

2 /6/16

Acts 11:19-26

Pain & Glory

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. 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.

(Pastor Prays)

William Cowper (pronounced "Cooper") is an enigmatic figure in church history. His life was filled with one tragedy after another all the way up until the day he died. He was born in 1731. His mom died when he was six years old and his father was aloof. He was sent to boarding school where he was unspeakably abused. He grew up with a dark cloud hanging over his heart. He fell in love, but the engagement was broken off by his bride's father and he never married.

Cowper was a well-educated man especially in the Greek classics. He became a notable poet in his day. He was plagued by what they called "melancholy" then. We know it as severe depression.

It was so bad he tried to take his own life three times and almost succeeded on the third try. And yet God used his tortured soul to produce some of the most majestic and worshipful hymns Christendom has ever known – with lyrics such as “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”

My favorite that he wrote is: “God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm.” My favorite line in the hymn is, “Judge not the Lord my feeble sense but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face,” meaning that although things look bad

and feel bad and maybe *are* bad, you've got to trust Him for His grace, that a good God is working out a good purpose in the chaos of your pain and worry and heartbreak.

That's the context of this passage. Stephen, their friend, had been brutally killed in Chapter 8 and now they've lost everything. Somehow in the panic of their broken lives, God is going to use them just like he's going to use you. This message is for the sidelined and brokenhearted. It's for the bruised and forgotten. It's for some of you walking in the fog of a confused future.

God Works In Your Pain For His Glory and Your Good

God Works in Ways We Would've Never Chosen

In the next few verses, the Christians are scattered and persecuted but it's the scattering and persecuting that starts to build the church. Let's read v. 19-21 and as we read it, I want you to see the *bad* in v. 19 and the *good* in v. 20-21. *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.*

Sometimes the power and pleasure of God is shown in healings and provision in happy families and healthy children. But sometimes the power of God is shown when the pain is so deep you think you're going to die, when the hurt is so real and betrayal is so deep and the loss is so devastating. Sometimes that's when God works, and in ways we would've never chosen.

Connie and I would not have chosen the inability to have children. God gave us boys I would fight and kill and die for. We don't wish pain or chose pain. We trust God in pain. I don't mean a weird, motivational, hyped-up false Gospel for consumers and window dressers. I mean the Gospel that these people carried in the text. They were being persecuted because they believed in a man who died on a cross in the place of sinners and was raised from the dead. God uses their broken lives to deliver his message of hope.

Many of you are in something you would not have chosen, and it's hurtful and seems pointless and only painful. Can you look up for just a moment and maybe in your heart ask God to take and use it? God works in your pain for *His* glory and *your* good and so often He works in ways we would have never chosen.

There's something else going on here as well.

God Works Through Pioneers of All Stripes

He leads in unexplored territory. I'll just pick a couple of examples from the text. You'll see the first pioneer in v. 19-20 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.*

Unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene. When they got to Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, v. 20 says they started sharing the Gospel with whoever would listen. These are men we never hear about again. They didn't get any notoriety and were never made famous. They had a deep belief in the saving power of Christ and saw people as souls, souls that will spend an eternity in a torture furnace called Hell or will be made children of God by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were pioneers. You know that's what you are called to be: a Gospel pioneer so saturated with Christ that in whatever endeavor you have, Christ comes out. For goodness' sake, these men were being persecuted and thrown out of their homes.

There's a second pioneer in this story. His name is Barnabas. I won't say too much about Barnabas except that he was trusted enough by the church that in v. 22, he was sent as a delegate to check out what was happening in Antioch. V. 24 tells us he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. But that's not what I want to show you. In v. 25-26, he went and found Saul, discipling him when nobody else would be willing even to talk to him.

Now think about it, the man Barnabas invested in became the apostle Paul, the most famous Christian in history and the man God would use to write half of the New Testament. By God's grace, don't underestimate the power of pouring your life into another person's life for the glory of God. God worked through men of Cypress and Cyrene. He worked through Barnabas and He will work through you.

If you are a growing Christian, take someone with you. Read the Bible using the same plan, memorize scripture. I'm memorizing 1 Timothy with several guys. We meet and pray together once a week. Don't sit on the sidelines distressed by trivial junk that doesn't matter.

God works in ways we would've never chosen and God works through pioneers of all stripes.

God Works Through Words

The truth is, you've got to say something. Actions back it up. Lifestyle is a must, but people can't *know* the Gospel unless it's *spoken*. You don't have to be a preacher. Let me show you what I mean. V. 19 *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.* Speaking.

That word "speaking" is not the same word as preaching. That's the word for normal conversation. As they were being run out of their homes and meeting new people along the way, they just talked about the Lord Jesus. You've met people who just got married and they talk about how great it is because they love it. Or a young couple that has their first child, and that child is in every conversation. When you love Christ, then He will be part of your conversation.

I don't mean sharing the Roman Road and pressing for a decision every time you meet someone. I mean the dominating truth of your life being Christ and your devotion to Him comes out in who you are, where you go to church, how you raise your kids, why you are like you are at work and at play. That's *speaking*. Normal conversation.

There's another word in v. 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*. Preaching. Evangelizing. The Good News of Jesus Christ. This is more than a conversation about what Christ means in your life. This is actual sharing the Gospel.

Now if someone asks you when you became a Christian, I'd like to share a good way to explain. Greg Gilbert says always start with God. It's God who is Holy --but not just Holy, but *loving* and holy-- who created all things, including every person, in His image.

But the Bible teaches that that image has been disfigured because you have committed sin. Not only were you born with a sinful nature but you think sinful things and do sinful things willingly. So Jesus Christ the Son of God, became flesh, all God and all man. That is to say, He lived a perfect life. Then the perfect Son of God went willingly to the Cross to take the place of sinners and received the punishment from God for our sin. God focused all that punishment on the Cross so that if you place your faith in the substitute Jesus who died on the Cross, believe in his redeeming grace, and repent and turn from your sin, the Bible says you can be saved.

There's another word in v. 23: exhorted. Barnabas encouraged and motivated. He pointed people to the goodness of Christ and His strength in their weakness. Encourage one another and bear one another's burdens. Don't add to the burden.

And another word in v. 26. When Barnabas found Saul read what they did 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*. "Teach, taught" – taking the Bible and opening it up and learning what this book says.

We have entered a time in history when your Christianity rises and falls on your grasp of God's word. In v. 26, the believers there learned it so well and lived it so clearly that the citizens of Antioch called them "Christians," which means "belonging to Christ." They were called Christians because they lived like Christ and loved like Christ and suffered like Christ. They were the people of Christ. It was of Christ they spoke. It was of Christ they sang. It was for Christ they lived.

God will work in your pain and He'll do it for His glory when you surrender your life to Jesus Christ.

(Pastor prays)