I thought, man, that is good. I like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
I was all those people. I met Jesus. I'm good. I got eternal life. But you are, you're going to spend eternity in hell and it's going to be torture for you for endless ages. I'm not afraid of who you are.
[33:29] So, again, we see the church at Antioch serves as an example of what effective churches should look like and what they can expect. So, you know, should we see increasing opposition from Satan?

that should be a sign to us that we are doing what the Lord is calling us to do. We're being obedient to His will. We're not afraid because we know in the end we win.
We've already won because of our faith in Jesus Christ and who He is. So, let's strive to continue to be ever more so that kind of effective church by making sure that we are marked by these five characteristics.
Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your word. I thank you for this group. Thank you, God, that we have had this time to come and to study and to enjoy fellowship and to learn.
Lord, our desire is that we would be this kind of church. God, in many ways, I feel like that you've caused us to be that way. But we want to excel still more. We want to be a church, Lord, that has godly men in leadership.
[34:40] We want to be a church, Lord, that is exercising all the spiritual disciplines. We want to be a church that sees the importance of engaging in missions. We want to be a church that doesn't run away or fear opposition from the enemy because we know, Lord, finally, that we have victory in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

And so, Lord, help us to be a church again that's continually marked by these five characteristics, that we would be a church like Antioch was, Lord, that would be a blessing to our community, that would be a blessing to the nations as we're seeking to advance the gospel and making much of the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.
Amen. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host