

“... The hand of the Lord was with them ...”

(Acts 11:21)

FEATURES OF A FAITHFUL CHURCH

It is a wonderful privilege to serve you, dear church family. Thank you for your call to do so and for all the labor and generosity invested in bringing us here. We join with you in prayerful hopes of the manifestation of God's glory in our midst, of the strengthening of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the ingathering of the elect from Kuala Lumpur and beyond.

Give these hopes, it occurred to me that a study of the church in Antioch in Syria (not to be confused with Antioch in Pisidia [Acts 13:13-52; 2 Tim. 3:11]), could serve well to unite our minds and hearts in worship and service over the coming days. Several factors came to mind.

Two international churches.

Most obviously, there is the connection between the international make-up of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3; and 14:24–15:35) and the fact that we assemble each week as the original international church of Kuala Lumpur. Since the New Testament tells us much about the church in Antioch and depicts her in a most positive light, it is worth our while considering at this juncture of St. Andrew's history what compelled Luke, the author of The Acts of the Apostles, to write so affirmingly of the church. Notice that he returns repeatedly to events ongoing in Antioch, offering us generous glimpses of the church's significance. From these we discern numerous traits of a faithful church. While they can be itemised variously, our series focuses on nine of them. Together, they help us to assess where we are at spiritually as a church.

Two parties.

Clearly, as pastor and people, we come at this assessment with uneven exposure to St. Andrew's. Whereas I have little experience of the church, many of you have been attending for longer. It is natural, then, that on occasion you will question my right to speak of St. Andrew's. Know, however, that I have no desire to be overly hasty or bold in doing so. When, though, in the course of ministering to you there is reason to challenge the church, please bear in mind two points. First, that my want of indepth experience of St. Andrew's is actually an asset in preaching to you the Word, for when the sermons get “near to the bone” you can assume it is the Spirit bringing this or that to light. Second,

understand that the Spirit speaks to us through ministers of the Word only to the degree that we minister *the Word*. Were it not for this divinely authoritative revelation, a divine call to preach it, and now your call to do so at St. Andrew's, I would shrink back from applying the Word to St. Andrew's. After all, I have in myself no authority to do so. The Word of God is alone my authority. It is, then, only as I commit to preaching and applying God's Word that I am able, as a newcomer to the church family, to address St. Andrew's directly. But when I do, we each, worshiping God with reverential awe, are bound to hear, to process, and to work out its principles. The more we do so, the more we shall mirror the excellencies of the church in Antioch.

Two realities.

While the church in Antioch offers us much inspiration, our ultimate tonic in pursuing faithfulness to God comes from God Himself. All the commendations of our brothers and sisters in Antioch arise from His grace, and the infallible recording of them from His inspiration of His Word. We should not assume, though, that because Scripture is divinely inspired that the church in Antioch was perfect. The falling out of two of her influential figures, Barnabas and Paul (Acts 15:36-41), gainsays this. The doctrine of inspiration requires of us, then, not the belief that the church was impeccable but that Luke's record of her life is truthful and accurate. Thus, we only draw inspiration from the church in Antioch to the degree that she was faithful to the revealed will of God. That said, her imperfection ought not to occasion cynicism about the Christian church. Bound together in Christ, we take refuge in the grace of God. Specifically, we turn our thoughts to the end of the age, when Christ, having sanctified (set apart) and cleansed his church by the Word, will present her to himself “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Two possibilities.

Once we have searched the ministry of the Word and found it to accord with Scripture (Acts 17:6) two clear alternatives lie before us. Either we embrace its teaching and application or we reject it. The question, then, is not whether the sermons please us or offend us, but whether they glorify God, are true to His Word, and are applied in the Spirit of Christ. That will be my intent throughout the series and, indeed, throughout my tenure at St. Andrew's. After all, the faithfulness of the church depends first of all on the trustworthiness of the pulpit. With that in mind, please pray that I may serve you aright. Pastor Tim.