

PRAYER

You can turn in your bibles or on your device to Acts chapter 11:1-18. Before I break down some of the scripture, I want to introduce you to a friend of mine. His name is Myk. Myk lives back in TN, and I have known him for more than 25 years. When Myk and I first met, he was not a Christian and I was a fairly new Christian. We met in a local arcade where he worked, and I used to go just to play video games. He would come over and beat me soundly at most every game that I tried to play. Myk is what you could describe as being unique, very sharp, quick wit, but when I met him, he was into what I could describe as a Goth lifestyle. He was into vampirism, at one time he was into wicca, so it was kind of odd that he and I would even talk to one another. I am going to talk more about Myk later.

So last week, Steve had preached on Acts 10 and we learned about when Peter had been preaching to Cornelius and the Gentiles in Caesarea. Actually, as I was listening to him preach, I realized he was using a lot of what I had been planning on preaching this week. Which meant on Sunday afternoon, I went home and prayed because I knew that what I had planned to preach wasn't what was needed. You may ask how could that happen? It's quite easy because this is actually the third version of this account within the Bible. I want you to take note of this, it was so important that it was repeated three times.

Preaching to a large number of Gentiles was a first after the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 and was considered highly unusual. It was a first because it was the first time that a group of Gentiles, non-Jewish men and women, were deliberately preached to. We pick up in Acts 11 where the news of how Peter had preached to the Gentiles reached the apostles and the other Jewish men. The Apostles in the area around Jerusalem ("Judea") and some other Jewish men were the leadership group over the Church. Naturally, when something unusual started happening - the "Gentiles received the word of God" - something new and much different

from the normal pattern of operation - this got their attention - and they met with Peter.

Change is sometimes **unexpected**

Let's pick up the account - 11:1-3.

1 Now the apostles and the brothers[a] who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party[b] criticized him, saying, **3** "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Basically, this was similar to calling Peter to the principal's office. However, this was not like a walk from the classroom down the hallway to the principal's office. This was a bit of a journey. It was called an ascension. The reason it was called an ascension was because Jerusalem stands at a higher elevation than Caesarea. It's about 600 furlongs which equates to about 75 miles, uphill. Now we don't know how Peter traversed the 75 miles, it's not told to us whether he walked it which is highly possible in my mind, or rode a donkey. What we do know is that he had time to think about what he had transpired in Caesarea, how God had moved. The average walking speed of a man is 3 to 4 miles per hour. At 75 miles, that would take approximately 19 to 25 hours, walking non-stop. Donkeys have about the same walking speed as humans at about 4 miles per hour, but have the ability to run. Based on the times and the culture, we can guess that this journey took Peter at least two days, most likely three. So he had time to think it over, to choose his words carefully.

When Peter arrived, he was met with criticism. People from the "circumcision party" (Jews) criticized him for going to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles, and "eating with them". If you notice, they didn't criticize him for preaching to the Gentiles, but eating with them. That was what was unusual, he ate with them. He even stayed with them for "many days" (10:48).

A true devout Jewish person would not ever be caught eating with a Gentile, this was an understood law (10:28). What's even more interesting, is that Luke described this group as the "circumcision party." They were circumcised believers or Jewish Christians. They had not given up their Jewish customs. This is at root the of why they criticized Peter, because they were accusing him of breaking from Jewish tradition. He had broken the man-made rule that Jewish people were not to eat with Gentiles.

I like to think of these people as the frozen chosen. What I mean is that they were set in their ways and to an extent, unwilling to move. Not going to budge. They were set in their ways, and their way was the only way, but not necessarily God's way. In some circles, we still see that today. You can "only be considered a Christian if you" fill in the blank. One thing I heard long ago which still makes me laugh, is "you can't have revival without a King James Bible." If we were going to be true to the actual texts, we would be speaking Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic for our services. We as a human race, try to place contingencies on how God can move.

The fact is, any time there is some type of change in the church, somebody will eventually get upset. Whenever God does a great work in the church, there are always some Christians who are unhappy and complain.

- Oftentimes they are jealous because they didn't get to take part in the new work or they felt like they should have had a say in the matter.
- Or they are unhappy because it wasn't their idea.
- Or they are unhappy because they have not received as much honor and recognition as they think that they should.
- Or they are uncomfortable with the change and miss the 'comfort' of what they were used to.

Whatever the reason, if it is God's work, they are basically complaining against God, because He is the one behind the work. Sometimes change can also be brought as leaders in the church seek His wisdom. This is done in an effort to advance God's work.

Sometimes **change** is **necessary**.

What happened in Caesarea was a God thing. But the circumcision party, the frozen chosen, were complaining about it because it was different than what they had expected. In Caesarea, God had used Peter to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. Remember, on his ascension, Peter had at least 2 days, more likely 3, to go over in his mind what had happened. Not only that, but he had time to formulate a response. He does so in verses 4-14 to defend his actions.

4 But Peter began and explained it to them in order: **5** “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. **6** Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. **7** And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ **8** But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ **9** But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ **10** This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. **11** And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. **12** And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. **13** And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; **14** he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

He told them in his vision that God had sent him to Caesarea, that God had taught him through the vision that the Gentiles were not “common”. As Jewish Christian men, in their philosophy and world view Gentiles were still considered common, and that the Jews were to receive salvation first. But God had a different plan. And then Peter kicked it into yet another gear in verses 15-17.

15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. **16** And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' **17** If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

This totally blew the whole "Jewish first" theory out of the water. The same things that the disciples and everyone else in Jerusalem witnessed back approximately 5 years earlier in Acts chapter 2 was happening to the Gentiles. There was no denying that God was at work with the Gentiles. If they had denied that it was God moving amongst the Gentiles, they would also have to deny that God moved with them in Acts 2. It was at this point that the apostles and Jewish Christians began to realize that God's salvation was for everyone.

18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Change will **happen**, whether we are ready for it or not.

Remember how I said I would get back to Myk and how he was such a unique individual. I had the opportunity to talk to him, to have a relationship with him as a friend. I remember at times he would invite me over to his dad's apartment just to talk. A lot of times it involved him asking me questions about my faith. Sometimes I didn't know the answer, and sometimes I did. If I didn't know the answer, I would try to find it though. I spent a lot of time talking with Myk to be able to build a trusting relationship. At one point, I was asked by someone, a Christian, "why are you willing to spend so much time with him, he's so different." This is not unlike what Peter had gone through to explain why he had been preaching

to the Gentiles. My simple response was “he’s my friend and he needs Jesus too.” Myk eventually started going to church with me. The first day he came in he wore a T-shirt that said, “Hello, my name is Satan.” He was wanting to test to see if the church would be as accepting of him as I was. Shortly after that he gave his life to Christ and has been married for more than 25 years. He now has 3 kids, and is still continuing to serve in his church. He still is very unique, which is not a bad thing. I see some of the questions he likes to ask others on social media, to cause discussion. In all honesty, I think he has realized that discussions lead to relationships, which leads to the ability to talk about Jesus.

The reason I said all this is because we as a church need to be reaching out to our communities, to the people who may appear different than us, to the people who don’t fit what we would consider to be the “normal Christian material.”

When God works, He often works in ways we don’t expect - ways that are different - reaching people we might not have reached out to.

We are going through a growth process right now, a change that is currently happening, and we may not approve of all the sins that a person may be working through, but God loves them and He desires for them to be saved - to follow Him.

And who is to say that our sins are any less than someone else. We sin just like any unbeliever sins, we have just met the One who has freed us from the shackles of our sin. We all need the change that Jesus brings.

In 2008 the Tuscaloosa news wrote an article that said 72% of people believe that the global church is full of hypocrites yet 78% of people are willing to hear someone who will discuss their beliefs. We have an opportunity to change that opinion. We just need to be like Peter, to go to the people who might seem “common”, because they need Jesus too. We as a church need to not just know, but to live out the Great Commission. To cause the change that the world needs.

Applications

- 1) Seek out opportunities for relationship - be honest
- 2) Pray for those relationships
- 3) Be accepting of people who come in, no matter how they appear
- 4) Be open to God changing how we act and respond as a church

PRAYER

Scripture Verse

Mark 16:15

15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Benediction

We are blessed because He loves us so much, let's go and be a blessing