

9 Defining Marks of the Overcoming Church

I am more convinced than I have ever been that we are on the doorsteps of the Third Great Awakening. I believe that revival is beginning to gain momentum across this nation. I also believe that revival and awakening are needed now more than ever.

My great desire is for this movement, this revival to be sustained and that it would never end. That we would fully move into the fulfillment of moving from glory to glory and faith to faith. Therefore if continual revival and awakening is our inheritance, then they must also be accompanied with reformation. On the local level, there has to be adjustments made in order to sustain the move of God.

I believe that God gave us a pattern, a paradigm or a model in the book of Acts called the Antioch Church that gives us a glimpse of what is available and necessary to sustain a thriving movement.

It is not the will of God for us to live in sin cycles or revival cycles. It is His will that we would live in the place of communion continually that would position us to sustain what comes from heaven, even when it touches the hands of our humanity. While Antioch was not a perfect church, there are some foundational things that were present that allowed them to sustain as a thriving body in a very difficult time of persecution and tremendous growth.

City Transformation

Antioch was the third most powerful city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. It was a place known for business, commerce, sophistication and culture but also very much known for its immorality. It was a thriving city that was the

capital of the Roman province of Syria. During this time cities and regions were often identified by the characteristics that were displayed in that city.

For example, Jerusalem was known as the religious city. Rome was known for its power. Alexandria was known for its intellect and Athens for philosophy. However, the defining characteristics of Antioch were business and immorality. So the birthing of the Gentile church was nothing short of miraculous.

Acts chapters 11-13 give us the narrative of the gospel being preached in Antioch. It was the beginning of fulfillment of the words spoken by Jesus to preach the gospel to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. What is so amazing about this revival, this movement that was sparked, is that we see firsthand the gospel of Jesus Christ coming to, infecting and completely transforming an utterly pagan city. This gives me great hope that if a city like Antioch can be transformed, so can my city!

Defining Marks of the Antioch Church

There are 9 defining marks of the Antioch church that we can learn from and apply. I also believe that these defining marks carry in them the DNA of reformation needed to sustain the revival and awakening that is upon us.

1. The Antioch church and accompanying revival were birthed out of persecution. Acts 11:19 says, "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."

After the stoning of Stephen, the believers were scattered. However it was this persecution that positioned them to have a platform from which to launch. They were declaring their testimony and the goodness of Jesus. Persecution did not keep them from preaching the gospel. They were not so ashamed of

their past that they kept silent. They were so filled with the Holy Spirit that seemingly negative obstacles were launching pads for revival and awakening.

2. Antioch was a place of revival and awakening.

Acts 11:24 says: "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord."

There was no mistaking that revival was upon the community of believers in Antioch. So much so that the Apostles sent Barnabas to check out what was taking place. He was so marked that he stayed and sent for Paul. People were coming to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ at a very rapid rate. Evangelism was second nature.

3. Antioch had a strong focus on the Word of God.

Acts 11:25-26 says: "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a considerable crowd."

There was a solid foundation of teaching the scriptures at Antioch. There was a need for sound teaching in order for this movement to be sustained. Living according to the scriptures was a way of life.

4. Antioch was place of identity.

Acts 11:26 says, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Although it was supposed to be a negative term at first, Antioch is the first place the term Christian is used. It was a place of identity so much so that even though the opposition was attempting to brand this group of believers in a negative way, they were so secure in their pursuit of God that it became a distinct privilege and it still is a privilege to be called a Christian.

5. Antioch was a giving and missional church.

Acts 11:29 says,

“Then every disciple, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea.”

They were not so inwardly focused that they could not see the needs of others. I love this concept. Agabus declares by the Spirit of God that a famine is coming. The church prepares itself so that they can sustain but also be an answer to impending need. We need more prophetic voices that not only have the ability to alert us as to what is coming, but also have the ability to hear the voice of God and gain His heart for a solution as well. We are not a prophetic people because we can see that America is in a mess. We are prophetic because in the midst of the mess we can see and declare the strategy for America to be once again burning with the fires of revival and awakening. This will position us to be willing to give of our time and our resources.

6. Antioch was a church with a plurality of leaders. Acts 13:1-2 says: “In the church that was in Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they worshipped the Lord and fasted”

We are never told that there was one person running the show. There were many prophets and teachers. This was such a unique setting that the Holy Spirit spoke to separate Paul and Barnabas and we are never even told who released that word. This is a model where the one-man show was never an issue. I am convinced that one of the true indicators of sustained revival will be that pride, ego and entertainment are slain on the altar of unity and humility. I believe the team model of ministry is why the New Testament church was so successful. It wasn't about the man it was about the mission to tell the world of the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. There was no room for ego.

7. Antioch was a worshipping church. Acts 13:2 says, “As they

worshipped the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

The word ministered in the Greek is the word *leitourgeo*, which means to perform religious duties. It also is where we get the word liturgy. So they were literally ministering before the Lord in the office of the priest. It was defining mark of this movement. If revival is to be sustained, then worship has to be a primary action. You cannot pray for revival and not honor the one who brings revival. They were literally "priesting" before the Lord daily in worship.

8. Antioch was a praying and fasting kind of church. Acts 13:3 says, "Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Fasting and prayer were foundational principles for the church at Antioch. I love that they heard the word of the Lord to send Paul and Barnabas and they bathed that word in prayer in fasting. I believe that the detriment to our nation is not the activity of sin, but the activity of the prayerless church. Prayer and fasting are still necessary. Ministers are still needed to lie between porch and altar in fasting and intercession. The answer for our nation is a burning, praying church!

9. Antioch was an apostolic and prophetic hub (Acts 11-13). The foundation of the church at Antioch was built on apostles and prophets, not pastors and associate pastors. While all are necessary and I believe that Acts 11-13 shows that four of the five-fold ministry gifts were present, apostles and prophets were still leading the charge. Antioch was place of sending. Paul and Barnabas came at the beginning of the movement and the word of the Lord came for them to be sent and they were sent. Watch this: The church didn't fold. Two of the greatest preachers and leaders in the New Testament were removed and the church kept on thriving. This was a result of the

foundation that was built from the beginning.

The Reason It Worked

Jesus was the sole reason for the connection and mix of ministry gifts. It was their common belief in Jesus as the Messiah that made this movement work. It wasn't positions, titles, programs or music. The common thread was that they were willing to lay their lives down for the Jewish man called Jesus.

I believe that God is releasing a fresh wave of the Antioch Paradigm because it is a proven, documented model that can spark and sustain revival and awakening. God is releasing a grace for establishing revival hubs across this nation in the pattern of the Antioch Church that will thrive in the face of persecution.

There is a remnant rising from the ashes of burning movements of times past with a heart for the harvest and evangelism. I believe that there is a fresh baptism in the love of the Word of God that is being poured out in this moment. God is releasing the mantles of identity to a fatherless generation who hunger and thirst for righteousness once again.

Giving and missions will mark these Revival centers. Uncommon unity will be the banner on the body of Christ. The one-man show will give way to unity and humility. I declare that there is another worship movement that will be released. Churches where the sole purpose of their gatherings will be to look into the fiery eyes of Jesus with worship and adoration.

The prayerless church will move in to the fulfillment of her true identity to be a praying, thriving church. I see the Lord restoring the function of the apostle and the unction of the prophet to the proper role and responsibility that was originally intended. I'm so thankful that He gave us a pattern and a model from which to draw from.

God is releasing the Antioch paradigm.

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