

Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher at a little church in Chicago, his class was for teenagers. It wasn't the biggest church in town, actually, it was a rather tiny church. Kimball had a small Sunday School class that consisted of just a handful of kids.

One Sunday a new kid showed up in church all on his own. This kid just showed up at church, he didn't come with his family and no one from the church brought him. He just appeared.

He went to Edward Kimball's Sunday School class that morning. Kimball quickly found out that this kid had never been to church before and was completely unfamiliar with the Bible and Christianity, compared to the other teens.

Edward Kimball realized that he needed to talk to this kid one on one about Jesus Christ and so that same week Kimball walked down to where the young man worked, a shoe store. Kimball saw the kid through the window working but hesitated to go in. He knew that he needed to really talk to this kid; again Kimball turned to enter, but again, he hesitated.

I mean who was Edward Kimball anyway? He was just a guy at one of the least significant churches in town, a guy with a relatively ineffective Sunday School class that only attracted a few teens, he wasn't brilliant or especially articulate, he was just a part time Sunday School teacher and not much more. Has anyone here ever heard of him?

Still, this kid needed to hear about Jesus, and so, one more time Edward built up the courage to enter the store and talk to the kid - this time he followed through. Edward presented the gospel to the new kid as best he could....and the kid responded by giving his life over to Jesus Christ, right there in the store.

Now, chances are fairly high that a good portion of us here today in this church this morning know Jesus Christ as a result of this single act of Edward Kimball. This small act that Kimball almost let pass by, quite possibly could have been the demise of our chance to hear about Jesus, of many if he had not acted. Chances are, we owe our gratitude to this man for our opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see, that kid who gave his life over to Jesus Christ that day was none other than Dwight Moody who later became one of the greatest evangelists in the world with hundreds and thousands becoming Christians as a result of his witness.

One of those who came to Christ as a result of Moody's ministry was the Reverend Billy Graham, who in turn brought millions to Christ, worldwide.

A man few people could name today, a man who wasn't really anyone, a man who didn't stand a chance to win the Sunday School teacher of the year award, yet, in one single act, this man set in motion the creation more followers of Jesus Christ, perhaps, than anyone in the history of Christianity.

This is, The Antioch Affect - Obedience to the Holy Spirit in small things, leads to far reaching blessings.

Here in our Scripture today we have a group of men who set in motion events that would change the face of Christianity, these men set in motion events that would literally change the world.

As we look at our Scripture today, here is what we will be able to apply to our lives today: The small things we do in the Kingdom of God will have a greater impact than the great things we strive to do in the Kingdom of God. Let me say that again, The small things we do in the Kingdom of God will have a greater impact than the great things we strive to do in the Kingdom of God.

You know, doing small things in the Kingdom of God, is well....doing things. When we do little things, we are actually doing the work of the kingdom of God. Now, striving to do great things in the Kingdom of God is excellent, but the truth is, we may simply pass up opportunities God sets before us, by ignoring the small things.

Here in the 11th chapter of Acts, men who are not even named, attend to some small things and in actual fact, do a great thing by doing a small thing. Let's see how that works.

Persecution has scattered the first Christians out of the city of Jerusalem and out of Palestine. You may remember that we learned that it was the Hellenistic Jewish Christians,

the Jewish Christians who spoke Greek, who predominantly fled Jerusalem and Palestine. The Aramaic speaking Jewish Christians tended to stay in Palestine, for example, all of the Apostles stayed - so it is primarily these Greek speaking Jewish Christians who are spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also saw that all the early Christians were Jewish, all Jewish. There wasn't anyone who was a Christian who wasn't Jewish first.

Then some Samaritans believed and became Christians, but this wasn't much of a stretch as the Samaritans are ethnically and religiously related to the Jews. After the Samaritans, the Ethiopians received the Gospel, yet the Ethiopian Eunuch who became a Christian was a follower of Judaism and a worshiper of the Lord God, we saw that historically, there were and still are a large number of Ethiopian Jews. So again, when the Ethiopians became Christians, though they were ethnically different from the original Jewish Christians, they too had Jewish roots.

In the last couple of weeks we have seen a Roman Centurion and his family become Christians, but like the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Centurion and his family were followers of Judaism and though they were ethnically different, they held common moral and religious beliefs with the original Jewish Christians. When the Holy Spirit came upon the Centurion and friends the Jewish Christians were shocked, this was a big stretch - but still, they hadn't seen nothing yet.

Right there in verse 19, our first verse, we see that the early Christians are still only telling the Gospel message to other Jews. Do you see that? Now why would they do this? Well, the idea that the Gospel would have any relevance to people who were not Jewish would just not occur to them. They preached Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of OT prophecy promised to people who were believers in the Lord God Yahweh. Jesus was Jewish and they figured that Jesus would only appeal to Jewish people and those who followed Judaism. Their thinking would be, if you don't know the OT, you won't get that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of prophecy for Israel, so what's the point in telling you?

Clearly, they had no idea the scope of what God desired.

Take a look at verse 20-21, “20 Some of them, however, men from [Cyprus](#) and [Cyrene](#), went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

These men, who are never named, are not from Palestine. These men have lived as a minority among non-Jews for years outside of Palestine in Cyprus and Cyrene. For them, interacting with non-Jews was a part of normal everyday life. In Palestine a Jew could easily insulate himself from people who were not Jewish. He could buy goods and sell goods and spend most of his daily life outside the company of non-Jews. But, a Jew in Cyprus and Cyrene would have no choice but to interact with non-Jews, because as a minority he would have to buy and sell goods with non-Jews, simply because there were not enough Jews to sustain a local economy. For these new Jewish Christians interaction with non-Jews was normal life.

Now understand that the Gospel has already been brought to the Jewish community in Antioch before these men from Cyprus and Cyrene arrive. These men could make a second attempt to evangelize the Jews in Antioch, but at this point the Jews in Antioch have heard the message of the Gospel, and may not be open to hear about it again. So the men, really, as a practical matter turn to people who were not Jewish, people who never had any connection at all to Judaism. This first happens of at Antioch.

[Antioch was on the Orontes \[Photos here\]](#) river and was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of about 500,000. Today it is the modern day town of [Antakya, Turkey](#), now with a population of about 6000. Antioch was founded in 300 BC by [Seleucus Nicator](#), first ruler of the [Seleucid dynasty](#), named by him after his father Antiochus. Antiochus was one of the generals of Alexander the Great and inherited the largest portion of Alexander's lands after the latter's death. The location of Antioch was part of this inheritance.

As the capitol of the Seleucid monarchy, Antioch rapidly became a city of great importance and at this point Antioch was surpassed only by Rome and Alexandria. Pompey made it a free city, Augustus and Tiberius enlarged the city and Herod the great provided the [colonnades](#) that lined the main street of Antioch. It was a commercial center with the silk route providing great wealth. The city attracted people from all over the Empire it literally had people from all over the known world living within it.

Though Jews started living in the city almost from its founding, the city was known for its immoral living and for its excessive wealth. Here in Antioch, Jew, Greek and barbarian lived together - the differences that seemed so great in Palestine, didn't seem so great in Antioch. This was a very cosmopolitan city that mixed cultures together like no other city in the Roman Empire.

It is within this social and economic climate that some men from Cyprus and Cyrene decided to do a small thing for the kingdom of God. They decided to present the Gospel to those who had no Jewish background, these people were pagan through and through.

Now remember, to present Jesus as Messiah for Israel would not make sense much to a non-Jew. These people would know nothing of the OT and OT prophecy. To these pagans, the OT would be irrelevant. But, the Greek terms Kyrios "Lord", and Soter "savior", were widely used in the religious world of the Mediterranean.

People in Antioch were looking for the truth. People were looking for spiritual meaning in their lives, and even in Antioch they could not find it. Here they were in a great city that could fulfill all of their dreams, they had great wealth, abundant food, they had luxury after luxury from all over the world, they even had the impressive Temples of [Artemis](#) and [Apollo](#) right outside the city. Antioch was the best of the best that the Roman Empire could offer, this was the good life of ancient times. Yet, people were still empty.

Many pagans were resorting to the various mystery cults to find a divine lord that would guarantee salvation and immortality. They had everything the world could offer, but even the spiritual they tried fell short.

Does this remind you of familiar place? Sounds as if I am describing the United States of America, doesn't it? This sounds like people who live all around us. Things haven't really changed much have they?

The men from Cyprus and Cyrene see this and decide to do a little thing, they talk to these Pagans and show that Jesus has conquered death, Jesus is the one who can give new life. Jesus is who they have been looking for.

Now this is a little thing these men are attempting, because in the minds of these Jewish Christians, the odds of the pagans responding is a little above absolute zero. See, this is a sideline event, this is hobby evangelism, for out of the several hundred thousand pagans living in the city, these men would be fortunate if one person responded. See this is a little thing, because the affect of their efforts were expected to be nothing.

There was a man who was filling up his car at a gas station alongside a road in West Texas. As the man filled his gas tank he noticed two men working alongside the road. They were using shovels to dig holes and fill them in. The first man, who was about twenty yards in front of the second man would dig a hole. The second man then came along and filled in the hole the first man had just dug.

Fascinated, the man finished filling his car and went and bought a soda and sat down to further observe the two men at work. Eventually, the two men were working right in front of the man drinking the soda.

“Hold on,” he said to the men, “can you tell me what is going on here with all this digging?”

“Well,” said the first man, “we work for the city.”

“But, your not accomplishing anything. You dig a hole, and you fill it in. Aren’t you wasting the people’s money?”

“Now look here mister,” said the second one, “don’t be accusing us of wasting money. You just don’t understand how things work. See, normally there are three of us, me, Sam and Bubba. Sam digs the hole, Bubba puts in the tree and I fill in the hole. Now just because Bubba is out sick, doesn’t mean that me and Sam can’t work.”

We want to have an impact for Jesus Christ and we may shy away from little things, because we believe, in the end little things will matter little. Yet, the truth is, God calls you to what God calls you to.

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the Parable of the Talents in which three men are given various amount of money, each according to his ability. With what was given was an expectation from God. God has given you whatever He has given you with the expectation that you will use it for the building of the kingdom of God - even in the little things.

Now, these men do this little thing, a thing that they have little or no expectations for, and a great number of people believe. It is a little thing because there is no expectation for results. The pagans, who were deemed an unreachable people, believe and believe in great numbers. Soon these former pagans, now Christians, would eclipsed in vast numbers the number of Jewish Christians, so much so, that we have the myth that is perpetuated today about the United States, that Christianity is not meant for the Jewish people - when in reality the early Jewish Christians could never even imagine non-Jews following Jesus Christ. What a great irony.

The church in Jerusalem hears about the mass conversions of the pagans and send Barnabas to help. Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew by birth and he would fit in perfectly with these men from Cyprus and Cyrene. Since Barnabas was from outside Judea he would want to evangelize outside of Palestine, so off he goes. He arrives and see things are great in the church in Antioch. After Barnabas arrives even more people come to the Lord Jesus.

The situation of new pagan converts has grown so greatly that Barnabas seeks out Saul. You may remember that after Saul's Damascus experience he spent time in the [Nabataean Kingdom](#) where he certainly presented the Gospel to the pagan Nabataeans, perhaps in the city of Petra. Saul would most certainly be open to teaching these young Christians about Jesus Christ.

Now here in Antioch, we see that the term Christian is coined. It seems that the new converts were always talking about Jesus Christ, everywhere, I mean everywhere they went - and so they were called Christians.

Understand that Christianity has arrived in a place were it should have never taken hold, with a people who had little chance of understanding who Jesus was, but also understand that it is only a matter of time before the church in Antioch explodes sending Christianity worldwide.

Let me point out that, for us in this room, verse 20 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. For all of us here, at some point in our past, had pagan ancestors and the conversion of these men from Cyprus and Cyrene are a directly the reason why you and I know Jesus Christ today. A small thing, yet, far-reaching blessings.

When we lived in Houston Texas, our oldest Spencer was born. Spencer was placed in one of the vast Texas sized nurseries at this hospital. There in that nursery I met a group of volunteers who were all from a nearby church. The job of these volunteers in the nursery was to simply hold the newborn babies. They would come and take turns spending an hour or two just holding little infants - and silently pray for each of these children.

Small thing? Yes. Effective? We may not know, until we stand before God at the end of all things. Perhaps these will be the only prayers these children will receive, perhaps the time spent in the arms of one of these volunteers will be the only time these children will experience the Holy Spirit in their childhood. Perhaps what these people do will matter little in the lives of these children.

Then again....perhaps these church volunteers are putting The Antioch Affect into practice - Obedience to the Holy Spirit in small things, leads to far-reaching blessings.