

▼ Non-Jews Welcome - Part 9

Rocklyn Clarke Sr. - Sunday November 29, 2020

© 2020 Life Church Ministries, Inc.

<http://www.LifeChurchBoston.org/>

• Read the Passage: Acts 11:1-18

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

"I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

"The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

• Read the Passage: Acts 11:19-30

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 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. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

▼ **Overall Exegetical Idea**

- God welcomes non-Jews into his family.

▼ **Sermon's Purpose (what listeners should do)**

▶ Understand the passage

- Learn to prioritize God's agenda over your comfort zone.
- Learn how the church handled fresh revelation.
- Learn about the next phase of gentiles entering the church.

▶ **Understand the Passage**

▼ **Understand the Passage (review)**

▼ Understand repentance in Acts 2 and how we got here from there.

- Change your mind about Jesus. Subway train: doctor, police officer, misbehaving youth.
- Faith - Niagara Falls wheelbarrow illustration.
- God directs Peter to preach the gospel to the non-Jewish soldier Cornelius and his family and friends and then fills them with the Holy Spirit.
- Yes - it explains why the Jerusalem church began accepting as valid the conversion of non-Jews.
- The church successfully expanded beyond its Jewish borders.

▼ Learn to proclaim the good news as a call to join God's government and not as a way to go to heaven.

- Acts 2:29-47
- Acts 3:11-26
- Acts 4:8-13
- Acts 5:27-32
- Acts 7
- Philippians 3:17-21
- God's agenda: To bring everything in heaven and earth under Christ (Ephesians 1:1-10).

▼ Understand the steps leading up to the gospel presentation.

- Note that Cornelius is a god-fearer: a gentile who looks to Jews rather than to his own pagan culture for spiritual guidance. He is, in other words, friendly to the synagogue. This will not necessarily be true of future gentile converts.

- ▼ God sends an angel to tell Cornelius to send for Peter.
 - Angels are not authorized to present the gospel - that job belongs to human beings.
 - The angel didn't tell Cornelius that he was doing pretty well and should pursue salvation through his own culture.
 - The angel didn't tell Cornelius that he should just continue being a god-fearer and giving alms to the poor.
 - Jesus is the authoritative revealer of God the Father (Matthew 11:25-30).
- ▼ Understand how the gospel is presented in this passage.
 - ▼ Peter doesn't say:
 - I don't want to impose my religious views on you.
 - I don't want to impose my cultural views on you.
 - We have so many hypocrites among our people (e.g. Pharisees, Saducees, etc.) that I don't feel it's appropriate for me to say anything to you until we have a better track record.
 - ▼ Peter does say:
 - ▼ "God accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what's right."
 - What does "what's right" mean?
 - ▼ Peter assumes that Cornelius knows the message God sent to the people of Israel - the basic story of Jesus.
 - Good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.
 - Why does he assume this?
 - Can we always assume this?
 - ▶ Peter reviews Jesus' anointed ministry, death by crucifixion, burial, resurrection.
 - Peter is a witness who has been commanded to preach the story.
 - Jesus has been appointed judge of the living and dead.
 - ▼ Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.
 - What does "believes in him" mean?
 - ▼ What does "forgiveness of sins" mean to the audience?
 - The 1st century Jews knew from their history that they were heirs of God's promise to Abraham that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. Genesis 12:1-3
 - They also knew that they had been exiled because of their persistent sinning against the Lord. - Jeremiah 31:31-37; 2 Chronicles 34:14-28; Ezra 9; Nehemiah 1

- Even though they had been allowed to return to their by Cyrus, King of Persia, they were no longer sovereign. For them this felt like they were still figuratively in exile. They longed for God's Kingdom to be established, expecting this to include their liberation from Rome.
- ▼ For them their sins caused them to be sidelined from God's plan and they expected forgiveness of sins to restore them to their original calling.
 - Consider a basketball player sidelined by fouls who is allowed back into the game.
 - Consider a surgeon who is sidelined by contamination or illness who, upon recovery or decontamination, is allowed back into the operating room.
- ▼ They clearly expected that after Jesus' resurrection, the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel would be the next thing on God's agenda. - Acts 1:1-11
 - By contrast, many folks with a church background believe their calling to be going to heaven and forgiveness of sins to be the removal of the barrier that prevents them from achieving this goal. Note that in the Bible the gospel is never proclaimed as a way of going to heaven.
- Peter gives orders for them to be baptized.
- ▼ **Learn to prioritize God's agenda over your comfort zone.**
 - ▼ God chose someone who would take his instructions seriously:
 - Note that Cornelius sent 2 servants along with a devout soldier to find Peter.
 - Note that Cornelius gathered his relatives and close friends.
 - God prepared Peter to move outside of his comfort zone.
 - Prior to ascending to the Father, Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. - Acts 1:8
- ▼ **Learn how the church handled this fresh revelation.**
 - ▶ The Jerusalem church expresses its concerns about Peter's engagement with gentiles.
 - Note that the church doesn't appear to be intimidated about confronting Peter.
 - Note that Peter responds calmly without appealing to his status as an apostle.
- ▼ **Learn about the next phase of gentiles entering the church.**
 - ▼ Network - Grow your network!
 - The scattered Jewish believers shared the good news in the places where they ended up.
 - Some of the scattered Jews share the gospel with Greeks.

- Sometimes changes are forced on you that affect your network. You must choose how you will respond.
- Learn how to network with partners.
- ▼ Don't bury your resources!
 - Parable of the Minas - Luke 19:11-27
 - Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30
- ▼ Pipeline - Understand Your Pipeline!
 - Who from your network is moving through your pipeline to salvation?
 - Relational evangelism is a skill. You can choose to master it or not.
 - Relational evangelism requires adjustments to your lifestyle. You can choose to make them or not.
 - Learn how to embrace partners in your pipeline.
 - How does someone become a Christian? What are the "magic words"?
- ▼ Harvest - Protect your harvest!
 - ▼ The mother church responds to news about the new community in Antioch.
 - The new community will need guidance, so they send Barnabus ("Son of Encouragement").
 - Communities of believers need shepherds. - Matthew 9:35-38.
 - New believers need people to disciple them. This is a job for all believers - not just "clergy".
 - ▼ Barnabus drafts Paul - presumably as an apprentice.
 - Barnabus doesn't do the work alone. He finds a disciple.
 - You need to have a discipleship mindset.
 - ▼ This is the context in which the term "Christians" was born! It seems to have been used by outsiders.
 - There are many equivalent terms for believers: saved, born again, Christian, disciples, etc.
 - ▼ Learn how to protect your harvest:
 - Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos - Acts 18:24-26
 - Paul and the disciples of John - Acts 19:1-8
- ▼ Good Works - Develop a Lifestyle of Good Works
 - ▼ The new community responds to a crisis/opportunity.
 - ▼ Prophets predict a famine.
 - The Holy Spirit still calls people to be prophets (Ephesians 4:1-13).

- Prophets sometimes predict events (foretelling vs. forth telling).
- ▼ The Antioch community demonstrates their family connection to the Jerusalem church by arranging to help meet their impending need.
- ▼ Wright, N. T.. God and the Pandemic (pp. 31-32). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
 - ▼ They don't say:
 - 'This must be a sign that the Lord is coming back soon!'
 - 'This must mean that we have sinned and need to repent'
 - 'this will give us a great opportunity to tell the wider world that everyone has sinned and needs to repent'
 - They don't start a blame-game, looking around at the civic authorities in Syria, or the wider region, or even the Roman empire, to see whose ill-treatment of the eco-system, or whose tampering with food distribution networks, might have contributed to this dangerous situation.
 - ▼ They ask three simple questions:
 - Who is going to be at special risk when this happens?
 - What can we do to help?
 - Who shall we send?
- Learn to do good works and respond to crises in ways that reflect our calling to be salt and light - Matthew 5:13-16.

▶ **Make Disciples!**

▶ **Conclusion**

▼ **Followup**

• **Q&A**

▼ **Discussion Questions**

- Do you know any believers with whom you can partner? What would happen if you joined their network or if they joined yours? Are you gifted at hospitality? Do you know a believer who is and who wants to grow the Kingdom?
- What are the five thresholds? Do you understand them? How do they apply to your pipeline?
- Are you prepared to lead someone in your pipeline into becoming a Christian? After he/she becomes a Christian, are you prepared to disciple him/her? How will you preserve your harvest?

- Will your disciples make a difference in their communities? Will they care about justice? Will they help those in need? Discuss.

▼ **Discipleship / Skills Development**

- Watch 5 Thresholds Overview.
- Watch 5 Thresholds Openness To Change