

Becoming the Antioch Church of Today

Happy 25th Anniversary

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I believe 99 % of our church members will agree with me that God loves Canaan Church! For the last 25 years of its existence, many of us have witnessed the amazing guidance of God in the development of both Taiwanese and English ministries. And with the start of the Mandarin outreach ministry last year, Canaan has entered a new phase: an era of challenges & growth!

Every Sunday, it doesn't matter what language you speak--English, Mandarin, Taiwanese, or baby language... "For we are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), Amen? Our goal for this year and beyond is to "Expand our Mission Field."

In celebrating **Canaan's 25th Anniversary**, let's be reminded of Jesus' desire on earth – to build up the church of God and to expand God's kingdom, for the Father's glory. May the Lord continue to join our hearts and our minds in one common goal – to build up Canaan Taiwanese Christian Church to expand God's vision in our hearts to reach the world for our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In Acts 11, God has blessed us with a model church to learn from: in the background of the Antioch church (Acts 11:19-26), we can relate to a church mixed with different backgrounds: Jews and Greeks. Antioch was an ancient city. Antioch held immense wealth derived from the caravan trade and links to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. It was about 16 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, ranking behind only Rome & Alexandria. It was the governing center of Syria. But it was also a corrupt city – many philosophies and cultic movements. But when Jewish believers went into Antioch, they made a difference for Christ:

(1) They were preaching the gospel to the Gentiles:

And because of their passion of the lost, v.21 says, "The Lord's hand was with them, & a great number of people believed & turned to the Lord." Not only did they lead many to the Lord, but also...

(2) They had wonderful church lives:

Because when the church of Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch, v.23 says, "When he arrived & saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad & encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." The result? v.25, "a great number of people were brought to the Lord."

(3) Their church grew rapidly:

They had a good reputation in the society – the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. The Antioch church is our great role model!

Canaan members, facing many new opportunities and challenges to grow God's church and to live as missionaries for the next 25 years – we must ask ourselves again, "Where do we go from here?" "What should we focus on?" Let's start with the original church - the Antioch church. There are a few major principles for us to follow.

I. Let's mobilize the people of God!

For any church to grow, it needs to have people. When we have willing co-workers, we will have thriving ministries. Because we have gifted people like you, Canaan churches (Mtn. View, San Jose) are blessed with Worship, Education, Missions, Evangelism, Discipleship, Cell Group, Caring Prayer, Music, Campus, Media, Marriage and Family, Adult, Youth, and Children's ministries. By the grace of God, we are growing in every aspect of our church.

In the O.T., we see that without the willingness of Moses, there wouldn't be Exodus. Without Joshua, there would be no entering of the promised land; without Joseph, how could the tribe of Israel continue? Without Nehemiah, how could the temple be rebuilt?!!

In the N.T., the grace period of salvation through Jesus Christ, the ministry of choosing the 12 disciples was vital. John 14:12 says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." What was Jesus talking about? He was talking about preaching the gospel – helping the people of this world come to Him! And because of the vitality of God's perspectives in the world, we see as in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Living in the Bay Area, with our high-tech capabilities, we have the means to reach any corner of the world within a few seconds; we can travel to the ends of the earth within a few hours; even though many of our Canaan missionaries seem far from us, they are within reach with a phone call, an e-mail. Dear ones, is it hard really to go to the ends of the world to share the gospel with others?

We, representing Jesus, can expand our mission field by joining forces with the Army of Christ - Christ becomes many Christians. That's multiplication! Think: without Peter, where do we get the Jerusalem church? Without Barnabas &

co-workers, where did the church of Antioch come from? Without McKay in northern part of Taiwan, we would never have the Presbyterian churches today. So without your participation and willingness to commit in serving Christ, Canaan would not have been where it is today. Let's press forward for Jesus!

(1) Find "like-minded" people!

After the establishment of Antioch, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help the Antioch church. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit & faith, and he brought many to the Lord. When he discovered the potential of Antioch, whom did he invite to come and help? Apostle Paul v.25f

When my father, Rev. Jonathan Cheng, was in his mid-20s (in the early 1960s), he had TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) who saw potential in him and equipped him to be an effective minister of Christ. Before he turned 30 years old, he was sent from Taiwan to the United States for further education and training. Within two years, he returned to Taiwan and served as the youngest director of TEAM Radio Taiwan in Tai-Chung.

A few years later, my father was invited by TEAM headquarters in Wheaton, IL, to join the home staff in 1977. During that time, he was the first Asian to join TEAM in the 80 years of its existence. For the next 30 years, he pastored, equipped, trained, and established many churches and trained leaders for God's kingdom! All his accomplishments came from TEAM's vision to help him, grow him, equip him, and train him. At Canaan, we have the important responsibility and privilege to seek kingdom workers and equip them for God's work.

(2) Disciple others!

Barnabas did not bring Paul for a sight-seeing tour or for the purpose of entertainment. The first thing he did was to bring Paul to the church of

Antioch. It is just like professional basketball players: when a rookie player enters NBA, he is assigned a mentor to guide him and help him face up to the effective lifestyle of a professional basketball player, so that he can adjust quickly to the proper lifestyle as a professional.

It's the same with spiritual life. After graduating from seminary, God was gracious in providing a few gifted ministers of Christ for me to learn from. We all need spiritual teachers to watch and guide us, so that we may mature in our Christian walk, develop our leadership potential. Dear ones, for the expansion of kingdom ministries, we need to find people out, develop them and disciple them that they can start the process all over again and again and again, ...

(3) Give opportunities to serve!

Back in Taiwan, I used to hear stories about some Sr. Pastors who perform ordination on new seminary graduates. As they lay their hands on them, they "leave their hands on them" for many years! (Do you see the picture... "Press them down & keep them down!")

Barnabas was senior pastor to Paul in all areas, but the very first message preached in Antioch was given by whom? By Paul! When Barnabas discovered that Paul's gift of preaching was stronger than his own, he gave Paul the opportunity to preach. A good leader will train an upcoming leader and make him more outstanding than himself.

Behind D.L. Moody, the great early 19th century evangelist, was a not-so-popular Sunday school teacher who gave Moody the room for growth to develop all his gifts. We don't really know who was the mentor of Rev. Billy Graham (the great evangelist of 21st century), yet he has become one of the most influential evangelists of all time. Dear ones, is there anyone whom you are training and developing for the kingdom of Christ?!

II. Let's love one another with God's love – "Agape!"

If we are to expand our mission field, we must first expand our love for one another!

From Acts 13, we see the makeup of the Antioch church--with its people groups, cultural backgrounds, languages, and lifestyles. To co-exist within this community was very difficult. Only through the love of God for each other could they have experienced unity in the body of Christ.

Within current Canaan church in Mtn. View, we have four regular Sunday services – Children's, Mandarin, English and Taiwanese (and a Youth service is not far behind). We have members from many parts of the world: Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, different parts of China, and many who were born in the U.S. We're supporting missionaries to Indonesia, Czech Republic, South Africa, Latin America and China. It is only through Agape love, a sacrificial love, that we can experience the unity of the body of Christ.

In Acts 24:1, we see that, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, & Saul." Simeon who was called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene were probably black persons; Barnabas & Saul were Jews – so they should look closer to whites; Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod, was of a royal family, so he had the skin of gold. They all came from different backgrounds & experiences, yet they were able to work together. I am sure that without Agape love, there was no way they could be unified in the Lord.

Dear Canaan members, let's accept one another in the Lord and love each other from the heart, that our prayers will not be hindered and the work of the Lord will continue to thrive for the edification of the people and the glorification of Christ Jesus.

III. Let's become a ceaselessly praying church!

It is clearly seen that the Antioch church was a praying church. Verse 3 says, "Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them

away - preaching in the synagogues.” Before preaching, they fasted and prayed. They valued the importance of prayer. Dear ones, for a praying church, God’s will revive its people; a praying leader will gain strength from above to be effective in ministry.

Many people pray when they are facing difficulties or tragedies. But it’s better than no prayer at all, right? When Peter walked on water and was about to sink, he prayed, “Lord, save me!” Did Jesus listen to his prayer? Yes, He did. Why? Because Peter had a close relationship with Jesus, his Lord.

Dear members, it doesn’t matter what situations or circumstances we are in – prayer should be an important part of our lives. Can I ask you a serious question? How much time are you spending in front of a TV daily or playing video games per week? How much time are you using for personal pleasure and entertainment?! To spend an hour & a half praying for the church every Wednesday night, is the church asking too much of your time? After 14 years here at Canaan, I’m still looking for the answers to, “Why is it so hard to get people to come out and pray?” In facing new challenges ahead, won’t you commit yourself to become a prayer warrior for His kingdom?!!

IV. Let’s value World Missions and become “goers!”

The Antioch church not only preached the gospel to its own people, but they also preached to the Gentiles and in other places. When God discovers a person, a nation, or a church, and when they cannot fulfill His will – what does He do? He chooses another person, another nation, & another church to continue His mission in the world. Can you imagine if Canaan church doesn’t appear in God’s list? How devastating that would be!

Moses in his old age didn’t respect God and used the rod to hit the rock – so God raised up another leader, Joshua. King Saul was jealous of David and wanted to kill him, so God raised up David as the new king and forsook Saul. Judas sold Jesus

for 30 pieces of silver; God chose another disciple to take his place. Dear ones, don’t think that we cannot be replaced – be alert and watch carefully!

If Canaan Taiwanese Christian Church does not continue to preach the gospel or to do World Missions, God cannot bless us, and He may raise another church who is willing to reach the world for Him.

In celebrating Canaan’s 25th Anniversary, what should we be focusing on?

May the Lord help us to learn from the Antioch church, to mobilize people, to find and train people, and to continue to love and pray – that God may perform miracles of expanding our mission fields for His ultimate glory! A-men!

