

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Please turn your bibles with me to Acts 11

We have been studying the work of the Holy Spirit among the early church.

And as I have said before, it is very important for us to understand how the Holy Spirit worked among the early church because the Holy Spirit continues to work among the church today in the same way.

One of the things that I you will hear me say repeatedly over the next few weeks is that the book of Acts is still being written – as the Holy Spirit continues to work in us and through us.

Now, for the last couple of weeks we have been looking at a very important event in the early church – and that was the gospel being made available to Gentiles.

We saw how God worked in the life of Cornelius a Gentile – and the Apostle Peter as He began to break the walls of prejudice that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles.

And at the end of our study last week, we saw God's approval of the gentile as they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

In our study this evening, we are going to see how the early church reacted to the news of salvation being extended to those that were not Jews.

Because the lesson that we saw Peter learn in chapter 10 – it is the early church's time to see if they will respond like Peter did.

Let's pray...

[Act 11:1-30 NKJV] 1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

Now, even though they didn't have cell phones back then – news still traveled fast.

The scriptures also tell us at the end of ch 10 – that Peter probably stuck around for a few days with Cornelius and his household.

So therefore, the news of what happened in Caesarea had reached Jerusalem before Peter made his way back.

Now, it would have been nice if the scriptures stated that the reaction of the early church was that they erupted in celebration that God's grace had been extended to the hopeless – right?

We would hope that would be their response – but it wasn't.

They contended with Peter – the word that is used here means: to oppose, to doubt, to discriminate against Peter.

The reaction in Jerusalem was, “You did what with a gentile???”

Notice how they were more concerned with what Peter did than what God was doing with the Gentiles.

Now, remember that law did not prohibit Jews from eating with gentiles or entering the house of a gentile – they were only told not to intermarry with a gentile.

These prejudices were all because of the traditions not the law.

Now, notice how Luke addresses those that contended as those of the circumcision. Every believer up to this point was circumcised – however, Luke is singling out a particular sect within the early church.

These were the legalist within the early church – those who still adhered to the Mosaic Law.

Later on, we are going to see them as the Judaizers – they were the ones that believed that in order for a gentile to be truly saved, they had to become Jews first and adhere to all of the laws – including circumcision.

4 But Peter explained [it] to them in order from the beginning, saying:

Notice that Peter doesn't respond to the contention by debating or arguing with them.

Notice also that Peter didn't say, "I am an Apostle – therefore you're wrong and I am right."

He proceeds to provide the details of the vision that he received back in chapter 10.

So the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record the vision twice, once as it happened to Peter and then here as Peter shares it with the church in Jerusalem.

5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. 6 "When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 7 "And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 "But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' 9 "But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10 "Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11 "At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 "Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

I had you make a note of the man's house –

And the reason is that I find it odd that Peter never refers to Cornelius by name when he shares the record of the vision.

It could be that Peter was still struggling with letting go of some of the prejudices that he had – regarding the gentiles.

Turn with me to Gal 2 –

Because Paul later on – rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy.

[Gal 2:11-13 NKJV] 11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

So despite Peter seeing the vision and witnessing the baptism of the Holy Spirit of Cornelius and his household – there were still a few old wineskins that he was holding on to.

So let's continue with Peter sharing his vision to those in Jerusalem.

13 "And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, 14 'who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'

One of the things that those of the circumcision contended was that Peter defiled himself by setting foot inside Cornelius' house.

But here, Peter tells them that a messenger from God, an angel had set foot in Cornelius' house first.

So he is countering their argument – regarding defilement.

If God permitted an angel to go into a gentile house – then it must be permitted for Peter also.

15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

Here Peter is equating what he witnessed happening to the Cornelius and his household – to what occurred to them at the Day of Pentecost.

He is saying that the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the gentiles – it was God's stamp of approval of His work among the Gentiles.

Therefore, these Christian Jews (those of the circumcision) – they cannot withhold their acceptance of what occurred knowing that God has already given His approval.

16 "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Here in verse 16, we have a very important verse.

Because even though Peter had experienced a vision and he had witnessed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with what transpired at Cornelius' house, it still had to be confirmed by the word of God.

There are cults today that originated with a vision – look at the LDS for example

Or new movements that begin within the church because of an experience – the Word of Faith movement – those that teach that you can have prosperity and health just by exercising your faith.

Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland

You don't need to ask God – just have faith.

Not faith in God but faith in your faith – ignoring that the scriptures tell us that our faith comes from Him.

[Heb 12:2 NKJV] 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Church, if there is no confirmation in the word of God – then it isn't from God.

It is that simple.

It wasn't enough for Peter to say I had a vision

It wasn't enough for Peter to say God told me to do this

Peter had to bring it back to the confirmation of the scriptures –

17 "If therefore God gave them the same gift as [He gave] us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

I asked you to make a note where Peter asked, Who was I that could withstand God?

This was the same question that Job had concerning God.

[Job 9:12 NKJV] 12 If He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?'

"If God wants to pour His grace among the gentiles – I am not going to question him, I am not going to contend with Him"

That is what Peter is telling his audience here.

Church, throughout scriptures, we have example after example of those who sought to contend with God.

And it never turned out good for them.

Look at Pharaoh – he learned the hard way when he tried to withstand the Lord's command.

Jonah, God commanded him to do something and he got on a boat and went the opposite direction – he tried to run from God's calling and ended up in the belly of a great fish.

Anytime we contend with God, we are inviting pain and hardship into our life.

But how blessed we are when we fully yield to Him.

When we finally get it through our thick skulls that He is the Potter and we are the clay.

And I think that is what Peter is doing here –

Remember, in the gospels – it was Peter that was always contending God's will.

What did Peter say when Jesus revealed to his disciples that He was going to die on the cross? Peter rebuked Jesus.

What did Peter say when Jesus told His disciples that He was going to wash their feet?

Peter said no way!!!

But look at Peter now – yes, he still has a few issues to deal with, but he has yielded to God's will.

And the result - is the early church concluding that the Gentiles are bow genuinely getting saved.

19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one

but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And **the hand of the Lord was with them**, and **a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**

Here we have the first church outreach to the gentiles – to the Greeks in Antioch.

Every outreach by the church to this point has been targeted to the Jews or half Jews (in the case of Phillip when he went to Samaria)

Even Peter going to Cornelius' house is not considered an outreach because he was commanded by God to go there.

But here you have a ministry that is led by the Lord – I had you make a note that the Lord was with them.

And because the Lord was with them, people started to respond to the gospel and turning to the Lord.

Any ministry that we partake of – there needs to be the Lord with us.

Where He leads, He provides.

If He doesn't lead and we proceed in doing it because it is something that we want – we will just end up miserable.

I had you make a note of the last portion there in verse 21.

They believed and turned to the Lord.

Here we have a good description of the work of both faith and repentance.

22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Here we find Barnabas again – this is the third time we see him in the book of Acts.

The first time was when it mentions that he was one of the believers that sold one of his possessions to support the early church, we then saw him when he convinced the Apostles that Saul had truly been converted.

So here, the “son of encouragement” – that was his nickname – that is what Barnabas means.

He goes to Antioch to encourage the new believers.

When he got there, Luke says he “saw the grace of God.”

What he saw was the fruit of righteousness in changed lives.

You see, Antioch was a morally corrupt city.

There were pagan shrines where people would participate in prostitution and orgies.

I don't want you to miss this –

Cornelius was a gentile – but he was a God fearing gentile.

Even though he wasn't technically a Jew – he was a Jew in heart.

However, the Gentiles in Antioch were pagan gentiles.

So here we see the power of Christ in transforming the life of a gentile believer for the first time.

You see, when Barnabas gets there – the new believers had responded to God's grace and were living their lives very distinct and different than the majority of people in Antioch.

So Barnabas encourages them to be serious, sober and determined in their pursuit of God - knowing that there was going to be a lot of spiritual warfare going on.

24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called **Christians in Antioch.**

When Barnabas gets to Antioch, he recognized how crucial the work was there – there were plenty of opportunities – so he knew Saul would be a perfect fit there – after all, Saul is in nearby Tarsus – and he’s been doing nothing there for about 9 years.

So, Barnabas brings Saul and they start a church in Antioch and the church grows – and here is the place where they are first called Christians.

Now, In Jerusalem the followers of Jesus were known by others as Nazarenes because they followed Jesus of Nazareth as He was called.

Believers referred to themselves as the people of the Way.

In Antioch, the New Believers wanted to be identified with Jesus Christ – so the people of Antioch started to refer to them as Christians – and they did it to ridicule them.

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 11 ends with the church in Antioch gets word of a coming famine in the land, they felt compelled to help and they take up a collection to help their brother and sister in Christ back in Judea.

And they send Saul and Barnabas to deliver the help.

So right away, we see the church in Antioch captivated by compassion, revealing their genuineness in their faith.

[Gal 2:10 NKJV] 10 [They desired] only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

This will be the second time Saul goes back to Jerusalem after his conversion.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. 25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. 26 May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

