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The Dam Breaks

Acts 11:1-30

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SermonAudio Blurb: The author, Luke, has been inexorably pressing forward to what amounts to the bursting of a dam. The gospel is not for a people group, it is for the world and in this chapter we see the breaching of the dam as the gospel begins to press rapidly outward into the Gentile lands. And as we examine this story we also have the opportunity to learn a few key lessons along the way.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 11:1-30
- B. Illustration of a dam breaking.
 - 1. This is what we have here in chapters 10-13 the breaking of the dam holding back the gospel to the Gentiles.
 - 2. Up to chapter 10 there were small indications of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the plan of God. We saw it with Jesus dealing with a Samaritan woman and a Canaanite woman—but His almost exclusive focus was Israel. Then we saw Samaritans coming to faith in the early part of Acts; not to mention the Ethiopian official who would take the gospel back to Africa.
 - 3. But then, we saw the conversions of all the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius in chapter 10. And it was that moment that the dam broke open and as we move into chapter 11 the flow of the gospel is now inexorably going outward into the Gentile world.
- C. We have in the first half here essentially a repetition of chapter 10 which should tell you that what happened in chapter 10 is very important to understand and remember.
 - 1. I cannot emphasize this enough. The book of Acts is a book of transition and if you forget it then you will invariably go wrong in how you read it and what you choose to remember.
 - 2. To invest this much time and ink on what seems to be a rather small event in our modern eyes requires you to think.

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3. At this point in history what is happening is that the gospel is about to explode outward into the furthest reaches of the world. But for this to happen will require many minds to be rewired to understand what God is doing.
- D. In the second half of this chapter we are transported to Antioch where we see what also is happening while Peter is engaging Cornelius and then later the Church in Jerusalem.
1. And again we find the same string of thought occurring, Jewish believers who are evangelizing Jews for the most part.
 2. But a few who are breaking out of that narrow lane and reaching out to the Gentile population as well.
 3. And again we see the reaction of Jerusalem by sending Barnabas to check in and see.
- E. We also have the entire storyline by Luke shifting.
1. You may recall that Luke likes to introduce a person or place in a somewhat passing manner, only to then make that person become the centerpiece of his words later on.
 2. We have this happening here.
 - a. Saul, later to be known as Paul was introduced in chapter 9.
 - b. Barnabas is mentioned in chapter 9 in connection to Saul and then recedes from the picture.
 - c. Now we find in vs 22 the Jerusalem leadership sending Barnabas to see what is happening. And then at the end of the chapter we have Barnabas and Saul heading back to Jerusalem.
 - d. We also have a key city and church in Antioch. Antioch is first mentioned in chapter 6 with one of the Hellenist Jews chosen to oversee the feeding of the widows. Now we find it becoming a key city from which the gospel will go forth.
 3. All of this is being described in much detail by Luke in chapters 10-13 so don't get distracted by the various events described. They are all important but they are all part of a bigger story, the breaking of the dam holding back the gospel from the Gentiles.

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- F. So today we have a very simple task before us. We merely need to let the story unfold in this chapter and draw some principles related to the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we might learn from these early men and women.
 - 1. We have four key observations to make regarding the spread of the gospel.
 - 2. Four different events that occur that are all inter-related that Luke records that reflect the will of God in bringing salvation to the nations.

II. The Breaking of The Dam.

- A. First, we have the Apostle Peter's return to Jerusalem and declaration of the events just experienced.
 - 1. In his retelling of the events with Cornelius there is nothing special or unique. Peter gave a factual and truthful explanation.
 - 2. What is impressive in my view is how he doesn't seek to pad the facts or become defensive. And the reason is the nature of how truth works.
 - a. Truth, for those who love lies, is a dangerous thing for it reveals lies. But truth also reveals biases, opinions and agendas.
 - b. For those who love life more than truth, then truth becomes dangerous for them. If they speak truth then they face possible harm. Peter certainly lived this at one point when he chose to deny knowing Jesus Christ to a servant girl
 - c. Notice this truth includes his own struggles with truth as he talks about the vision and his wrong response in vs 5-10. This is a truth-teller rather than a politician.
 - 3. Note how the truth of the events provoke a reaction from those listening
 - a. Likely these were those believing Jews who were also very zealous for the law and the demands God placed upon Israel. Don't read this as them being false believers, simply very committed Jews.
 - b. But they have a real problem with what he is saying.
 - c. So, they then hear that Peter had that same struggle but it is resolved through the vision and faithful obedience in light of it. Both had to be accepted.
 - d. We see here that these cultural biases run very deep and they are not easily discarded by many.
 - 4. But we learn that though the initial reaction is negative, the people actually love truth. And so vs 18 stands out in a quite pleasant manner.

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- a. *They heard.*
 - b. *They quieted down.*
 - c. *They glorified God.*
 - d. They also showed that they accepted now that the Gentiles were part of the Church and part of the mission of God.
5. So the first observation is the manner in which Peter relayed the information about the Gentiles in Joppa. And so the dam is breached and the waters of change are beginning to flow and this takes us a bit further down to the next step.
- B. Second, we have the Jewish believers who had fled earlier persecution continuing to bring the gospel with them to unbelievers.
1. We see this in vs 19.
 2. These are the Jews who began to flee from Jerusalem and surrounding areas back in Acts 8:1-4
 3. And now we get to pick up with their story for a moment to see that this was not a quick moment of emotion where they were seeking to share the gospel. They were committed to it.
 4. So like, the Jews in Jerusalem who initially stumbled over Peter being with Gentiles; these too simply did not understand that God saving plan included the Gentiles of their cities—but not all of them.
- C. Third, we have a few Jewish believers who are actually engaging Gentiles with the gospel and God is blessing that effort.
1. In vss 20-30 we see the bursting of the dam even more clearly.
 2. Some of the Jews who came to saving faith in Jesus turned outward to the Gentiles. But notice who they were: These were Hellenist Jews.
 3. This meant that they carried a different culture in their hearts. It is the difference between a someone born in India who moves to America vs a second or third generation Indian in America.
 4. The Gentiles of the cities they called home were their neighbors and friends. They were not outsiders, they were fellow Phoenicians and so on.
 5. This is all about mission fields.
 6. And God blessed this work (21); which then caused another stir back in Jerusalem. And so Barnabas is sent.

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- D. Fourth, we see the rise of the missions team of Barnabas and Paul (25-30).
1. After a time in Antioch Barnabas head up the coast a little more to Tarsus, the home of Saul, soon to become Paul.
 2. They come back to Antioch together and there they established essentially a mini bible college to train all these new converts.
 - a. The bringing of the gospel to people is not missions work.
 - b. The seeing people saved is not missions work.
 - c. The bring professing believers to maturity is missions work.
 3. Here is the first time the term “Christian” came into use. And it was due to the focus upon following Jesus Christ.
 4. During this time we have prophets out of Jerusalem coming down from Jerusalem. And one of them, Agabus, prophesied of a great famine coming.
 5. Now what is not written here is something we merely infer. Apparently Judea in Israel would be hard hit by this famine. And as a result these new Christians determined to help.

III. Conclusion.

- A. And here we come to an end. The dam has burst, the gospel is now flowing rapidly outward and it is still flowing throughout the earth to this day.
- B. The question I have for you is in what way are you participating in it?
 1. Are you withholding the gospel?
 2. Are you giving the gospel only to the people you think you should?
 3. Are you giving the gospel to those God has placed you among?
 4. For all who are Christians here, one of this is true of you.
 5. And this brings us back to the beginning of the sermon. All of this has to do with truth.
 6. Is Jesus the Truth? Meaning, you have no alternatives but Him.
 7. And if you believe He is the Truth then do you accept and conform your words and actions to the Word of God, which He says is the truth?
 8. And if/how you share the gospel will reflect this.

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Benediction

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.