

A Culturally Diverse Church

by Keith Malcomson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of a culturally diverse church, highlighting the unique mix of languages, colors, and backgrounds in the church at Antioch. It explores how the church faced and overcame cultural crises, focusing on the need to hold fast to the faithful word and rebuke cultural sins. The sermon also points out the church's role in fulfilling the Great Commission by reaching every nation, tongue, and culture.

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Description

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Transcript

I'm going to ask you tonight to turn to Acts chapter 13, and I'm just going to read one verse here tonight. We're going to part three of this series on an Antioch church. And what we said was, this is a vision for LCC.

It's a vision for every Christian, every preacher, and every church of every generation of every nation everywhere. So it's not just for us, but we are presenting it as a vision because I believe the church at Antioch has, or holds, or embodies certain remarkable things that I believe should be the mark of this church. We saw in part one of this, what we said was an evangelistic church.

The church at Antioch was an evangelistic church. It was birthed in evangelism. It moved forward in evangelism.

Everything it done. And eventually it absolute blossomed, or maybe I should use the word exploded in evangelism, which we are yet to get to, but we will along this way. Then in part two, we looked at a gifted church.

The church at Antioch was a gifted church. It had diverse or different gifted ministry, not just one gifted ministry, but different, diverse, unusual, supernatural, gifted preachers that were given by God for the

edification of the body. And so we come to part three, and I know you're waiting to hear what is the third mark of this Antioch church that we find here.

I believe, and this is my message here tonight, a culturally diverse church. So it's an evangelistic church, a gifted church, but third of all, a culturally diverse church. And you'll see what I mean by that.

Reading from Acts chapter 13 in verse one. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, savor every single word of this. I'm only reading one verse.

Gonna preach from this one verse. Now there was in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manian, which had been brought up with Herod, the Tetrarch, and Saul, five in number. Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for your grace and your mercy. It's you that created language. It's you that created generations.

It's you that created the nations. It's you that created our DNA. It's you that created our color.

And oh God, it's you, Lord God, that distributed us out across the world. Now Lord God, I pray, oh God, even as we look and study, Lord God, and consider this church at Antioch, that we would see your plan and purpose for evangelizing the nations, for reaching every culture, for reaching every tongue. Lord God, for reaching, Lord God, and evangelizing every family, every people.

Lord God, we pray, oh God, that as we consider this, that you would make us, Lord God, to be joyfully and gladly diverse. Lord God, utterly unique in the plan and the purpose of God. And Father, reveal your plan and purpose even, Lord God, in making us a diverse church.

Lord God, a unique church, oh God. Lord God, built by your own sovereign hand, that we begin to see that there's a plan and a purpose and a will, even in that. Father, I do pray, Lord God, that from this church at Antioch, that you'd make us to enjoy the blessing of the body of Christ.

How you design her, how you make her. Lord God, the very marks that define her. Lord God, do speak to us, even tonight, on the issues of culture and the body of Christ.

In Jesus' mighty name, amen. And so part three, a culturally diverse church. And I'll explain what I mean by that.

But first, let me give you a background, biblically and scripturally, to what we're gonna deal with in Acts chapter 13, and verse one, concerning a culturally diverse church. If you go back to the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 10, you begin to read the word nations for the first time in the Bible. That's not accidental.

Four times in Genesis 10, we read the word nations for the very first time. The word nations is mentioned for the first time, and God wants us to take good note of it. We actually see in Genesis 10, the creation or the beginning of nations.

And it wasn't man that done that. It wasn't sin that done that. It was actually God's hand.

What we have in Genesis 10 is the table of nations, or the only authentic, accurate record of the history of all nations in the world. We have the original origin of nations that spring out of individual families. But not

only that, we have the origin of language.

And if you study that chapter closely, you'll even see the origin or the breaking off of distinct families of nations of different color. You actually have it all in Genesis 10. And it wasn't man that done that.

It wasn't coincidence that brought that about. It wasn't circumstance. We see in Genesis 10, this was the plan of God, the purpose of God.

This was the engineering of God. If you remember what was happening before Genesis 10, you had Nimrod building the Tower of Babel in Shinar. He was a globalist.

He was a one-world government man. He was a one-world religion man. And you know what he was doing? He was trying to combine all men, not to allow them, as is spoken in Genesis 1, 2, and 3, that men ought to multiply too.

Men and women ought to bring forth children and be dispersed across the world, the nations. You see, what Nimrod was trying to do was unify all culture, all nationality, do away with nationality, to unite all men with one language, one color, one creed, one religion in one place. That's what Nimrod was doing.

But that was never God's plan. God's plan is very, very diverse. His plan is for nations scattered across the world, unique families of nations with different languages, and he dispersed them.

And so in Genesis 10, you see the division into nations wasn't made by man, but the division, the scattering of nations into families with their own language was actually given of God. It was God who actually done it. And if you study Genesis 10 carefully, you'll see that families made up the original nations and that each of those families was given a unique tongue to divide them and separate them because a tongue or a language makes you very, very unique.

It gives you a common identity. If you don't have the same language, you cannot communicate together. And so we even see in Genesis 10 that God had planned and ordained actual countries for the nations.

A nation is not the same as a country. A country is land, a nation is people. And so God separated the nations, and as they were scattered, going out in different directions, he had a country for each nation.

And so we see that originally the languages, the separation of nations, and even the countries where certain peoples lived were ordained of God. Now we know since then that is messed up with sin or with man's hand or the devil working, but we know that this was God's original plan. Listen to what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 32, verse eight and nine.

When the Most High divided the nations, their inheritance. Do you see that it was God who divided the nations, not man? And he had an inheritance for them. What was that? A land, a country.

When he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bonds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. In Genesis 10, you have 70 families, 70 distinct languages, 70 original languages that God created. Man didn't create them.

God created them. We know over the centuries and millennia, languages changed, diversified, but the original 70, God gave unique tongues, the original languages of men. And God set the bonds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

Then in Acts chapter 17, 26, it says, and God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed and the bonds of their habitation. So we see again that God has set boundaries of countries and of nations, that God actually separated these peoples. Then he gives the reason, verse 27, that they should seek the Lord.

If happily, they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. So that's just a little introduction. I could go very far on that chapter 10 of Genesis, but it's just to remind you, to stir you up to the backdrop of this whole cultural issue, the biblical teaching of the scriptures concerning God originating the nations, originating language, originating color.

I want you to see that. It wasn't man's hand. God separated the nations and set their boundaries.

It wasn't accidental. But let me bring you to my message tonight. A culturally diverse church, the church at Antioch that we've read about in Acts chapter 13, verse one, is a culturally diverse church.

It wasn't accidental. Any more than God dividing the nations, giving them different nations. It was no accident that God in the church at Antioch had different languages.

Listen to this, it's the reverse. Different languages, different colors, and different cultures. I want you to see that God works in reverse under grace.

And in a individual church, he unified all this back and they function perfectly with one heart, one spirit. We know we all have one blood, but we don't always have one heart or one spirit or one voice. So it takes a work of God's grace.

I've got four points here for you tonight from this verse. Number one, and I'm taking off, just carrying on from part two when we dealt with the gifted church. But now we're dealing with a culturally diverse church.

My first point here, a culturally diverse church in a culturally diverse city. They're matched, they're connected. Acts chapter 13, verse one says this.

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch. I want you to say that very carefully. I want you to eat and feast and mark out every single word in this verse.

Now there was in the church that was at Antioch. I want you to say the word church and Antioch. There's one church in one city, not many churches in one city.

There is one church here that you find, one unique church, and it is the church in the city of Antioch. The first time we read the word church concerning Antioch is previously in chapter 11, verse 26. And it says this, a whole year, they Barnabas and Saul assembled themselves with the church.

It's the first time at Antioch we hear the word church. What does the word church mean? What does church mean? Don't get a false idea. It's a building.

It's a church gathering. What does the word church mean? The word church means to be called out and called together. That's what the word actually means.

In other words, you have to be called into this. If you have not heard the voice of Christ and be called out of darkness, out of sin, out of the world, away from your own life, if you have not heard the call to follow Jesus Christ, you cannot be a part of the church. The church is called out, one's gathering together.

One's called out of the world, called out of sin, called away from their own lives. And they're called together to the person of Jesus Christ. That is what the word church actually means.

A church is a unique gathering of genuine believers in a certain town, city, or village. And what defines a church? The word church is used in two ways in the Bible. The word church can be a general, global, worldwide, or generational church.

The church, the body of Christ, the worldwide church, the church. That is one way. But normally in the book of Acts and elsewhere, we read the word church being used uniquely of a gathering of Christians within a town or a city.

It's not called churches. It's called the church in Antioch. And you find this all through the Bible.

If you begin to read the church in Thessalonica, the church in Philippi, the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, the church in Philadelphia, then it says the church of the Laodiceans. You know why? Because they owned it. The Laodiceans were the worst, the lukewarm, the cold, and it's called the church of the Laodiceans.

It was their church, a man-made church. But almost always through the entire New Testament, all the post letters, it is the church in a certain place. When it comes to a region like Munster, which is our region, then it will be churches, plural.

But when it comes to a particular town or city, in the Bible, and I know we've lost this, we have many churches in towns, many churches in cities, but I'm talking about the original. I'm talking about the Bible here. A church was defined by a city.

So you don't have the church of Munster, the church of Ireland, the church of England. You don't have that. You have a church is localized within a city.

You can reach it. You can be there. You are the church.

It is very marked in a unique way. This is where we see for the very first time a whole church gathering in Antioch together, the same people gathering in the same place at the same time to do the same thing. It says the church that was in Antioch, a church, a singular church, one united church gathering in a city.

And please note it was Antioch, the third biggest city in the entire Roman Empire. It was a city of about 300,000 people. It was a massive city.

It was a mega city. It was the capital of Syria. It was called Antioch of the Orientus.

The river actually ran past it like the Shannon runs through Limerick. It was called the Jewel of the East. Some even called it Theopolis, which means the city of God or the divine city.

And it was one of the main trading cities of the entire Roman Empire. Rome was at the far end. But you know how Antioch was situated was all the trade had to come through this city.

The Silk Road passed through this city. It was the very hub. It was the most vital trading city in the entire Mediterranean.

Everything passed through this city. Every culture, listen to this carefully. Every cultural culture passed through this city.

Every language passed through this city. And so it's understandable this city of Antioch, this third city of the empire, this mega city, this ginormous city. And it reached its highest point in this century when the church began to explode there.

It was at its highest population. It was at its most victorious point, its economic height. It was at its splendor and majesty.

And right then God deposited his church right in the center of it. It was one of the most diverse cultural cities in the entire empire, if not the entire generation. It was an utterly unique city made up of Syrians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, and 100 other nationalities.

Everybody from the empire was represented at Antioch. There was every language, every form of culture, every habit of man was all there. Every sort of trade, job, work, every style of dress, everything was submerged there.

And so we see in this city, it represented the entire empire. It represented many nations. If you walked on the streets of Antioch, you would hear different languages.

You'd just be taking a stroll. And person after person, you'd hear conversations, different countries, different tongues, different colors, different habits, different dress. It was absolutely everywhere.

Can I remind you that we are living also in an hour that's utterly unique. We are seeing a mixing of culture like has been very rare for hundreds of years or maybe several hundred years. Here in Limerick, we live in a city of 100,000 plus people easily, easily.

And about 80% of the people living in Limerick are of yes, national white Irish citizenship. But there's at least 20% of the city are utterly diverse and it's exploding. It's getting more diverse by the actual year.

And I believe we're gonna see within a few years, we're gonna see this dramatically change. I believe this city is gonna explode. And there's a personal conviction, not from the Lord, not anything else.

I've thought this for a few years. I think this city is gonna explode. I think it's gonna explode in diversity.

I believe it's gonna explode in nationality. I believe it's gonna explode in size. At the minute, about 18,000 people live here in this city from other cultures, other nations, other tongues.

And 50% of the entire population come from different ethnic backgrounds. Do you know what that means? One out of five people in the entire Limerick area do not come from here and it's exploding. This is only a beginning.

If you came here 20 years ago, you would rarely see someone of another color. It is exploding. If you walked down the streets, you wouldn't see a Muslim wearing a headscarf.

You wouldn't see it. 10 years ago, you wouldn't see it. Now you could drive out, you see it everywhere.

This city is literally changing from the first time I came here. Overnight, you can see the change. And some of the most popular peoples here are the Polish, the Latvian, Lithuanian, Pakistan, China, Nigeria, India,

and we can go on.

And of course, we even have Ukrainians, about 1,500 Ukrainians here. They're filling hotels or the city campus. They've already been in here visiting on Sundays.

We had people sitting here on Sunday. They now can understand the funny looks on their face when I preach because they communicate. We don't speak English.

I was so relieved because the faces they made during my sermons were very unusual. Now I can begin to rest and relax. I don't need to worry about that.

Do you know what the most notable age in our city is? Those from 30 to 50 is the biggest population of this city. Not the young people, not the very old. From 30 years old to 50 is the main core of the population.

That's who we need to evangelize. And you know what? That's the hardest age to evangelize. Not the young, not the old, but that middle gap, and we want to evangelize them.

See, this church that was at Antioch, it was a church in a city of Antioch. Antioch was multicultural. It was exploding.

It was utterly diverse. It was a sinful city, a contemporary city. Every contemporary idea, view, philosophy was promoted there.

I mean, it was pushed big time. Everybody came into the city of Antioch to sell the latest thing, the latest idea, the latest dress code, the latest way of doing things, the latest immoral act. Everything got poured into Antioch.

But you know what? God put a church there. In the midst of all these languages, colors, cultures, you know what God done? God deposited a church right in the middle of that. This is my first point.

A culturally diverse church in a culturally diverse city. Do you know what I believe? We as the church ought to represent the city. We ought to pray that we represent the city.

Certainly, 80% of us should be national Irish if we represent the city at the minute. And then we ought to be praying for these different nationalities. We need some Muslims born again here.

We need some Polish in here. We're not doing too bad at the minute. Remember, I quizzed you over the past two days.

And so I think I've got this right. And I'm going on the safe side, the lower end. Sitting here tonight, we've got those who speak about 14 different languages, minimum, at a decent level.

Forgive me if I pronounce two of them wrong. We have Lithuanian, German, Latvian, Russian, Czech, Slovak, Papiamento, I should get a thumbs up for that, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Malaya, Alam, Hindi, and national Gaelic Irish. Now that's minimum sitting in this room tonight.

These languages can be communicated in with others should they come through the doors. And we're only touching the base core of it there as a beginning. But do you know what, Antioch was a culturally diverse church in a culturally diverse city.

I want to tell you, we live in a very unique world and it's God's will that we're a unique church. I do not believe in splitting the church up into having a Hebrew Jewish roots church, a African church, a Chinese church. I understand the reason that happens.

I understand that language, culture, styles of worship. But do you know what, if I went to Bombay, I'm going to look for an Indian church. If I go to some nation in Africa, I'm looking for a national church.

I'm not looking for a group of Irish people. God help me, I will not be doing that. If I go to Australia, I'm not looking, where's the Irish church? I want to be with Irish.

I'm going to say, God help me, lead me to a church that represents this city. And it's no surprise then it should happen the other way. I want to be an authentic local church, not split by culture, not split by language.

I want to be in a church that's going to evangelize that city. That's my first point. A culturally diverse church and a culturally diverse city.

Number two, a culturally diverse leadership. A culturally diverse leadership is number two. I want you to see here in Acts chapter 13, verse one, five leaders of the church in Antioch were very diverse.

I want you to note this very, very carefully here tonight with me, it's very, very important. I want you to see this. It says here, now there was in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene and Minion, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul, five leaders are mentioned.

What's my point? A culturally diverse leadership. These five men couldn't be more diverse. You know why? Because they're in a culturally diverse generation, city, culture.

And so the leadership of the church was even noted in that in a very remarkable way. Let's go through these five men and I want to show you how diverse the leadership of the church. You see, people tell you certain cultures can't get on, but I want to tell you our church, our love, our fellowship, this church ought to have different colors.

We can't make different colors come together or different cultures come together or different languages. But in the will of God, we want that. You know why? To show this world we're unified.

This world separates, but we don't separate around those things. There ought to be no racism in the body of Christ, but there can be. There can be.

It'd be silly if we said there never is because that can be a sin that is in the church, but it ought not to make a difference. Let's look at these five. First of all, the first of the five, and I believe these are named in order of importance.

Number one is Barnabas. He's the first out of the five leaders, and I believe the most significant at this stage at this time. You have Barnabas.

Who was Barnabas? He was a Jew from Cyprus who had lived in Jerusalem just before this. He'd settled on the city of Jerusalem, but he was born a Jew, raised a Jew. His name was Jewish or Hebrew by background.

It had a Hebrew, Jewish, biblical background. He was named as a child because he was born into a Jewish family on the island off the coast of the Mediterranean. That's where he came from.

He came from the island of Cyprus, which was a Gentile foreign nation, but here's a Jew whose family lived there, and he's born as a Jew, but he doesn't lose contact with Jerusalem. He is raised in the faith of his fathers, very strongly Jewish. In fact, the Bible says he was a Levite or from the line, the priestly line of Israel.

So he could have served as a priest in Jerusalem if he had wanted to or was able to. He was also a man of some wealth because he was able to sell land to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. So you begin to get a picture of the first leader in the church at Antioch.

When you look into his past, he'd come from a Cypriot background. He'd come from a Jewish background, a religious background. He had a strong Hebraic background.

The scriptures dominated him from a little child. He was raised in them, but yet in another culture with another language, with a national language, but he never lost his Hebrew tongue. He would have been taught that from a child.

Now, very likely he was converted on the day of Pentecost or in the revival that came out of that. And as we dealt with before last time in part two of this series, he was a man of a large heart. He was a man of broad views.

He wasn't dogmatic. He wasn't narrow, but he was a large man. He was a man of great warmth.

Remember with Saul, he went and looked for Saul. Remember how he brought Saul, the murder of Christians. Remember how he brought them to the apostles at Jerusalem when no one else would touch Saul.

He's a remarkable man. So this Cypriot, this Jewish Cypriot who got born again, met Christ, has such a warmth and he's a prophet in ministry. What beautiful ministry.

He did not return to Jerusalem once he encountered what was happening at Antioch, but he settled down there and he went and got Saul and brought Saul there. You begin to see something very, very unusual in the leadership of this church. He searched for a man called Saul.

Why? Because Saul had a call to the nations. Remember young Saul converted this Jewish radical Hebrew Pharisee actually had a call to take the gospel to all cultures, all languages, all nations. And yet Saul is there amongst the Jewish nation.

There he is. And then he has to go back to his own community of Tarsus. But do you know what Barnabas knew? There was an understanding.

The nations, all languages, all people. Barnabas had a large heart. He was a Cypriot living in Jerusalem, but he had a dynamic view of the nations and of all cultures.

That's the first leader, Barnabas. The second one, look at your verse here. Simeon that was called Niger.

Simeon or Simon is a Jewish Hebrew name. So we see that Simon was obviously from a Jewish Hebrew family background as well. And notice what it says, Simeon that was called Niger.

Simeon is the name he was given when he was born. Simeon is what he was called, but it says he was called Niger. In other words, he was nicknamed.

You know, we've seen this before. You're given a nickname. Barnabas was the nickname.

Barnabas wasn't his name, but it became his name. Barnabas, son of consolation, son of prophecy. Well, here's another one, Simeon, but we nicknamed him in the church, probably because there were other Simeons in the church.

Here's Simeon, which Simeon do you mean? Do you know that Simeon was the most popular name in Israel in the first century amongst Jews? The most popular of any other name. So they had to define certain Simeons and we've had it in churches. Which Mary do you mean exactly? Which Jason do you mean? Which Patrick do you mean? You have to define it.

And it was the same in the church here. There were various men called Simeon, so they nicknamed them. Do you know how you give a nickname? You don't call someone big nose if they don't have a big nose.

You don't call them Niger if Niger doesn't fit. In other words, when you look at him, you think Niger, of course. You mean Simeon the Niger.

So they give him a nickname, Simeon that was called Niger. This word Niger is a Latin word, not a Greek word, not a Jewish Hebrew word. It's a Latin word.

It means black or dark. It's talking about his complexion. When you look at him, you go Niger, that's what it is.

And so they nicknamed Simeon black in complexion or Simeon the black, Simeon the dark. There was nothing rude on this. It wasn't being degrading them or being rude and calling them the black.

It was a biblical, normal, healthy way in a local church. I think someone got worried about me using the word black once and I said, well, if it's okay, I'm not offensive. I will use it.

But here is a leader. Do you know what this shows? He is from an African background. Now I'm showing you the leadership in this church.

You've got to understand that. First Barnabas, who is a Cypriot, who was a Jew converted after Pentecost. This second man, Simeon, who had a Hebrew name, but he's a black man.

He's an African, but it doesn't say African, doesn't give his country. So maybe it wasn't born in Africa. He could be a black man born anywhere.

But what we do know is he was black in complexion to such a degree that he's not gonna get confused with anyone else in the church. That means there wasn't lots of black Simeons in the church there at Antioch, but he was. So that's the second leader in the church.

Then the third one, Lucius of Cyrene. Now the name Lucius is a Latin name, a Romanized name, a cultural name, not a Hebrew name. It was a secular pagan name.

Lucius, it's not Luke. Some people think this is Luke. It's not Luke.

It's two different names. This is Lucius of Cyrene. Where was Cyrene? Cyrene is in North Africa.

So we've got a second potential African here. This one is African. He's not black, but he's an African.

The North of Africa was not all black at this particular stage. So Cyrene is in North Africa. And in fact, if you look on the map, it's in Northeast Libya.

If you find the country of Libya, it's in the Northeast part of it. And today, if you go to Libya, there's an area, the same area is called a name almost similar to Cyrene. This same area is still called Cyrene.

And that's where Lucius, the third leader, was a Libyan. He was from Cyrene. He was from the North of Africa.

So you're beginning to see different countries, different languages, different cultures, different influences on the leadership of this local church. It wasn't only a diverse church and a diverse cultural city, but you begin to see the leadership is actually diverse as well. Now this area, Cyrene, began as a city, the city of Cyrene.

It'd become an entire province under the Romans. And it was also joined with the little island of Crete, making it all Cyrene. It was the center of philosophy.

And this man, Lucius, was probably one of the founder members of the church in Antioch. It says in chapter 11:20 that people from Cyrene initially evangelized in Antioch. Certain believers from Cyrene who actually had moved to Jerusalem and were chased through persecution to Antioch, here they are.

There's a good chance he was one of the original individuals, believers, evangelizing. Now you see him raised up of God to be a leader in the local church. So you've got a Cypriot with a Jewish background.

You've got a black man, potentially African, with a Hebrew name. You have this third man from Libya with no Hebrew connection or Jewish background who was a founder member. Now you have fourthly, Mannion.

Now I want you to notice this. This is where it gets really interesting. Mannion.

And it says, which had been brought up with Herod, the tetrach. Do you know who Herod the tetrach is? The word tetrach means a fourth or a quarter. Do you know who Herod's father was? Herod the tetrach.

His father was Herod the Great. This is the Herods, the family of Herods. An entire family of kings that ruled over Israel.

And when you begin looking at this man, his father is Herod the Great, who slaughtered the babies trying to kill the new king that was gonna be born, that would arise and rule over the people of Israel. His father slaughtered the babies. Do you know Herod the Great was a wicked, vile man.

Look what it's saying. One of the leaders of the church at Antioch was raised with who? Herod the tetrach, the son of Herod the Great. And this son ruled over a quarter of Israel, of one fourth of the nation at that particular time.

Do you know what that actually means? This leader was initially raised in a palace. And so you begin to see that they weren't only diverse in color, diverse in language, diverse in country, but they're also socially diverse. The leadership came from every background imaginable.

You can't even comprehend this. So they were socially diverse. In fact, this man he was raised with, this Herod, is also called Antipas, the son of great.

Now the word to be brought up with means to be a foster brother. When you look at the word to be brought up with Herod, this is what it means. Raised or suckled by the same nurse.

Reared together, fed at the same breast. Or it could mean a court title. That's what it normally means.

Means, in other words, Herod the tetrach and Mannion got raised being suckled in the palace by a wet nurse because the royal princess didn't do this. She wouldn't do this. So you've got this church leader.

When you go right back to his childhood, for some reason, how could this possibly be? That this Jewish Hebrew man who's now a born again man and what's more, called to be a leader in the church. Here he is being raised, suckled, growing up with and becoming an intimate friend of Herod, the son of Herod the Great. You know what that means? That this church leader was raised in around Herod the Great who had killed all the children in around Christ, trying to murder Jesus Christ.

This was the most vile, wicked leader in that generation. And he had a lot of competition. But here is this church leader, his social background.

His family background is in that home. Let me go a bit deeper here. When you look at Tetrach who he's raised with, Antipas, remember he's married to Herodias.

This Herod that he was suckled with, his best friend, his intimate friend in the palace. Do you know who his intimate friend became later? He was the Herod who enjoyed the preaching of John the Baptist and had John the Baptist beheaded. He is also Herod the Tetrach is the one who had Jesus Christ put to death.

He was raised with them. Can you imagine here at this church, you've got a church leader that was raised under Herod the Great with Herod the Tetrach who had John the Baptist and Jesus Christ put to death. You've got a diverse leadership in the church at Antioch.

All unique testimonies, all unique countries, all unique stories. Almost sounds like here, but I don't think we're quite as bad as this church, I wanna tell you. But you've got an utterly diverse church.

I was just looking at this earlier and I looked up Antipas, when was he born? About 20 BC. When did he die? 39 AD. Notice that word 39.

This is several years after that, that Herod died. And listen mate, that means Manian is about in his 60s. He's a church leader over the church at Antioch in his 60s, which is a remarkable thing.

Now how did this man who was a Hebrew by background get raised in Herod's palace? Because you know Herod the Great, he wasn't of the royal line. He shouldn't have been a king. He shouldn't have been over Israel.

He was a half-breed. He was a pagan. He was religiously immoral.

He was spiritually and morally immoral. And when Herod the Great come up through, he shouldn't have been king. How did a man like this end up getting grown up in the palace? Here's a possible thing.

I'm not saying this authoritatively and I don't often do this, but I can't help but tell this story. I find it so fascinating. Josephus, the Jewish historian, later in the first century, wrote the history of Israel.

This is one story he told, very interesting story. He told about how Herod the Great, that wicked king who should never have been king, who wasn't of the royal line, as a little child going to school, he wasn't a Jew. There was no chance in a million he would become a king or a leader.

No chance. But on his way to school, he met a man called Manahem, which is very closely related to Manian, this name that we're talking about. And this old man, Manian, was a prophet of God, a very godly man.

And he saw the young boy on his way to school and he patted him on the back. And he greeted him as king of the Jews of Israel. That's what he called him.

The little boy corrected him and said, no, you must have made a mistake or you're joking with me. I'm not a king. I'm just a normal boy.

I'm not gonna be a king. I'm not even Hebrew by birth. But the old man said, no, you're gonna be the king.

God has shown me. And listen to what he said. This is something he said.

He says, love justice towards all men and piety towards God and clemency towards thy citizens. Yet do I know how thy whole conduct will be that thou will not be such a one. It says later when he did become king, he remembered the old prophet, the old man, sent to him trying to give him rewards.

He refused them. He then offered to raise his child in his palace. And it was said he did.

I'm not connecting this. I'm just telling you a possibility that it could have been this prophet's son that got raised with Herod under the leadership of Herod the Great. It is a possibility, but I'm not forcing it.

I don't often add something like that. But let me just tell you about Manian. Do you realize someone raised with Herod experienced conversion.

He got born again, become a disciple of Jesus. Not only that, he had to flee in persecution. Someone raised in the palace, suffered persecution, had to flee Jerusalem.

And when he got to Antioch and began to preach the gospel and evangelize, God raised him up. He had a call to be either a teacher in the church or a prophet in the church. And he'd become one of the five leaders in this church.

Let me deal with the fifth one here. I love this. I just, when you see God's hand, how God built the leadership of a church, it was a culturally diverse church and a culturally diverse city, but it had a culturally diverse leadership.

The fifth and last one, Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus is in the very southern part of present day Turkey. Notice he's the fifth name, Saul of Tarsus.

He was a Bible teacher. Of course, you'd put the man who's 60-odd before him, born in a palace. He gets in ahead of him.

Saul of Tarsus was a younger man. What was his background? A Pharisee of the Pharisees, a persecutor of the church from Tarsus. And so you see with these five leaders, there's three different continents mentioned amongst them.

There's different colors. There's different language backgrounds. There's different cultures that they are raised in from the palace.

Can you imagine advertising? Mannion's gonna be testifying on Sunday night from palace to pulpit. You know what Spurgeon said? If God calls you to be a preacher, don't stoop down to become the king of England. Do you realize this man got promoted to the pulpit? He got rescued from the palace.

He would have died and gone to hell in that environment. You know, Herod actually got thrown out of his position eventually. He got removed from his position, had a fall on the Roman empire, the emperor sent him to Gaul and he died in Gaul within one year.

He died a tragic death, probably murdered. But you know, this man lived his latter days as a leader in the church, in the body of Christ. Do you know when you study the city of Antioch, there's an interesting bit of information.

The city was ethnically, in an ethnic way, was divided into five ethnic sectors, Antioch was. It was divided into the Greek sector, the Syrian sector, the Jewish sector, there's 40,000 Jews, the Latin sector and the African sector. Is it accidental that we have five leaders when there's five different cultural sectors in the city? It could be perchance, but I find it very interesting.

The third point, the cultural crisis behind the birth of the church. So you have this culturally mixed church in a culturally mixed city. It has to be that way, it ought to be that way.

You have this mixed leadership. But third of all, can I remind you of the cultural crisis? See, you and I are living in a cultural crisis, nation against nation. That means ethnos against ethnos.

Never have we seen our world so divided by color, by culture, by background, by religion, by sex, by everything, everything. They are pushing this in a global way. You know why? They're trying to take it all over.

It is divide and conquer, divide and conquer, divide the people and then you unify them under your globalist power. You see, there was a problem and I dealt with it before in the persecution of leading to Antioch. This church that's filled with diverse languages, diverse leaders, socially different people, age different, everything different, color different, all mixed together, living in unity, a dynamic church evangelizing, filled with the spirit that's gonna set the Gentile world on fire.

I mean, absolutely on fire. This church is a dynamic church, a racially mixed church, ethnos mixed church. It's only one race, but there's many ethnos, many families, many nations.

But let me remind you of the crisis, the cultural background that was going on because I believe their world was in a mixed up, cultural, confused crisis at this hour. If you go back to Acts chapter six, let me take you to Jerusalem, back to where all this begin. In Acts chapter six and verse one, we read something very interesting.

And in the days, in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied. So notice in Jerusalem, a revival is going on. It started on the day of Pentecost.

There were people there from many different nations, all gathered on the day of Pentecost. Many of them didn't go home, they stayed there. And there was poverty, there was a struggle for jobs.

There was a struggle for food amongst the Christians. The numbers are multiplying. That brings problems in the church.

Real problems. Do you know what you had in the day of Pentecost? All these Jewish believers came into Jerusalem. They then get born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, become part of the church at Jerusalem.

But you've got a problem. You've got people from different backgrounds, different nations, different cultures, all in Jerusalem. They're in the one church, they believe the same thing.

Culturally, they do have a connection, but they're from many different languages and nations. Look what happens here in Acts chapter six and verse one. As the disciples multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.

Do you see that? They're all from a Jewish background. They're all born again. They're in the same church.

But yet here comes a problem. There is a murmuring, grumbling. I know none of you do that, but it happened here with these ladies.

These widows, a murmuring, complaining, grumbling. You've got a problem. And it was between two cultural differences.

It was the group who were Grecians and the group who are Hebrews. In other words, the widows who were born Hebrews in the land of Israel in Jerusalem. Then there were the other Christians who had been Jewish who had come from other nations, from Cyrene or Cyprus or some other nation that come in for Pentecost.

And so there's these two group of widows and they begin to murmur and complain. You've got a cultural crisis in the church, two culturally different people with similar backgrounds. And yet they say, we're Grecians, we unify.

We're Hebrews, we unify. And they start murmuring. They're getting more than us.

We're not getting cared for. Us Grecians who have come in from other nations, you're caring for the Hebrews. Imagine the apostles being accused of this.

You care more about the local Hebrew widows than you do about the other widows that come from other nations who are here without their husband now. And you know what? You give them more food than you give us and you care more for them than you do us. And this murmuring broke out.

There was a real dispute, a real problem. It was such a crisis, the apostles had to act in unity immediately. What did they do? They went to the entire people and says, you appoint for yourself seven men filled with the Holy Ghost.

You choose them out. And these seven men, we need to give ourselves to the word of God and to prayer. You bunch of women are distracting us.

This cultural crisis, this problem in the church, bickering over culture, divided by culture, accusing wrongly. Do you know what? It was actually distracting the apostles from preaching, from prayer now. You know what the answer was? Choose seven men.

The first was Stephen. You know what's special about Stephen? He's a Greek speaker. His name Stephen was a Gentile name.

It wasn't a Hebrew name. It was brought in. So he was one of these Grecian Hellenistic Jews who had come into Jerusalem and he was the first.

Isn't that wise to do? I'm gonna choose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the wisdom of God to begin looking after this. Do you realize these cultural issues niggle away in the background of things? It says about Stephen, notice this carefully, this gets worse. See the devil is trying to cause a problem through culture.

He's trying to cause disunity in the local church and he's using this issue and they appoint seven men filled with the Holy Spirit to solve this. But one of them, Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue.

Notice this carefully. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines and the Syrians and Alexandrians and of Cilicia. That's where Paul came from, Tarsus.

Notice that. And of Asia disputing with Stephen. Do you see Stephen's a born again deacon in the church who's handing out bread from the ladies, but all of a sudden the spirit of God's moving on him.

He's become a preacher. He's doing miracles. God's used them in a supernatural way.

And all of a sudden, as he's preaching, filled with the Holy Spirit, believe me, someone filled with the Holy Spirit can be contended with and become, be at the center of a crisis. Don't think because someone stirs up trouble, there's something wrong with them. Maybe they're the most right person.

When everyone turns against them, you ought to ask why? This is a good man, a godly man filled with the spirit. But notice all these groups, the synagogue of the Libertines. This is an elitist group of Libertines.

You know what it means? Citizens who have freedom. They're not slaves. This is people who are free born.

They've got their liberty. This is a special synagogue raised up in Jerusalem and said only Libertines are allowed to go here. And you know what all these Libertines are from? They're Syrian, Alexandria, that's Egypt.

Remember, Syrians, Libya. Cilicia, that's Turkey. Asia, that's the eastern part of Turkey.

All these areas. And you've got all these men gathered in this synagogue, unified, all from different cultures. But now they're unified against one man, Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit.

They're saying, he's a Christian. And we're Jews from different cultures. You know who's in the midst of them? Saul of Tarsus.

Saul of Tarsus. He is one of them. He belongs to the synagogue.

There's a cultural crisis brewing here. I mean, an explosion. Real trouble.

And it's a cultural problem right in the midst of Jerusalem. You've got all these blow-ins from other cultures, all in the same synagogue. They are radicals.

And you have Saul of Tarsus in the middle of them. And now all it took was a Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, to stand up and preach. And it becomes an explosion.

And you know the rest of the story. You know what happened here. There was religious bigotry.

There was biblical extremism. There was anger leading to murder. There was religious opposition to the real Holy Ghost.

What did Stephen say to all of these gathered, including Saul? Why do you resist the Holy Ghost? What a preacher. What a man of God. You're resisting the Holy Ghost.

They're angry. They're angry. They're saying, we know the scriptures.

We are right. You know, culturally, you've got a problem here. And they dragged Stephen out.

And they stoned him to death. They killed him. Remember what begins now, a persecution of the church in Jerusalem.

I mean, a dramatic persecution. The widest persecution. All of these people out of the synagogue, they explode, they kill Stephen.

Now they're going to every home. These are blow-ins from other cultures who are lighting a fire of persecution in the city. They've unified.

They're more radical than the Hebrews from Jerusalem. Who do you think's behind that? I believe the devil is behind these cultural problems, stirring up strife. You know, it says in chapter 11, verse 20, and some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they come to Antioch, speak unto the Grecians.

Remember, they're being persecuted. Look what comes out of this cultural crisis. Do you realize our world's a smelting pot of cultural crisis at the minute? Do you realize we've never been so close to a third world war? Do you realize that they're stirring up strife of nations? Do you realize they're conquering America through this very issue? Globalists who want power are destroying the nation, dividing the nation, fueling the fires of civil dispute, of riots.

Do you know they're doing it right across the world at the minute? Do you realize all of Europe is being flooded by Muslims pouring in, immigration? I'm glad all of you that have come in in immigration, I'm glad you're here. But I wanna tell you, someone is behind this, stirring the pot. They're trying to destroy Europe.

You can't conquer Europe unless you create a cultural problem. Do you realize our entire world, the globalists are stirring up? See, they wanna lose nationality. They wanna lose identity.

I wanna tell you in the church, I love different colors. I love different languages. I love different countries.

Don't be ashamed of your country. I love diverse, different cultures. You know, when I first moved to Southern Ireland, I was very embarrassed about my Northern Irish accent.

I'd even tell Candice, for years, you answer the phone, you speak to the bin man. I'm embarrassed of my Northern Irish accent. Then we started the church here in Limerick, and in one year, I forgot I had an accent.

You know why, in the body of Christ here in Ireland, I become so apart. I just think I talk like you now. I actually think I sound Limerick.

I speak Limerick fluently. I should have put that on the list today. I'm a Limerick speaker, I'm sure of it.

It's taken time, but I now speak this. And so you have the answer, what came out of this crisis in this hour, out of this burning division of cultures, this murderous spirit, this wicked division over ethnos. Do you know what gets birthed out of this? Is a unified church with different cultures, different languages, different colors, unified to carry the gospel to all nations.

This is remarkable. This is dynamic. I want you to see here that the city of Antioch that was so culturally diverse, it was known for its tolerance of everything, of everything, anything, morally, sexually, politically, religiously.

Remember, it's the city that corrupted Rome. Rome wasn't the worst city. Antioch was the worst city.

Antioch corrupted the morals of the city of Rome. It was a mix of everything. It was open to everything.

And you might say, look at this city. It is 21st century, cutting edge, everything. It moves with everything.

It's right on the cutting edge. Remember, Limerick's been called the cultural city of Ireland more than a few times. It was the first cultural city in Ireland.

In other words, we're open to everything. We want everything here. We want the homosexuals here.

We want to promote the gay rights here. We want to do it all here. We want Limerick to be at the very heart of this.

In Europe, we want it to be at the very cutting edge of this. You may say, oh, we the church need to draw back. Maybe we should move.

Maybe we should go elsewhere. Maybe we're in the wrong position. No, no, no, you don't understand.

We're right in the heart of this. We're right in the right place at the right time. I want to show you things.

Do you realize that when you come to the city center within hundreds of meters where our building is, where we sit right here tonight, do you realize within walking distance, we have 10,000 homes, 10,000 people living in this area of the 100,000 people of Limerick, all within walking distance of us. Do you realize 47%, almost half of them are other nationalities, other nationalities. Do you know what I'm saying? Within walking distance of our door, we can evangelize every people in Limerick.

All those different cultures, they make a focus on the city center. The city center does not look the same as all of Limerick. I want to tell you, you walk around the city center, you walk over on that street, all you get is foreign shops.

We're in the Turkey burger place. I won't go and eat anywhere else in the city center now. Their price is better, their food is better, the atmosphere is better.

I'll be going to the Turkish burger place from now on. They keep their prices cheap because they're accommodating their own people. But this Irish man is going to go there.

And so you have, there's a cultural crisis in this hour. Islam is pouring into Ireland, different cultures. And there's a purpose, there's a plan.

By the devil, there is. There's a plan in the globalist mind to break nationality, break sovereignty, break down identity. They have a plan.

I'm going to tell you, God's going to hijack it. God's going to use this. Right within walking distance of our door is every country, every culture, every manner of person you can imagine, saying to God, what a place for us to be.

What a place to evangelize. What a place to be praying. What a place to reach out to the brokenhearted.

We could evangelize everyone from our door. It's an extraordinary thing. But here, let me tell you, in the midst of this cultural diverse hour, it did not change their gospel.

It was dynamic and Antioch. They did not accommodate the culture. They didn't change the gospel and say, no, we've got to change it for our culture and this city and this kind of person.

Oh no, they preached repentance. They preached faith. They preached heaven and hell.

They preached Christ and Christ alone. They had no toleration. This church in a tolerant city had no toleration for any other God.

Do you hear me? They were an intolerant church in a absolute tolerant city. But do you know what? It exploded. It boomed.

They did not, it did not change the church. The culture did not mold the church. The church was cultural.

It had different cultures, but it wasn't the culture then making the church. And please note this. Every real church is unique.

Jerusalem was not like Ephesus. Ephesus was not like Antioch. Antioch was not like the church at Rome.

Do you see when you go to your Bible, every church in every city is unique. It has the same gospel, the same teaching, the same Bible, the same leadership structure, but you know what? They're utterly unique. Not two churches aren't the same.

This church doesn't need to be a production, a copy of a church in America or Australia or England or anywhere else. We go back to scripture and we just, it's like having a baby. You mothers, you go, well, this baby coming out is gonna have two arms, gonna have two legs, gonna have two eyes, gonna have hair.

You know, you have the basic structure, but what mother knows what their child's gonna look like? You could even know it's gonna be a boy or it's gonna be a girl. You go, I've got an idea of certain similarities. It'll have that McNamara look.

It'll have that Walsh look. It'll have that Tallulah look. There's gonna be some unique features here, but you're always gonna get surprised.

That's why parents, do you think it looks like you or does it look like me? Does it look like our great-grandfather? Maybe it's gonna have mommy's teeth or mommy's eyes. Who knows? And you're looking at the, you don't know, it's a baby, it's a child, it's a boy, it's a girl, but you don't know what it's gonna be like. It's the same with the church.

It is governed by the word of God, but it is utterly unique. We don't conform to church tradition or church culture. We are molded by the word of God.

What about national cultural sins? You know, people in the church, they love to argue about alcohol is a cultural issue. Food is a cultural issue. Women's place in the church is a cultural issue.

It depended on the Corinthian culture. Head covering was only for Corinth. Leadership, structure, how it functions is culture.

Jesus done it that way because he's in Israel, so he accommodated the culture. I listened on ours talk the other day on leadership and said, well, Jesus done that because of the culture. Really? And the apostles did that because of the culture.

Are you telling me that Jesus built his leaders because of the culture in a certain way? Are you saying Jesus submitted to the culture, really wanted to do something else, but he had to do it that way for culture? What a load of rubbish, absolute rubbish. Well, they only wore head covering in Corinth because the local culture, and we've studied the culture. Why not read your Bible for once? Just read your Bible.

Oh, I could go a long way down this. Let me just give you this one point in Titus chapter one, verse nine. And I want you to see the Saul of Tarsus who'd become Paul the apostle dealt with cultural sins.

Oh, you need to submit to culture? You shouldn't speak out against culture. Well, I want to tell you they did. Titus one, nine, holding fast the faithful word as he had been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

For there are many, and notice this, Paul is writing to Titus, sorry, to Timothy, sorry, to Titus. Paul's writing to Titus on the island of Crete, the island of Crete, okay? A little island with its own culture and language. And Paul is writing a letter to Titus on how he is to deal with the local situation.

Let me continue. Whose mouse must be stopped. Who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake.

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, and this is a quote, the Cretans are the population, the culture of the Cretes are always liars, liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. Can you get a more diamond statement culturally? This is Paul writing to Titus who's overseeing the churches in Crete. Titus is an apostle.

Paul is not an apostle. And he's writing to this preacher, giving him godly advice. And he's quoting, you know all those problems that you have there, those cultural sins entering the church.

He said, let me quote one of their own prophets, a cultural Cretan prophet, secular outside the church. He says, they're liars, evil beasts and slow bellies. Paul actually puts that on a letter saying the Cretans are marked by this.

Then he says, this witness is true. Do you see Paul is putting in print in a letter these people who say, well, they would stay away from being controversial in their letters in the New Testament. What sort of Bible are you reading? This is Paul writing to Titus telling them, this witness is true.

So what's he gonna do? Wherefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men that turn from the truth. Do you see this here tonight, that Paul deals with social sins, cultural sins, national sins. He even puts in print things that dominate a certain culture.

You know, maybe this helps me, justifies me a bit. I have noted in the past some Irish national traits and sins, which you don't get in Northern Ireland. You only get them in Southern Ireland.

They actually do not dominate the people in Northern Ireland. They're utterly unique to the South, to those of a Catholic background, to an Irish culture. They're not in the North.

It's an utterly different culture. But I'll tell you what, you've heard me also thousands of times. If you've listened to me constantly, I pointed out what's the national sin of the church in Northern Ireland, foolish jesting, which destroys people in the church.

You've heard me. Saints of God, I'm not even gonna go to fourth point or I'll keep you too long. But my fourth point, I'm not gonna preach on a culturally diverse commission fulfilled.

We are gonna cover that in the weeks ahead. But I've just given you a culturally diverse church, an evangelistic church, a gifted church in ministry, not a culturally diverse church. And I hope you see from this, do you not see God's plan on this? Do you not even know, look around you in this room, consider the languages we've mentioned, look at the colors around you, look at the nations represented here, look at all of these different things.

And as you see, God has a plan. If you think it's an accident that the people that are sitting here from different countries, it's an accident that you're here, you're gravely mistaken tonight. But because I believe, and it was all in point four, but I'm not gonna give you point four.

The whole plan is to make us a vessel. Antioch with this mix of culture and language and of social background was to make them into a vessel that was gonna be an instrument of the great commission, to fulfill the great commission, to evangelize the nations, to reach every tongue, every country, every culture. And it all sprang out of this one church.

Do you know what I believe in this church? The nationalities have to be here. The different ethnos has to be here. I believe God's got a plan.

Why? Me, a northerner, and please remember, if any of you are blue-ins here, I'm a blue-in as well. There's nothing more controversial than someone like me preaching on Limerick High Street, a northern

Irishman with a northern accent, who's an ex-British squaddie, preaching in a church on Limerick High Street. 20 years ago, the building would have been burnt down.

Isn't that right? I'm telling you, this is controversial. This is something culturally unusual. But God called me to Limerick High Street.

Why Limerick? I don't know. Why of all the cities of Europe, Limerick? I haven't got a clue. But this man had to be here.

But let me tell you what, you had to be here. You had to be here, because God is building a church, because out of this church, he's got a unique plan and purpose for the nations, for the nations. Let's pray here together.

Just stand with me. Let's pray. Thank you, Lord.

Oh, thank you, Jesus. We love you. We bless you.

Lord God, thank you for this picture, this vision of the church, that it is an evangelistic church. It is a gifted church and ministry. It is a culturally diverse church.

And Lord God, all these languages that you put here, oh Lord God, all of these cultural traditions, all of these family backgrounds that are in this room, all of the sins from our past, all of those things that dominated our life in this world, it's no accident that we're sitting here, Lord God, with the testimonies we have, with the backgrounds we've been saved out of, with the sorts of families that we have come from, you are building a diverse church, Lord God, called out of every language, every nation, every culture, my God, and you're merging us to be one, that we might walk in the love of Christ. Lord God, as one united family, loving each other, encouraging one another, praying for each other, blessing one another. And Lord God, it is beautiful in our sight.

Lord God, it is a picture of one day that you're gonna save out of all nations, all generations, all cultures. You're gonna have one united people gathered at your throne. And Lord God, we love it.

We bless you. We worship you tonight in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

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