The Book of Acts Lesson 23

Acts 11:19-26

“Guilty as Charged”

**Introduction:**

It is fascinating what forensic scientists can do. In criminal cases, forensic scientists are often involved in the search for and examination of physical traces which might be useful for establishing or excluding an association between someone suspected of committing a crime. As a culture, we have displayed this realm of science in movies, books, and TV dramas. Quite possibly, the majority of people’s exposure to forensic science is found in crime dramas on TV. In the show, someone finds a body, law enforcement gets involved, and by thorough investigation the forensic scientist finds out the when, who, what, and the how that leads to the murderer. It’s amazing that forensic scientists can find evidence in seemingly the most “off the wall” ways; but evidence is still evidence.

I want you to think about this: Why is evidence so important?

Because evidence is the most crucial factor in any criminal case. Evidence and the amount of it determines if a person is innocent or guilty. We’re going to look at a passage of scripture that, no doubt, these people were guilty of being: Christians.

**Read: Acts 11: 19-26**

**I. Notice, there was persecution that caused the propagation (spreading) of the gospel (vs. 19)**

A. The persecution of Steven and the persecution that followed led to the salvation of people hundreds of miles away (Acts 8:1)

1. Phenice was 600+ miles away by boat

2. Cyprus was 254 miles away by boat

3. Antioch was 300+ miles away by land

B. Regardless of being driven away, many from their home and family, they went abroad preaching about Jesus Christ.

C. The Bible specifically mentions a group of those that were scattered aboard were men of Cyprus and Cyrene that went to Antioch (vs. 20)

1. These men are not named, all we know is that they were committed to Christ and were not afraid to proclaim the gospel.

a. God is looking for some people today that will care less about whether they get credit or if people see what they are doing and care more about accomplishing God’s will.

b. These men were on fire for God and could not help but spreading the word of Christ.

2. In chapter 11 we saw that God led in very special ways to bring Peter to Cornelius, but in this case these men just saw a need and took the lead.

3. These men spoke to the Grecians that were there in the city

a. Grecians were Jews who were born in foreign land (like Antioch) and spoke Greek.

b. It’s important to mention that the Jews who were saved didn’t know if the Gospel had come to the gentiles yet. Which is why they went to the Grecians and not the entire city preaching about Jesus and Salvation. (The fact that they didn’t know was not that Gentiles couldn’t be saved. Peter led Cornelius (a gentile) to the Lord in chapter 10. Word didn’t travel fast; these men of Cyprus and Cyrene wouldn’t have known.)

**c. Many of the Grecians (a great number vs. 21) got saved. So much that the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to go up and start a Church. (vs.22)**

1) This is the first record of a Church staring another Church. (Only the Local Church has the authority to start more Churches. That’s why we as Baptists say and hold to: “Churches start Churches”)

**II. Barnabas starts the Church there in Antioch and it continues to Grow. (vs. 23 -24)**

A. Barnabas was at Jerusalem at time of Peters return and news from Caesarea. He knew that the Gentiles could be saved. He, quite possibly, preached the gospel unto the gentiles that were at Antioch. (The bible doesn’t tell us whether he did or he did, but that much people were added unto the Lord.)

B. Most likely Barnabas knew he couldn’t disciple all these new believers on his own so he departed to Tarsus (151 miles away) to find Saul (Paul-Chp.13 his name was changed).

1. The Great Commission of the Church wasn’t only to lead people to Jesus to be saved, but to then teach them (to disciple them)

**Matthew 28:19-20**

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **Teaching them** to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

C. Barnabas and Saul joined the church at Antioch and stayed with them a whole year discipling them.

**Transition:**

This next statement sticks out to me the most:

**III. The first time in Scripture the name Christian is now used.**

A. Notice it’s not a name they choose for themselves. It was a name they were called.

B. “*ian*” in Latin mean belonging to the party of. Therefore being called a Christian would mean that person belongs to the party of Christ.

C. “To be a Christian is to be Christ-like.” They would have been assigned this name because they were imitators of Christ and frequent speaking of Him.

**Transition:**

This word, most likely, was not used to commend or congratulate a person’s actions or choices, but was a word that was derogatory, it was a term of derision (ridicule, mockery), meant to single them out so that persecution was properly aimed. “*You’re one of those Christians*.”

**1 Peter 4:16**

*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

**Act 17:28**

*Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

Now, if they were called Christians was evidence did their accusers have? Look at the text:

1) **Verse 26**: “And the disciples…” -They were believers who followed the Christ-like teachings they were taught by Barnabas and Paul.

2) What were they taught, **verse 23**: “**That with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord**.”

Two Things here:

**Purpose of Heart** = willingly or to choose with all that you are. “To the best of my ability I am going to \_\_\_\_\_”

**Cleave** = to be steadfastly (unwavering) devoted to; \*in other verse in the NT the Greek word is used as continue, to abide still

**Merriam Webster Online Dictionary**– to adhere firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly

**IV. The people at Antioch called these believers Christians was because they behaved and thought like Jesus Christ, because they willingly and unwaveringly devoted themselves to Christ.**

1. The evidence was backed up by many witnesses.
   1. The people of the city of Antioch would have testified of the works of the Christians.
   2. What have you done lately that would get you convicted of being a Christian?
      1. Would your road rage?
      2. Would your spirit of complaining?
      3. Would missing church?
      4. Would arguing with your spouse in public?
2. Barnabas was glad at the work of God in this multicultural city and was willing to stay there.
   1. He went out of his way to ensure that the Christians were encouraged.
   2. We may not have the ability to stay somewhere else for a year to teach young Christians, but you can help and encourage the people around you today.

**Application:**

Is there evidence in your life that would declare you guilty of being a Christian?

I’m not asking you if you have been saved. There are plenty of people out there who have trusted in Jesus to be their Savior but have little to none of **current** evidence that would show them to be Christ-like.

Those Christians at Antioch were living out loud their new life in Jesus Christ, so much that they couldn’t help being called Christians.

If you know Jesus as your savior are you his disciple (are you following Him)?

Are you devoted to Jesus Christ?

If the answer to these two questions is true there will be evidence.

**Conclusion:**

In a courtroom, Beyond a Reasonable doubt is the standard that must be met by the prosecution’s evidence in a criminal prosecution: that no other logical explanation can be derived from the facts except that the defendant committed the crime.

Would your friends or coworkers be able to see evidences in your life that beyond a reasonable doubt they would find you guilty of being a Christian? Would there be any witnesses that could testify that you invited them to church? Would there be anyone who could testify that you showed them forgiveness even when they did not deserve it? There are so many ways that we can leave evidence behind that we are Christians.