

“God Provides For His People”
Acts 11:27-30
(Preached at Trinity, February 15, 2006)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been looking at the wonderful work of God at Antioch. After the death of Stephen the Jewish Christians were scattered and went about preaching to the Jews only. There were some, however, from Cyprus and Cyrene who preached to the Greeks in Antioch and multitudes were being saved. The Church of Jerusalem sent Barnabas to check on this new ministry.
2. Arriving at the new church at Antioch Barnabas rejoiced when he saw the evidence of God's grace upon these Gentiles. He immediately began to teach and encourage these new converts. Because of the magnitude of the work he traveled to Tarsus and convinced Paul to help him in the work at Antioch. They went together to Antioch where they ministered for a year.
3. Beginning in **Verse 27** we are told of a crisis looming in Judaea. There was a great famine coming that would bring great hardship upon the people of God.
Acts 11:28 – “. . . that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.”
 - A. First we have to qualify the word “world.”
Instead of using the word κόσμος Luke uses the word οἰκουμένη which can be used universally or it can have a more selective interpretation: 1) the inhabited earth 1a) the portion of the earth inhabited by the Greeks, in distinction from the lands of the barbarians 1b) the Roman empire, all the subjects of the empire
 - B. The Greeks having great pride in their country used it to refer to their own country, but the Romans for the same reasons applied it to their empire.
 - C. Historically, in the 4th, 5th, and 6th years of Claudius many died of a great famine in Jerusalem. In addition, however, in the first and second year of his reign there was a great scarcity in Rome, and in the ninth year Eusebius records a famine in Greece. So it would appear that famine did cover the known world of their day, however the focus here is particularly upon Judaea.
4. There are several great truths we can glean from this passage.
 - I. First, we need to see God's care of His people
 - A. God has a high interest in His people
 1. He cares for us
1 Peter 5:6-7 – “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: ⁷ Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

2. He is intensely and intimately active in our lives – He knows every detail about us – even the number of hairs on our head.
Matthew 10:29-31 – “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”
- B. He gave His prized possession for us
1. He sent forth Christ as an expression of His love
John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
 2. If He gave His Son for us, does this not demonstrate His care of us?
Romans 8:32 – “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”
- C. God was fully aware of the needs of the Jerusalem saints
1. He ordained the famine
 - a. All of God’s acts fulfill His eternal purpose. He ordained all things from eternity.
Acts 15:18 – “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”
 - b. We don’t know all of God’s purposes. He doesn’t tell us why He sent the famine.
 - Perhaps God was bringing judgment upon the Jewish unbelievers – they rejected the Bread of Life so God took away their daily bread.
 - Perhaps God was sending the famine to strengthen His people.
 - Perhaps both – or something entirely different
 - c. We’ve seen this with the case of the famine in Joseph’s day. God used it to bless Joseph. He used it to bring the sons of Jacob to repentance. He used it to bring Jacob into Egypt.
 2. Whatever God’s purposes in the events that happen in our lives, His care of us never fails. His interest in us far exceeds all of the rest of His creation
Matthew 6:26 – “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”
- D. This is where our trust of God comes in
1. We know His purposes are perfect and will never fail and that His purposes always work for our good.
 2. We know that He is aware of all our needs and that He cares for us deeply
 3. This is the nature of Jesus as our Shepherd. The Shepherd cares for the flock.
 “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. ³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and

thy staff they comfort me. ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

4. We can trust our blessed Savior, the most High God.

II. God usually works through the use of means – through the use of ordinary people, places, events, objects, etc

A. God can work without the use of means

London Confession, Chapter 5 – of Divine Providence

“. . .there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without His providence; ye by the same providence He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. God in His ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.”

1. All healing comes from God. He can heal supernaturally, yet God usually uses the means of the body’s natural defenses, as well as medicines and other medical care.
2. God provides our daily bread. He caused manna to fall from heaven. He multiplied the loaves and fishes. The normal means of God providing for us, however, is by blessing our labors.

B. God often uses people as the means of carrying out His purposes

1. We saw this in Isaiah as God used the Assyrians as judgment against Israel
2. We saw it with God raising up the heathen king, Cyrus to deliver Israel from Babylon
Isaiah 44:28 – “That saith of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*”
3. God has chosen to use people in the sending forth of the Gospel message.
2 Corinthians 4:7 – “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

C. Even before God sent the famine he sent Agabus to prepare the church

1. A number of prophets had come from Jerusalem to Antioch to preach the Word and minister to these new converts. We might suppose they were sent.
2. This was one of the four original NT offices
Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastor/teachers
 - a. Each of these were given the ministry of the word – public preaching
 - b. All but the Pastor/teacher has ceased to function
 - c. The office of apostle ended with the death of the 12, the office of Evangelist ended with the Apostolic office. The office of Prophet ended with the completion of the Word of God
3. One of these prophets was Agabus whom God sent forth with a warning of a coming famine. The purpose here was that the saints at Antioch would begin to prepare themselves to give aid.

4. God didn't have to use Agabus. He could have provided for His saints in Jerusalem another way. He could have ended the famine. He could have not brought the famine in the first place. God works according to His good pleasure. He chose to use men as He provided for His elect people.

III. God often uses people in the accomplishment of His purposes

A. God uses His people in the care of His people. He uses Christians to provide for Christians.

1. God has put pastors in place to care for his church – in the qualifications for pastor we read:
1 Timothy 3:5 – “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”
2. God has raised up families to care for one another
1 Timothy 5:4 – “But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.
1 Timothy 5:16 – “If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.”

B. God also uses individual Christians in the care of His elect people

1. Agabus warns of the coming famine and each believer began to prepare
 - a. Notice the universal language – “every man”
 - b. Notice their firmness of resolve – “determined to send relief”
“determined: - ὀρίζω - to ordain, determine, appoint, decree
 - c. We see here the unity of the brethren and the connectivity of the church
 - d. They did more than just discuss their intentions. They followed through – in **Verse 30** we read that they actually sent their gift via their two leaders, Paul and Barnabas who brought their gift to the elders in Jerusalem.
2. There is a biblical mandate for Christians to aid one another
1 Peter 4:10 – “As every man hath received the gift, *even so* minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”
Hebrews 10:24 – “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”
Romans 12:10 – “*Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;”
1 Peter 4:9 – “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”
2 Corinthians 9:7 – “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

C. Could it be that one purpose of the famine was to give the saints in Antioch an opportunity to demonstrate their love for the brethren and faithfulness to God?

1. It would appear as such – God sent the prophets to them before the famine came. We have no indication that Jerusalem received such a warning.

2. Why do things unfold in your life each day?
There are no accidents. Is God providing you opportunities of service?
Hebrews 13:2 – “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”
3. This is the way we should view events like Hurricane Katrina
4. How do you view opportunities of service? Opportunities to help a brother or sister?
 - a. Do you help grudgingly?
1 Peter 4:9 – “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”
 - b. Do you murmur in your heart, or worse, to others?
2 Corinthians 9:7 – “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

Conclusion:

1. Pray that God might provide you with opportunities of service – opportunities to care for and serve the brethren.
2. And pray that with the opportunities present themselves you serve with gladness of heart.