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Literary Lectures By Roger E. Dickson

Lecture Theme

- The Search Begins -

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Having no cellphone, or Whatsapp, or Facebook, or Phonebook, or even street addresses, if I as a Christian were to enter the city of Antioch of Syria about ten years after the Passover/Pentecost of Acts 2, and go looking for a Christian, my task would be somewhat different than today. If I were to go searching for a Christian in Antioch, how would I find a Christian. I would certainly go searching around for an individual with a like-minded faith as my own.

It seems that the unbelievers of the city of Antioch would have already made my search easy. They had already nick-named those individuals who believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. They derogatorily referred to them as “Christians.” About twenty years after the unbelievers of Antioch came up with this reference to those who followed Christ, Luke, the historian, wrote, “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (At 11:26). They were called “Christians,” not by Christians, but by those who did not follow Christ.

Now suppose for a moment. Since we would have been looking in Antioch for people who were disciples of Christ, then the unbelievers of the city had already made our search easy. All we had to do is inquire around for any individual who was ridiculed by the idolatrous unbelievers, or even Jewish unbelievers, to be followers of Christ. We might have inquired at the local market, “Do you know of any individuals in town who are followers of Christ? The unbelievers would possibly have responded, “Oh, those Christians! There is one of them working at the fruit stand on the other side of the street.” And so, our search would have ended with a par-

ticular individual who believed and behaved as a disciple of Christ. From that individual we would have been successful in finding other “Christians.”

In order to be successful in our search in Antioch, we would not have been able to find for some “church house” full of Christians on Fifth and Main. Neither would we have satisfied our search in finding some assembly of disciples in someone’s house. Our search would have been for individuals, for people who followed Christ.

So in our search today, we too seek for people who are so different in their beliefs and behavior that they are identified in the community as “Christians.” Our search must first be for people who believe and behave as Christ, and thus, are His disciples (followers) in any city. Therefore, if we could have entered the city of Antioch over two thousand years ago in order to find a disciple of Christ, then we would have gone looking for individuals who believed and behaved after the manner Christ. And so it is the same with our search today.

[Also consider how Barnabas when from Antioch to Tarsus in order to find Paul (At 11:25,26).]

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