**Evidence**

There was a certain elderly woman who had immigrated to the United States from Europe as a child and lived here most of her life. At a certain point she decided she wanted to become an American citizen. She already possessed a Permanent Resident (Green) Card. She…

         18 years old or older

         Wrote and spoke English

         Was of good moral character

She filled out form N 400 – the Application for Naturalization. She passed the biometric evaluation and successfully went through the USCIS, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, and finally went to take the oath of citizenship.

         Judge asked her to raise her right hand – she did

         *Do you swear to defend the Constitution of the United States against all its enemies, foreign or domestic*?

         Suddenly she became very pale and with trembling voice asked, *Uhhh…all by myself*?

That would be a frightening prospect wouldn’t it?

What if a similar process was required to become a Christian? What if we were made to go through an application procedure, and interview, then were asked to take an oath: *Do you swear to defend the faith against all enemies, within or without the church*?

How many of us could defend our faith against an intelligent skeptic? How many of us prepare ourselves to defend our faith against an intelligent skeptic?

By the grace of God nothing like that is demanded. *To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to be children of God*. John 1:12 Through faith we are saved by grace, not from ourselves and not by works. (Ephesians 2:8f)

There’s nothing controversial in that. We all agree and accept it. It is the Gospel.

Of course, we also agree and accept the words of James: *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* *A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.* James 2:14,17, 24

There’s plenty of room to argue about what that means exactly. Can we agree on this, Genuine faith in Christ includes evidence by way of living. We’re going to come back to this but first let’s look at Acts 11.

There are a couple of things going on here that we should note. **First**, word spread of what happened when Peter shared the Gospel with Gentiles in Caesarea. At first people missed the importance of what happened and criticized Peter for going into the house of and eating with uncircumcised Gentiles.

Peter explained what took place. God gave him a vision and simultaneously sent an angel to Cornelius orchestrating the two of them getting together for a preaching session. He pointed out to his detractors that when these Gentiles believed the Holy Spirit came upon them, *Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*  Acts 11:16

Peter drew this conclusion,*If God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”* Verse 17 What a humble statement.

Prior to his experience with Cornelius Pater would not have welcomed Gentiles. We talked last week how Peter said, *I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.* Acts 10:34f

The inquisitors accepted his explanation and rejoiced that God has welcomed non-Jews into faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is for everyone. Jesus came to save the world, not just some of the world. He came to save

         Jews and Greeks

         and whites and African-Americas,

         and bartenders and gardeners,

         and bikers and chocolatiers,

         and politicians – well maybe not politicians.

He came to save men and women,

         sports fans and couch potatoes,

         teachers and cops,

         nurses and animal rights activists,

         star gazers and truck drivers,

         skate boarders and CEOs,

         car salesmen and scientists,

         prostitutes and preachers,

         baristas and cab drivers,

         tall people and short people,

         Walmart greeters and television personalities.

Peter understood and made clear to the church in Jerusalem including the Apostles, Jesus came to save the whole world.

A **second** thing that happened, recorded in verses19-26 is that the Christians who had been scattered by the persecution were telling the Gospel wherever they went, Phoenicia and Cyprus and Cyrene and Antioch. *The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.* Verse 21

The Elders of the church in Jerusalem heard this great news and dispatched Barnabas the encourager to build them up. *He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.* Verse 24

Barnabas, understanding how spiritual gifts work, went to Tarsus to fetch Saul, soon to be called Paul. Saul was an extremely gifted teacher and bold preacher. He brought Saul to Antioch and for a year those new Christians were taught by perhaps the greatest preacher in the history of the church.

Barnabas and Saul experienced such success that the enemies of the Gospel, who couldn’t argue with the teaching, choose to denigrate the believers and started calling them Χριστιανους, Christians. It wasn’t mean as a compliment, none-the-less the believers joyfully adopted it.

**One more** important thing is reported here. When a man named Agabus predicted a famine in the entire Roman world*, The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.* *This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.* Verse 29f

All in all this is a rather positive chapter. The church is taking God at His Word. When He said take the Gospel to the Gentiles, they took the Gospel to the Gentiles. Filled with the Holy Spirit they shared the message of Jesus with everyone they contacted.

Now I want to go back and look at a verse I skipped over. I want us to see something very important. Those Christians didn’t just tell people about Jesus, they lived lives transformed by Jesus.

With Barnabas as the subject of the verbs, *When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.* Verse 23

“*He saw evidence*” comes from one word, ειδον. Ειδον means more than to simply capture an image with your eyes. It means to take in the whole scene, observing the nuances and subtle things.

         For example, when I look at a painting I see a person. An artist observes the lines of the muscles, the texture of the skin, the strands of hair.

         When I watch a baseball game I see whether my team scored more runs that the other team. Coaches observe the mechanics of the pitcher, the movements of the defense, the way the batter is swinging the bat.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch he observed the whole scene. We’re told he observed the grace of God manifest in these people. They didn’t just believe in Jesus. They received Him. They surrendered their lives to Him. They truly followed Him.

That they had accepted the salvation of God was clear for all to see.

Luke didn’t write of specific evidences that demonstrated the grace of God in them so we’re left to imagine. I’m going to imagine out loud. You’re free to disagree with me but here’s the evidence I think Barnabas observed of the church and of the individual Christians.

**1.** He observed integrity, or what Jesus called in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:8, pure in heart.

The unbelieving world has observed too much of churches that say one thing but do another. At the risk of offending fans, I want you to look at these two houses.

Show images side by side

One belongs to Billy Graham, the other to Joel Osteen. I don’t begrudge any man for financial success, but what does the world observe of one of America’s most notable preachers? Humility? Mercy for the poor? Self-sacrifice?

I read from one preacher who was trying to get a man to make a decision to accept Christ. He said, *You know what you should do. What is keeping you from it*? The man answered, *because when I do the people in the church will quit visiting me*. How sad that he observes that the people of the church only care until he gets baptized. If we say we care about people, we need to care about people.

I think Barnabas observed a church in which the people lived the teaching of Jesus. They did what Jesus did.

**2.** I also think Barnabas observed a church that practiced mercy.

Jesus said in Matthew 25, *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.* Verses 31f

The standard of judgement was simple,

*I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.* Verses 35f, 40

I doubt that Jesus is going to brag about how big our church buildings are or well we dress for worship. I don’t think He’s going to care what style of songs we sing in church or how many people we fit into our building.

I think He’s going to count our Generosity Barrel. I think He’s going to measure what we did for the Women’s Care Center, how we reached out to the lonely and troubled, how we welcomed people who look different than us.

I think that’s what Barnabas observed in Antioch.

**3.** Barnabas observed a church that exhibited the Fruit of the Spirit.

He saw people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. People who had crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires in order to live a Christ-like lifestyle.

**4.** I think Barnabas observed a church who used their spiritual gifts.

God gives us gifts for ministry through His Spirit. Spiritual gifts are tools for outreach. They enable us to teach and encourage and support and care. Like Jesus, we’re not here to be served but to serve.

The leadership gifts of the Spirit are intended…*to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* Ephesians 4:12f

**5.** I think Barnabas observed a church that proclaimed Jesus.

They didn’t just talk about Jesus, they believed and taught the person of Jesus. They told people about the person, the friend, the man who gave His life for us.

They didn’t promote themselves. They knew they were sinners. As someone once said, they were like starving beggars telling other starving beggars where to find food.

They didn’t just tell people to come to church as if the church would save them. It’s a funny thing. Christians tend to limit evangelism to inviting people to church. The fact is, if someone believes and loves Jesus no one has to invite him to church. People who love Jesus worship. They told people about Jesus.

**6.** I think Barnabas observed Christians who were involved in the church.

You’re welcome to disagree with me but I firmly believe that you can tell the seriousness of a man’s faith by his participation in a church. Jesus loves the church and gave His life for her. Jesus loves the church. It’s His bride.

You will not find any believer in the New Testament who was a loner. There’s never a reference of someone who didn’t think he needed the church. There are no spiritual orphans.

Men, would you be satisfied with a part-time bride? She’s your wife when it’s convenient but not if she has something else to do. Ladies, would you be happy with a part-time husband, one who you never know if he’ll be around or not? I’ve counseled many husbands and wives who were not satisfied with a part-time spouse.

I really don’t Jesus is pleased with a part-time bride, or part-time members of His bride. When Gary Johnson we here teaching the Leadership Summit, he shared a problematic statistic. Forty years ago Christians averaged participating in church stuff something like 3.9 times each week. (I’m sorry I don’t remember the exact number.) I do remember this number: today Christians average 1.7 times each month.

The church mattered to those Christians.

**7.** I think Barnabas observed a church that glorified God.

It was a church that worshiped, and praised, and honored Him.

It was a church that followed His Word and obeyed His teaching. It was a church that surrendered everything else to be His people. It was church that loved God and it showed in their lifestyles.

**Now**, a question: Why was this very young church so able to demonstrate the grace of God that when Barnabas arrived that’s he observed and apparently reported?

Often, when a person first comes to Jesus, he’s captivated by His love and grace. There’s a certain exhilaration in committing yourself to the Lord, inviting Him to change you from the inside. You’re excited to become a prayer warrior, a diligent student of the Bible. Every teaching, every command you learn from God’s Word fine-tunes your lifestyle to be like Christ.

I think that’s what was going on in Antioch. They were new Christians. They were on top of the world. They wanted to reflect the Savior in all things. They wanted to be known as Jesus followers, or as it happened, to be called Christians.

Another question, why aren’t all churches like that church in Antioch?

For one reason or another the freshness of newfound faith in Jesus tends to dissipate. The Christian walk becomes an uphill march. The former joy is replaced with skepticism, cynicism, lethargy, boredom.

Perhaps you went through a difficult experience with another Christian. Perhaps some physical or family trial overtook you that God didn’t fix. Perhaps God answered a prayer, but not the way you thought or wanted. Maybe none of what you were experiencing matched what you expected. Maybe you tire easily.

Someone once said, *The problem with life is that it is so daily*. Sometimes Jesus followers find themselves bored by the daily routine of Christian disciplines and routines.

Maybe you’ve experienced discovering a new hobby – playing guitar or small engine repair or quilting. You fully intended to master the skills necessary, logging countless hours of practice.

But then the tedium of fundamentals numbs your mind. Then you stopped improving so you felt like you were wasting time. Now your guitar sits untouched in the corner, your tools hang neatly on a peg-board untouched, your material and thread are stored in a plastic tub in the attic.

That digression sometimes occurs with our passion for Jesus. Like couples who fail to build on their love allowing their relationship to deteriorate until they no longer feel what they used to feel, sometimes believers in Jesus find that somehow the honeymoon has ended.

That’s never Jesus’ fault. His love never fails, never gives up, never runs out, but sometimes we allow ours to. We allow our devotion to drift away to some other god: our work, our toys, our leisure activities.

Jesus called out the Christians in Ephesus for that very thing, *I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.* Revelation 2:4f

The people in that church had allowed their love to wane. Let this be a warning to us today. We each and we all must not forsake our first love and let our spiritual lives plummet.

Now let’s return to James. *What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Faith is more than a set of doctrines. Faith includes doctrine or theology, and yes these beliefs are important but the object of faith is most important.

People have faith in all sorts of things. It’s not only what we believe, it’s in whom we believe. Christian faith is in the person of Jesus.

There’s a religious group who call themselves Pastafarians. They worship something called the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Check them out at [www.vengaza.org](http://www.vengaza.org/).

Their purpose is to ridicule belief in Intelligent Design of the universe. Like most anti-intelligent design people they begin a priori with the premise that matter is all that exists. What they don’t realize is that they’ve made matter their god. They worship at the altar of atheism but don’t even realize that what they believe is by faith, no less than Christian belief in God.

But what good is any faith if it doesn’t support itself with good works? What good is our faith unless someone observing can recognize the grace of God in us?

What if Barnabas arrived in La Porte? What evidence would he observe of us?

If we’re not demonstrating the grace of God in our lives we need to repent and return to our first love. If we are showing the grace of God, I encourage us, I encourage you to remain true to the Lord with all your heart.

*When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*