

Scripture Reading:

Acts 10: “44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.”

Acts 11: “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!" 4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: 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. 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.' 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 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.' 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."”

"Peter Makes His Defense"

Before we consider how Peter made his defense before the Saints in Jerusalem and the lessons it can teach us today, I want to take just a moment to talk about where we will be going in the coming weeks. As I pointed out last week, Luke in his orderly account is about to begin his consideration of the final step in God’s great plan of salvation:

- Jesus has come to save His people from their sins
- The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the Church
- And now He will glorify the Son by using these Saints to take the Kingdom of Jesus to all the world.

The Spirit has been poured out on the Jews in Jerusalem, the Samaritans and now the Gentiles and Peter will confirm that this is what has happened. Luke will then remind us how the Saints were scattered after the death of Stephen, and how this has opened the doors for preaching to the Gentile world with a picture of the Church in Antioch, where the Saints are first called Christians. Luke will then give us a final picture of the continued persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem and a taste of the coming judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 with the pride and death of King Herod.

Then beginning with Chapter 13, and for the remainder of the book Luke will focus on the great missionary journeys of Paul & Barnabas as the Gospel goes to the ends of the earth!

- So my plan is to finish chapters 11 & 12 in the coming weeks and begin chapter 13 next year after the Advent season.

This will leave a few weeks before Advent where I plan to finish our ordinary time this year discussing the importance of Lord's Day worship and reviewing the elements of our Covenant Renewal Worship. This is good for all of us to review again and again, and we must be diligent to instruct our younger members so they more fully understand how we rightly worship God and why we do the things that we do in the worship service.

- Of course then we will enjoy once again both the end and beginning of our Church year with the season of Advent.

Looking forward to the day that Jesus returns and celebrating His coming in real history as the Baby Jesus: The Son of God who came to save His people from their sins! It will be a blessing once again to have Theron and Mike share the pulpit in this season and see the joyous times we all share together. So with all of that in mind, let's consider what we have before us this morning from Luke's orderly account:

- Peter has gone to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea and the Spirit has truly shaken things up in the Jewish world!

While this is a passage we might think we can quickly pass over and move on to the exciting journeys of Paul, there are some tough lessons for us to learn: Lessons about...

- Submission to authority
- Defending the Faith
- And submitting to God

We talked about those "peace" bumper stickers a few weeks ago, and along with them my generation proclaimed those simple but devastating words on another bumper sticker: "Question Authority!"

While it may have rightly begun as a discussion of whether we must accept all that someone in authority over us has to say, it quickly degenerated into a mass attitude of:

- "who needs all these authorities telling us what to do anyway?"

There is a proper way to question authority: We see the best example later in Acts when the Saints at Berea took all that the Apostle Paul said to them back to the Scriptures to see if it was true.

- Such should certainly be the case with all the sermons and lessons that we give you here at Church of the King!

In the Christmas story we will again read how Mary questions an authority sent by God by saying, how can this be?

- Because it was honest, and respectfully asked, the angel explained what was going to happen to Mary.

Zacharias must have had the "question authority" bumper sticker on his camel because the angel did not like the attitude with which he asked a similar question...

- And Zacharias ended up with many months of silence to think things over.

So when Peter returns to Jerusalem he is not insulted that the Apostles and others want him to come before them and he is not even troubled by their misreading of what has happened. These gathered Saints were certainly missing the forest for the trees: They did not ask Peter about what happened to those Gentiles or how this might change their whole world view... No, they wanted to fight over the food laws and misreadings they had about the Old Testament laws. As we studied at some length, the food laws were there to demonstrate holiness and there was NO prohibition against eating with Gentiles.

- In fact, they had missed the whole theme of the Old Testament where the promise made to Abraham was to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth!

So they contented with Peter saying, “you went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” and Peter humbly comes before them because we are commanded to be in submission one to another.

Peter is not afraid to make a defense at this point which is our second lesson...

- But I think it important to point out that Peter is going to defend God’s actions and not be defensive about himself.

Peter recognizes that he once was in their shoes: After all, God had to give him the vision THREE times to help him understand what the Spirit was about to do with the Gentiles. And even after that he and the other Saints who traveled to Caesarea were astonished by what God did!

Yes, we are to be ready to give a defense for the faith, but is it not about winning debates and never about trying to put down the other party, even when they are wrong. At this point Peter would have been VERY excited about what God was going to do: He now understood what Jesus said in the Great Commission and would begin to see how the Kingdom of Jesus was going to fill the earth!

Peter could easily have said to these Saints, “Don’t you see what God is doing, how come you still want to be hung up on the dietary laws!” *[yes body language and the tone of our voices are important!]*

Instead Peter gives us a good example of how we should defend the faith, both to those who do not know Jesus, as well as to fellow Saints where we disagree on a particular doctrine.

- Peter tells them what happened, “from the beginning.”

Now it is very interesting that Peter gives almost all the details about what God did, giving him the vision and commands and then pouring the Spirit out on the Gentiles.

- But he gives them no part of his message at the home of Cornelius!

Is this vision more important than the Gospel presentation Peter gave? Obviously it is not in the grand scheme of God’s story of salvation, but we must remember that Luke is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and now gives us the vision in all of its details once again. It is important here because it explains what God is doing at this critical point in history and it answers the confusion that now reigned with the Saints at Jerusalem.

- Again, there are not two plans for salvation: One for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.
- ALL are saved under that same Covenant of Grace!

God has sent His Son to save His people from their sins and this has made them clean: Both Jew and Gentile when they repent and are baptized into Christ! The vision is repeated in part to help us see just how hard this was for the Jewish Christians to understand!

- Even Peter struggled as God gave him the visions and later we know from Paul’s writings that Peter still sinned in this area by not eating with Gentiles.

As Peter gives his defense there are two details given that Luke did not mention in Acts 10: Peter here recounts how the angel told Cornelius, that he was to call Peter who “will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” Just as Peter has grown in his knowledge of what God is doing, so the Spirit expands the account. This is why the great truths that we find and wonder over in Romans 9-11 are in chapters nine through eleven and not in chapters one to three. This is true with how God reveals things to us here in the Bible and true with how we grow in our understanding in all of life.

- We must be so careful with the hearts of other Saints who may not yet see all that we do.

We certainly want to encourage them to grow in the faith, but it is much better to say something like, have you considered this or have you compared this with that... Then to just jump down their throats with such statements as “everyone knows this or that” or “I can’t believe that you don’t understand how this all fits together!”

- If we are honest, we know that God has been very patient with us in our journey and so we should be patient with others as well!

The second thing that Peter tells these gathered Saints which Luke did not include in chapter ten was how something that Jesus had said came to Peter’s mind as he watched the Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit. Peter remembered how Jesus told the disciples that “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” We have stressed the importance of how the Spirit was poured out on the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles in the same way so we would know they were all part of the one Church. This is what Jesus was referring to and it is wrong to try and make the baptism of the Spirit an individual experience like speaking in tongues. But there is also a lesson for us all here about how God teaches us along the way:

- The Words of Jesus were brought to Peter’s remembrance and they helped him to understand and accept what was happening at Caesarea.

Just as Peter had the benefit of walking with Jesus for some three years and hearing many His actual words spoken on earth...

- We have the benefit of ALL of God’s Word and yes God will bring it to our remembrance IF we have been diligent to learn it as we should.

As Paul told young Timothy, “14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- If we want to be complete and thoroughly equipped for God’s work, then we need to know our Bibles well and to be obedient!

This brings us to the final and most difficult lesson:

- Submitting to God!

As part of his defense Peter explains how he submitted:

- First by going with those Gentiles and later by baptizing the Gentiles after the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon them.

Neither of these steps would have been easy for Peter in the flesh, but as he told the gathered Saints, “who was I that I could withstand God.”

Peter has been moved by God's visions, the direct instructions from the Spirit and witnessing the Spirit's power coming upon the Gentiles. Peter asked the right question: 'Who can withhold baptism?' and goes on in obedience to God to baptize these Gentiles without requiring circumcision or any other Jewish ritual.

- I hope in the weeks that we have studied this we have come to understand how difficult this was for Peter and now for the others present that day in Jerusalem.

Peter has come to them with his six witnesses and made the case for what God has done before a skeptical group of believers in Jerusalem and it is time for them to decide if they will submit to God or continue in their Jewish pride.

Verse 18 shows the struggle & the victory: "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.""

They became silent...

- Both because Peter had made a convincing argument and because they were stunned by the conclusion
- Then they accepted God will, and glorified the God who had extended His Grace to even the Gentiles!

Again, this was NOT easy:

-- They would be greatly persecuted because of this as we will see in the lives of both Peter and Paul.

-- There will be those like Peter who slip back into the old ways

-- There will be those who wonder if the gentiles should not at least be circumcised which we will see debated and resolved at the first church council in Jerusalem

- And we know from Paul's epistles that there will be those who hold fast to the old ways and become the Christian legalists of that day.

Today almost two thousand years later, we serve as Gentiles who have been made children of Abraham by the same faith and baptism that we saw there at Caesarea! May we strive to learn the simple but challenging lessons we have reviewed: May we be willing to submit to the authorities that God has placed over us:

- Children must strive to honor their parents!
- Parents must learn to love and submit to one another
- All of us must learn to be in submission to the earthly authorities that God has placed over us... Both the rulers in the Church as well as rulers in the civil realm.
- And as Christians Paul challenges us to all submit one to another out of reverence for Christ!

We must be ready and willing to give an answer for the faith: Respectfully and fully just as Peter did for these gathered Saints.

- Yes, this means knowing the faith so that we can give a defense!

And finally, may we learn the toughest lesson of all... A willingness to submit to God! Now of course, as we think about some examples here, it can be all the same ones I mentioned above...

It is God who commands us to submit to all those authorities, and to be ready to give a defense and if we fail to do so, we are obviously NOT submitting to God.

There are some others to add, but I want us to remember that how we do these things is also important: We could find husbands or wives who are PROUD of how they love or submit or someone who is proud of how they submit to their pastor or governor.

Dr. Francis Schaeffer often shared a contrast to help us see if we are properly submitting: If we are doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way as he would put it... He remembered the proud pose of Napoleon Bonaparte that he saw in France, standing with his face to the wind and his hand tucked confidently in his jacket:

- Proclaiming to all the world, look at what I have done!

Then he would talk of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, overwhelmed by the duties that lay before Him and humbly praying to the Father that it might be removed and then saying, Nevertheless, your will be done and not mine!

- One man proud and self-centered the other humble and serving to others.
- This is how God expects us to serve and it will bring advancement to the Kingdom:

Jesus now sits in heaven at the Father's right hand, while Napoleon's proud body has rotted in the grave and his soul is likely burning in hell.

We are not to be proud of our submission and service, but rather humble, looking out for the interest of others before our own:

- Losing our lives so that we might have life abundant!

If Peter had allowed his Jewish pride to keep him in Joppa, then he would not have been God's instrument for bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles! If the other Apostles and Saints in Jerusalem had not accepted what God had done, giving Him all the glory, we would be reading about all of them as the ones who bewitched the early Christians at Galatia!

We all know what are duties are and we must always be learning how to humbly obey...
[and watch out, sometimes our flesh even allows us to be proud of our humility]

- If we are more focused on how or why we are doing things, than on what we are doing it could be a problem.

And perhaps most important today is to remember that there will be those times where God shows us that we were pretty wrong in some area, just as He did here with Peter and the others who thought Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved.

With those of us who came from Baptist or evangelical backgrounds, I am sure that baptizing children was such an experience:

- We came to understand that the promise DOES apply to us and our children!

For those of us coming from a Reformed background, having these covenant children at the Table was such an experience:

- Jesus really does want us to suffer little ones to come to Him!

It seems so clear on this side of the decision, but many of us can remember how difficult it was: We needed some of those visions and directions from God!

I will leave you with two thoughts in this area: First, as I have been saying, we must remember that many others do not see what we think is so clear and we must treat them with respect and trust that God will bring them along.

At the same time, we should pray that God does so in mighty ways because how we view and treat our covenant children has enormous implications for the growth of the Kingdom.

Another area where we have grown and been greatly blessed in with worship and music...

This is why it will be good for us to review again why we gather on Sunday and how we rightly worship God: If we get things right there, so much more in life will go well!

- **Just as the advance of the Kingdom did after these early Saints accepted the Gentiles...**
- **Something we will begin to study next week!**

Communion Meditation: Ephesians 5:13

“But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.”