

## Part 31 – The Gentile Church

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, April 13, 2016

† Acts 11:1-30

We left off last Wednesday looking at the first Gentile converts. We read where a large group of people had congregated together in the home of Cornelius and after Peter preached to them about Jesus, they believed and the Holy Ghost came down upon them and the Gentiles began speaking in tongues and Peter had them baptized into the New Testament Church.

Well, we leave chapter 10 and Caesarea and we travel with Peter and the 6-men that he had brought with him that were witnesses to the salvation of the Gentiles. And that is where we pick up tonight.

1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

So, the news has spread by now about the Gentiles receiving Christ. It must have traveled like wildfire in the Jewish community. This was a major happening.

2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Peter comes to Jerusalem to the main Church to give his account of what happened in Caesarea. Obviously there were many of the Jews (those of the circumcision) that had a hard time believing what they had heard. So they are “contending” with Peter about it. They even talk to him like he had done something wrong: “thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” How dare you do that? And you call yourself a Jew!

4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

So, Peter has, as the Bible says, “rehearsed” what he was going to say to these folks. He already knew it was going to be difficult for them to believe and accept. He goes into the whole story of how he came to be in the uncircumcised Gentile's house. It was because the Holy Spirit bade him to. This is also how we know that he took 6-men with him to Caesarea: “these six brethren accompanied me.”

13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

Then he explains that lightbulb that went off in his head while he was there. It wasn't a lightbulb but the leading of the Holy Spirit that had caused him to understand what was needed. And the Lord caused the remembrance of John the Baptist's ministry and what was said concerning the baptism of the Holy Ghost when the Lord came. He says: “what was I, that I could withstand God?” In other words, look fellars, I understand you are concerned about this and you think that I was wrong to go into the Gentiles house and eat with them, but look, the Lord is the one that told me to do it. What else could I do? I can't go against God!

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

That little phrase that Luke uses here, “When they heard these things,” is unique to Luke. He is the only New Testament writer that uses this phrase and he uses it four times, once in the Gospel of Luke, and 3 times in the Book of Acts:

- **When Jesus went to his own hometown and preached in the Synagogue: Luke 4:28:** And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,
- **When Stephen preached before his accusers and they stoned him to death: Acts 7:54:** When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.
- **Here in our text when Peter gives details of how the Gentiles were saved. Acts 11:18:** When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.
- **And when Paul was in Thessalonica staying a man's house named Jason: Acts 17:8:** And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

But when Peter explained how it all came to be, the Bible says that they held their peace, and glorified God, and accepted this new grace given to the Gentiles. Friends, this is life changing for these Jews and for the world.

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

After Stephen was martyred, the Jews scattered. We read about that in **Acts 8:1b:** “... And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. These scattered Jews were only preaching to other Jews. But now that news has gotten out that the Lord is also offering the Gentiles salvation, they begin preaching to them, as we read in our next verse:

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

What a wonderful thing it was. Men and women from all over were getting saved. These Gentiles in Cyprus and Cyrene and the Grecians in Antioch. We are not given a number of any kind but the Bible says “a great number believed.”

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

Again, news gets back to the Church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem would be where everything is validated. That’s where the Apostles would be and the great men that God used to get the New Testament Church started. This would be very important in those early stages of the Church because everything needed to be just as God intended it to be. Just imagine if anyone could validate important matters such as the Lord grafting in the Gentiles. There would be the potential for a lot of false doctrine to be let in. So, important things like this went through the main Church and the leaders of it.

“and they sent forth Barnabas.” And, here is another reason it went through the Jerusalem Church. These wise men that oversaw things made the decision to send in a heavy weight to validate things and to help out in the ministry.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

And Barnabas certainly did validate the news when he witnessed first-hand what was taking place. A great revival had broken out. God’s grace was being poured out upon all men, both Jew and Gentile alike. It says that Barnabas “was glad.” And that is how all Christians should be when they hear of news of people getting saved and God doing a mighty work. Instead of getting jealous and made because God appears to be working in one place and not another, we should be glad and rejoice when we hear of such good news.

“and exhorted them all.” Barnabas let them know that they were just as much a part of the Church as he was and the Jews were. He encouraged them and treated them like equals and brothers and sisters in Christ.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

What a testimony concerning Barnabas. For the Holy Spirit to guide Luke to write down those words, “for he was a good man.” Notice it does not say that Barnabas was a smart man, or a talented man, or a good looking man. He may have very well been all of those but the Bible specifically says that he “was a good man.” I can’t think of anything better than that. To be known as a good man or a good woman.

And the Bible doesn’t stop there. We also see that Barnabas was “full of the Holy ghost and of faith.” Those are the two qualifications that each and every Christian should strive for in our life. Being full of the Holy Ghost means that you are obedient to Him. To be full of faith means that you rely upon Him for your every need. That is where faith comes from, **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

Why did Barnabas go find Saul? I think it is pretty obvious. One, he is being led by the Holy Ghost, but two, because of this great revival and outpouring of the Spirit upon all of these people and Barnabas needs help. He needs help from someone he can trust and would be as excited about the work of the Lord as he is. Naturally that is going to be his friend, Saul of Tarsus.

You can only imagine how much Saul was ready to get busy in the ministry. It is hard to say how long he has been in Antioch waiting for the Lord to use him. I bet he had his bags packed and ready to go when Barnabas showed up at his door.

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

So the team of Barnabas and Saul dive in and get busy. They are concentrating their efforts in the City of Antioch. Obviously a large number of Christians were now living there and they spent a whole year assembling together with them and teaching them.

The City of Antioch was considered the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the world at that time. The largest being Rome, the next was Alexandria, and then it was Antioch. It is believed that there were over 600,000 people living in Antioch in the days of Saul and Barnabas. -- Antioch was known for its wickedness and for the large Temple built in the name of the goddess, Daphne. There in that temple people would come to worship in vile and disgusting acts of sexual debauchery. Prostitution was rampant in Antioch. This is going to be the perfect place for Christianity to be introduced. A shining light in the midst of darkness.

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

The word Prophets in our Bible is used in a couple of ways. It is used for religious teachers but it is also used for men that God gave the gift of foretelling future events, such as Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Isaiah, John the Baptist, etc.. This man Agabus is obviously one of these types of Prophets. God was still using men like this in the early stages of the Church.

Agabus tells the Christians in Antioch that there was going to be a “great dearth.” That means a famine. Then Luke gives us a little update that this prophecy actually came true in the days of Claudius Caesar, and history also backs that up.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Here we see the Gentile Church is a loving and giving Church. They send aide to those in Judaea which is where the famine hit the very worst. And they sent their two best men to deliver it.

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† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version