

The First Greek Church

Acts 11:19-30

Halifax: 3 June 2012

Introduction

Over the last few weeks in our sermon series from Acts,

- we have seen how the Lord took down the wall that separated Israel from all the other nations.
 - It was not a wall made of stones or barbed wire, but a wall of ceremonial ordinances that God had imposed upon His people.
 - What Paul calls the law of commandments contained in ordinances.
 - It included food laws and many other ordinances that prevented Israel from mingling with the nations.
 - I have emphasised a point that is often ignored by modern expositors...
 - That this wall was not put up by man, but by God.
 - It was His *intention* to keep Israel separate until the coming of the Messiah.
 - Too often, the Jews are charged with wrong as if they erected this wall in opposition to God's will.
 - But this is not so.
 - Indeed, inasmuch as they had attitudes of superiority and disdain for the Gentiles, they were guilty of gross sin!
 - They certainly deserve to be blamed for their pride!
 - They could be charged for keeping the ceremonies that separated them in the wrong way and with the wrong attitude,
 - but not for keeping the ceremonies.
 - They should have been overwhelmed by God's mercy...
 - greatly humbled that God has chosen them.
 - He had plainly told them that they were no better than the other nations, but that it was all of free mercy and grace that they were His people...
 - They should have known sin better than the nations did...
 - They had the law that taught them that God is holy and that they are sinful...
 - It showed them what He required of them and how far short they came...
 - so short that they could not even come near to His temple to worship Him without a blood sacrifice together with all sorts of washings and such...

- And that was only for *ritual worship—worship through types and shadows!*
- They ought to have been the most humble people of all, realising that they and all mankind needed God’s salvation.
 - It was only because they missed the point that they became proud and looked on others with disdain...
 - But as far as the wall of ceremonies—
 - That was what God had appointed!
 - He put the wall up and there is no blame to Israel for keeping what the Lord commanded!
 - It marked them off, not as a superior people, but as the objects of God undeserved mercy.
- But when Jesus came, the wall was abolished because all those laws concerning rituals and ceremonies were nailed to the cross...
 - that is, they were fulfilled by Jesus.
 - They had stood to show God’s people, through ceremonies—pictures—that they needed a Saviour to atone for their sins...
 - But when that Saviour came, the point was clear.
 - Now there was a real atonement—an amazing atonement—the offering up of the Son of God Himself...
 - And there was no more need to the rituals that only testified to what needed to be done.
 - Now there was, and is, a call to trust in Jesus Christ and His finished work...
 - not to go to a temple and offer sacrifices that can never take away sin.
 - But again, this is not an occasion for pride, but for humility.
 - We are marked out in Christ as a people who have been washed from our sin and who need daily cleansing.

So God took down the wall by sending Jesus!

- However, His people—even His faithful godly believing people like the 12 apostles—did not at first understand this...
 - They had to be shown that wall had been abolished by the cross.
 - And God revealed this to the church through the Apostle Peter.
 - We saw that the Lord gave him a vision in which it was declared to him from heaven that all foods were now clean...
 - And further that the Lord instructed Peter to go to the house of Gentile to minister the word to him...
 - And further that the Lord sent an angel to instruct the Gentile, Cornelius by name, to send for Peter that he might learn the will of God.

- And further how that Peter went the house of Cornelius the Gentile and as he preached the gospel to him,
 - Cornelius and his Gentile friends and his family believed and were immediately baptised with the Holy Spirit...
 - The Spirit whose baptism cleanses sinners—
 - This showed on no uncertain terms that God had not only cleansed foods, but that He was also ready to cleanse people from every nation!
 - Not just Jews, but uncircumcised Gentiles were to be the recipients of God's mercy in Christ!

And I described to you that this inclusion of Cornelius's house into the church without circumcision was the beginning of God's gathering of the nations.

- By taking down the wall, and now by showing the church (which was then only Jewish) that the wall was taken down,
 - the Lord signified that the time had come for the gospel to go to the nations.
 - Gentiles would now hear the voice of Christ, believe, receive the Holy Spirit, and then be baptised and added to the church.
 - Worship would no longer be at temple, but now it would be in spirit and truth in every place where God's people were assembled together according to His precepts.
 - The time had come for God to extend His mercy to the nations!

Today, as we move along in our study of Acts,

- we come to the account of how the first church that was largely made up of Gentiles was established.
 - In looking at this, we see how God worked among them to make them His people!
 - It has tremendous value to us as history in showing us how the gospel began to spread in the first century,
 - but it also serves as a pattern for us of the way that God continues to operate when He gathers people from another culture to Himself.
 - We have had the gospel in our land for a long time, and much of the work that we do locally is in calling those who are baptised (but have broken God's covenant through unbelief) to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus.
 - But we also have many people from other nations among us who have never known the Lord,
 - Plus we also have missionaries who have gone out to reach people from other nations and people groups around the world.

So let's take a look here in Acts 11:19-30 at three things the Lord does when He is gathering a new people group into His kingdom...

- The first and principle thing He does is quite obvious and quite necessary:

I. He gathers them to Christ.

- They must come to Christ or they cannot be His people, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.
- A. In His providence, He somehow brings together the people group that does not know Christ with those who do...
- so that the ones who know Christ can make Him known to the ones who do not.
 - We have seen this again and again in Acts—that even when angels are employed to bring the gospel to someone,
 - they do it by sending those who believe to those who do not.
 - The gospel transmits from faith (one who had faith) to faith (one who comes to believe).
1. Look at how God brought together Christian Jews with Greeks at Antioch.
- a. Verse 19 reminds us of what happened back in chapter 8...
- **Acts 11:19: Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.**
 - You remember the persecution that is referred to here...
 - It is spearheaded by Saul of Tarsus when the Jews became incited against Stephen and his amazing testimony for Jesus.
 - It was a violent persecution involving murder and imprisonment of men and women.
 - Saul went searching for believers, intending to root them out of the land of the living.
 - But those who fled did not shut their mouths about Christ...
 - They went all throughout Judea and Samaria telling people that the Messiah had come.
 - And here we are told of those who went up the coast and ministered to the coastal cities and the island of Cyprus and went as far as Antioch, preaching the word.
 - *Preaching* is not the best translation here—
 - The word is *la-le-o*.
 - It indicates that they were just talking about their faith wherever they went, but only to Jews...
 - Philip had gone to the Samaritans of course...
 - But the ones that went up the coast spoke only to the Jews.
 - It did not even occur to them to tell the Gentiles that the Messiah of Israel had come.
 - But God relocated these believers and brought them to Antioch because Antioch was the place He was going to establish the first Greek church.

- b. The Lord strategically placed them in Antioch with this purpose in mind.
 - Antioch was a great city.
 - It was third in size in the empire—Rome being first and Alexandria second...
 - It had a population of about half a million,
 - and was very cosmopolitan—
 - with a substantial colony of Jews,
 - with many Romans and Greeks,
 - with Persians and even people from India and China.
 - It was also a prosperous commercial centre—very progressive, and yet, very morally decadent...
 - In many ways, it was similar to New York City.
- c. But the time had come in God’s plan for the gospel to go the Gentiles...
 - So in God’s providence, some of the believers from Cyprus and Cyrene that had gone to Antioch,
 - began telling the Hellenists the good news about Jesus (in verse 19, the word *preaching* translates the word that means *evangelise*.)
 - **Acts 11:20: But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.**
 - You will notice that it says *the Hellenists*...
 - We saw before that this simply means, “Greek speaking people.”
 - Many of the Jews spoke Greek as their first language, and particularly those who had been scattered in the persecution...
 - Many of them were what we call *Hellenistic Jews*, that is, Jews who spoke Greek and followed some Greek customs.
 - But here at Antioch, the context sets the *Hellenists* in contrast with the *Jews*.
 - These *Jews* who, as compared to many of the Jews at Jerusalem were Hellenistic,
 - because to speak to those who were even more Hellenistic—who were, in fact, Greeks.
 - There are a lot of manuscripts in which verse 20 actually had the word *Helens* which means *Greeks*
 - It is the word *Helens* instead of *hel-lay-nis-tace'*
 - This gives additional support to the theory that the people in view here are Greeks.
 - Before they had spoken only to their fellow Jews, but now they began to speak to the Greeks.

- It would be interesting to know how this came about...
 - Perhaps it was at the synagogue that they met some of these Greeks, or maybe they did business with them...
 - But somehow or another, the conversation began, and these Greeks began to respond to the good news!
 - The Messiah was the Messiah for the Jews, but they began to consider what His coming might mean for them as Greeks!
 - It is even possible that these brothers and sisters from Cyprus and Cyrene had heard about Cornelius.
 - But whatever their reasons were, the Lord in His marvellous providence brought it about that they began to tell the Greeks the good news of Jesus.
2. And you see what the result was in verse 21...the Greeks began to listen!
- **Acts 11:21: And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**
 - a. The hand *of the Lord* means that He did a special work as they spoke to these Greeks.
 - It was God's special providence that these men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to these Greeks,
 - and that these Greeks responded—a great many of them believed and turned to the Lord.
 - It is hard for us to grasp how extraordinary this was!
 - The Lord extends His mercy to new people groups so often these days that we are quite familiar with it...
 - But this was the beginning of that work of missions.
 - b. Consider what happened to these Greeks by the hand of the Lord.
 - 1) They were actually embracing the Messiah that God sent to Israel.
 - The One that had been promised for so long who was to come and to make an offering for their sin.
 - He had done that, and all those who received Him were given eternal life...
 - All those who believed and turned to Him for salvation obtained salvation.
 - Though they were sinners, they were completely pardoned and given an everlasting hope of glory!
 - That they would see God!
 - That they would themselves be glorified and become like Him!
 - 2) But now these Greeks had come understand that this salvation was not just for Jews, but for the whole world!

- They have come to realise that they—even they also—could have their sins blotted out and be given the hope of eternal life!
 - They had come to Christ and God had welcomed them in His amazing grace and mercy.
- B. Know that it is still only by the hand of the Lord that new groups of people are gathered into His kingdom.
1. Yes, God uses men to spread His Word—
 - He always uses those who know Him to spread the word to those who don't...
 - But it is only through the Lord's providence that the connection is made with those He had appointed to be saved...
 - It is only through the blessing of His hand that people who were cut off come to believe.
 2. So pray that He will be pleased to bring us together with those who do not know Him and that by His hand, many will come to Him.
 - It is our privilege to go about speaking of Him—not only to the baptised, but also to foreigners who never knew our God.
 - You never know when, by His hand, there may not be many who come to the Lord even though they have no knowledge of Him now.
 3. Remember that the gospel is universal...
 - All need Jesus because all are lost in sin.
 - Those who have never heard of Christ at all will not be judged for refusing the gospel,
 - but they will be judged for their sins...
 - and that will be enough to send them to Lake of fire forever.
 - Nothing more than the sins that you have committed today are enough to send you to Hell forever.
 - It is not that men *become* guilty when they reject Christ,
 - It is rather that all are already guilty to start with—for their sins—even if they have never heard of Him.
 - Rejecting Him, as so many around us do, just adds to the guilt that they already have.
 - But what a marvellous thing it is when those who had not heard of Him hear of Him and turn to Him for salvation!
 - What a blessing it is for them to have eternal life...
 - And what a blessing it is for us if we have had a part in introducing them to the Lord Jesus.
 - Pray for missions! God's hand is in it!
 - Give to missions! God's hand is in it!
 - Do missions! God's hand is in it!

- He is the one who brings us together with those He wishes to save!
- May His hand be with us to gather the nations...
 - Pray for the Wards in Sudan!
 - Pray for Ali Mitchell as he ministers to Muslims!
 - Reach out to the foreigner who comes across your path and tell him the good news he has never heard.

TRANS> God's gathering of the nations who did not know Him is a wonderful thing,

- but that is not all that He does in calling a new people group to Himself...
- I want you to see secondly that...

II. He establishes them in Christ—in the church which is the body of Christ.

A. Look at how God provided two able ministers for these Greek believers...

1. First, He sends Barnabas...

a. The church at Jerusalem heard about the remarkable happenings in Antioch—that a great number of Greeks had believed and turned to the Lord.

- And upon hearing this, they immediately act in order to provide instruction and pastoral care for these believers...

- Look at Verse 22:

- **Act 11:22: 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.**

- This is similar to what they did when the Samaritans had trusted in the Lord under the ministry of Philip...

- They sent able men to investigate and to instruct the Samaritans.

- They were not indifferent about these things.

- They cared and they wanted to help these new believers.

b. And consider the man that they sent! Barnabas!

- It would be hard to imagine a better choice than this man!

- He was a Levite who was originally from Cyprus, so he had great knowledge of Greek culture, but also of God's Word.

- We have seen repeatedly that this man was a man of sterling character!

- He is mentioned as one who sold houses and lands to help those in need.

- He is the one who introduced Paul to those believers in Jerusalem who were afraid of Paul, not knowing or believing that he was really converted.

- He is well named the son of encouragement—the *paraclete*—the one who comes to your side to help you in whatever way is needed...

- The one who is like the Holy Spirit—the helper—the comforter, the encourager, the exhorter...
 - He is described in verse 24 as
 - **“a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith!”**
 - He was one who truly walked with the Lord and who truly cared for the saints, and he was also from a Greek city...
 - and so the church chose him to go to minister to these Greeks at Antioch.
- c. Now look at what Barnabas does when he arrives in Antioch!
- 1) He rejoices because he sees the grace of God working in these Greeks.
 - This is what we saw that the church at Jerusalem did when Peter told them how Cornelius had received the grace of God...
 - And I told you that you ought to do that too...
 - There is your spouse—who knows the Lord—isn’t it marvellous?
 - There are your children and your parents—God has saved them!
 - There is your friend—
 - Barnabas grasped what a fantastic thing it was that these Greeks who formerly did not know God were now walking with Jesus!
 - He was not blinded by jealousy that these Gentiles had come...
 - He was rather basking in the great mercy of God—the same mercy that had come to him had now come to them.
 - Oh, see that you learn to rejoice in God’s salvation!
 - Don’t miss the mercy of God!
 - 2) And look, seeing how God has begun a work in these Gentiles, Barnabas encourages them to continue!
 - Look at verse 23:
 - **Acts 11:23: 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.**
 - He told them what a good thing they had in the Lord—what a good thing it was that God had been gracious to them!
 - “This is something to keep on at with purpose of heart!”
 - “This is something to pursue with joy!”
 - “This is a glorious hope in a glorious Saviour!”
 - “You can’t go wrong with Him!”
 - It is all true!

- There is every reason to go on in the Lord!
 - Oh do go on!
 - There is so much more for you to have in Him.
 - Do you know Him?
 - Do you realise how full of glory and grace He is?
 - Then continue with Him—you will never regret it if you do.
 - You will never feel that you have followed Him too much.
- 3) And you see one of the consequences of this man’s ministry of encouragement in verse 24...
- **“a great number believed and were added to the Lord.”**
 - As a faithful minister, Barnabas encouraged the believers to go on in the Lord,
 - and you can be sure that ministry was effective in their lives...
 - But it also led to more people coming to Christ—more Greeks no doubt!
 - That is what happens when believers get excited about the Lord and about serving Him!
 - The people around them take notice and they come to inquire, and they also believe and turn to the Lord.

TRANS> In sending Barnabas, you see how the Lord cared for this new people group.

- And we knew from what follows in history,
 - that the Lord not only had an eye of mercy for these particular Greeks at Antioch,
 - but that He was also laying a foundation for future expansion among the Greeks.
 - And now with even more people added to the church, Barnabas sees that more help is needed.
 - And he makes a very important decision that will have a tremendous impact on the church and its extension to the Gentile world...
2. Barnabas goes to get Saul or Paul from Tarsus!
- **Acts 11:25-26: Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.**
 - a. You may remember that the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea were so opposed to Paul that he had to flee.
 - He had gone to his home town of Tarsus, but it appears that his family had disinherited him.

- There are clues of this in scripture, such as in Phil 3 where he speaks of suffering the loss of all things...
 - And also right here in that Barnabas has to go seeking him.
 - The word translated *seeking* that is used here speaks of searching for a person who cannot be easily found.
 - But Barnabas finds him and brings him to Antioch.
- b. What a fine decision this was!
- 1) Once again, it is the hand of the Lord showing grace to the Gentiles!
 - Barnabas must have thought of Saul as a he was labouring away with more and more Greeks turning to the Lord.
 - He remembered how zealous and how gifted brother Saul was.
 - He knew that Saul was a better teacher than he was, and here again,
 - instead of being jealous, he yearned to see Paul teaching the growing flock in Antioch!
 - Barnabas loved the Lord's people, not his own ego!
 - So he went to get a man who had gifts that he did not have.
 - He wanted to give place to this very gifted man.
 - William Farel did this when he, after labour in Geneva as an evangelist of great zeal,
 - saw in Calvin a man who would be able to shepherd the people far better than he could.
 - What a difference it made in the history of world that Farel practically forced young Calvin to serve at Geneva.
 - The ministry that grew up there became a school for reformers from all over the world.
 - 2) Well here is Barnabas, going out of his way to find Saul—the man he knew God had especially called to minister to the Gentiles!
 - And here is the opportunity for that ministry to begin!
 - Here is a great company of Gentiles that need instruction and grounding in the Word, so off Barnabas goes to find Saul.
 - 3) And here you see the hand of the Lord in this again...
 - a) It was from here that Saul was to begin his amazing ministry to the Greeks—
 - a work that would go forth from Antioch all the way to Rome!
 - Right here at Antioch, the foundation for future mission work is prepared.

- This great city of half a million people—Jews, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and even people of Persia, India, and China—became the sending church for Paul’s future ministry as we will see in future chapters of Acts.
- b) And you see the labour that Saul and Barnabas carry out at Antioch...
- The same labour that God graciously provides for every new people group when His hand is in it...
 - It is described in the middle of verse 26:
 - **Act 11:26: So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.**
 - It is a ministry of teaching in the assembly—in the church.
 - This is how God establishes His people.
 - He brings His word to them in the assembly—the church or the ekklesia.
 - The word *assembled* is the verbal form of the word synagogue, and the word church is ekklesia, an assembly of those called out to transact business.
- B. God’s establishment of His people in the church is something that is often not emphasised enough in our day.
1. But you see that these Greeks were not left to flounder about as new believers!
- When God’s hand is in it, He provides ministers to establish them.
 - It is His will for those who know Him to be rooted and grounded.
 - You cannot find a place in Acts where people come to the Lord and do not also immediately become part of the church.
 - It is part of a Christian’s identity to be a member of the body of Christ... not just the invisible church, but the church on earth with its elders and deacons and members!
 - The concept of the invisible church is very helpful, because it helps us to understand that not everyone who is a member of the church that we see is genuine...
 - They may profess their faith, but they do not really believe.
 - The invisible church is made up only of those who truly believe or who will believe.
 - But it is absurd for a person to content himself with being a member of this idealistic church and refuse to become a part of the church that Jesus established on earth...
 - with its ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper...
 - with its pastors and elders and deacons who care for the flock...
 - with its members who love and serve one another
 - with its vows and mutual accountability.

- with its corporate worship and prayers in the assembly...
- After all, the very word church means assembly of called out ones.
- How can anyone claim to be part of the invisible church if they are not part of the assembly that Christ calls together to worship Him with its elders and deacons and members?

2. O my brothers and sisters,

- Pray for me as I minister the word to you—God has sent me to do this—Pray that I would be faithful and true and diligent.
 - A great responsibility is put upon me.
- Pray for all the other ministers of the Word as well—
 - Give thanks for them.
 - Give thanks to God for His mercy to His church in raising them up to help His people to be established and grounded in the Word.
 - Pray that the Lord will provide teachers for the mission fields...
 - Pray for Jack Whytock as he seeks to train up leaders in Africa and Pakistan...
 - Pray that God will send forth faithful men.
 - Pray that He will not judge us with a corrupt ministry, for we have not hungered for His word as we ought...
 - And He has taken away the ministry of the Word in many places.
 - Is it not safe to say that the majority of churches in Halifax do not have the gospel?
 - There are many that do, and it is mercy that they do...
 - But there are many that don't.
 - Pray that God will give us this blessing and that He will provide for the mission fields of the world.
 - Churches need a faithful ministry if they are to be established and built up in the Lord.

TRANS> So we have seen two great things that the Lord does when He is raising up His church among a new people group...

- That He gathers them to Christ...
- That He establishes them in the body of Christ with faithful shepherds...

But that is not all He does...

- They might have faithful shepherds and sound teaching, but unless the Lord works in the members of the church themselves,
 - the ministry will be ineffectual.
- But you see here at the end of the chapter how God transforms these Greeks!

III. He cultivates in them the mind of Christ.

A. See how He makes these Greeks at Antioch shine as the light of the world!

1. The first thing we see is that He gives them an identity as Christ ones!
 - As the teaching and preaching went on, it was all about Christ, for Christ had shown the Apostles that He was the one that the prophets wrote about.
 - And as Paul and Barnabas showed these young believers what Christ had done for them and of His love and grace and of the future He had for them,
 - They could not get enough of Him!
 - They spoke of Him and they imitated him wherever they went!
 - And so it was that very soon the people of Antioch gave them a nick name...
 - Look at the end of verse 26...
 - **“They were first called Christians at Antioch.”**
 - It is debated as to whether this was a title of disdain or of jovial teasing (these people are enamoured with Christ),
 - It was probably both—depending on who said it...
 - But this name shows how the grace of God is at work in these believers because their identity with Jesus the Messiah is evident to everyone.
 - You had groups like the Herodians who followed and promoted Herod,
 - but these were the Christians who followed and promoted Christ...
 - They were all about Christ—they were into Christ—that was their reputation.
 - Are you known in the community as one who is associated with Christ?
 - Do people think of you and say, “Oh, he is really into Christ.”
 - Is that your identity?
 - Not nearly enough, is it?

TRANS> But notice further...

- This identification with Christ was not just in their talk—it was in their walk—it showed in their actions...
2. We see from verse 27-30 how they have the mind of Christ!
 - **Act 11:27-30: And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. ³⁰ This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.**
 - a. Consider that this donation is given to their Jewish brothers and sisters...

- The Jews had not always been very kind to the Greeks, so there was a history here,
 - but now these Greeks have come to Christ and they recognise that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem are their brothers and sisters.
 - The Jewish Christians at Jerusalem had been under persecution because of Jesus, and that had impoverished them—
 - They had been removed from the synagogues, and that meant that people would not hire them or purchase from them...
 - We have seen how those such as Barnabas who had means sold houses and lands to provide for those who had need...
 - These believers were poor, and now there is the famine!
 - It would hit them very hard.
 - They would need relief in order to live.
 - And these believers at Antioch are ready to help.
 - The former hostilities between Jews and Gentile have been broken down in Christ...
 - Their Jewish brothers have helped them—sending Barnabas to them, and now they are ready help as they can.
- b. Their generosity shows that they had the mind of Christ...
- What had Jesus done?
 - He had gone to the cross to pay their sin debt.
 - He had become poor in order that they might be made rich.
 - They had done nothing to deserve His help, but He had freely given all for them.
 - And they understood this and it was rooted deeply in their souls!
 - They saw the beauty and the goodness of it all!
 - Here was the ideal man they had longed for as Greeks—only one that went far beyond their wildest dreams and philosophies.
- c. And so as soon as the need of the saints in Jerusalem is brought to their attention, they immediately purpose to help...
- And it does not stop with their intentions...
 - Like Christ, they follow through their intention to help.
 - It is so easy to have the best of intentions, but good intentions are of no value unless you carry them out in action!
 - So these believers at Antioch take up a collection and send it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul!
 - It is a beautiful offering—much more beautiful than just a plain offering—because it is given out of heart captivated by Jesus.
 - It is a truly Christian offering.

- Not an offering given out of guilt to try to please the gods...
- Not an offering given in anger against God because of the famine...and they are going to do something about it!
- Not an offering given to make them feel superior to others...
 - But a Christian offering given in love to Jesus and to their Jewish neighbours for the glory of God.

B. Pray that the church today would have the mind of Christ...

1. It is God who brings about this transformation in us when we truly learn of Christ.
 - It is impossible to receive Jesus and to not be affected by it...
 - to not become a servant... a giver... one who is concerned for the needs of others and who goes out of your way to serve them.
 - The Lord changes us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ...
 - We are far from measuring up to what Jesus is just yet,
 - but God is working in us to cultivate His mind in us.
 - And that is why you need to pray that God would work in you and in His church to give us the mind of Christ...
 - It is His work and we must seek Him for it.
 - Don't you want it?
 - Don't you want to be generous and loving and caring like Jesus?
 - Aren't you tired of being closed and selfish?
 - Don't you want to be free from that bondage?
2. This is a very important aspect of mission work.
 - Missionaries and pastors must encourage the people who come to the Lord to become true servants!
 - Caring for their own families as a start... for many do not even love at home in this world... sacrificing for each other—laying down your lives for each other...
 - And then—then reaching out in the community and to other communities in whatever way you can—
 - finding ways to help others—giving yourself to service!
 - Too often, we found missions in which the people in the mission come and ask, “What do you give out?”
 - We need to instruct them that our mission is not about giving to them, but about teaching them to give...
 - not that we don't give, of course, but in Christ, we are not just a food bank—we are there to equip people to serve.
 - Barnabas cared so much about his brothers and sisters at Jerusalem...

- Remember, he had sold houses and lands to help them out.
 - You can be sure that as a faithful pastor, he encouraged the saints to this good work.
 - We have the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 8-9 where he is encouraging the Corinthians in this very work of helping the saints at Jerusalem...
3. The mind of Christ is a blessing to crave for the whole church!
- That every believer, whether a new believer like these Greeks, or old believers like some of the Jews, would have the mind of Christ!
 - That all of us would have a servant's heart!
 - What a beautiful place the church will become then!
 - What a beautiful thing for the brothers to dwell together in unity.
 - What a beautiful thing when every husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her!
 - By God's grace it will be so!
 - Pray that it will be so!
 - In your life...
 - In the life of your brothers and sisters in the church...
 - In the life of those who come to Christ among the nations...

Conclusion:

So we have seen three things that God does when He is blessing a new people group with His salvation...

- He gathers them to Christ...
- He establishes them in the body of Christ...
- He cultivates in them the mind of Christ so that they serve others...

Oh may He bring these blessings to the nations!

- May He gather them and establish them and renew them!
- And may He use us to spread His word to those who have never heard.