

**1/31/16**

**Acts 11:1-18**

## **Crisis Management in the Shadow of the Cross**

*Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, <sup>3</sup> “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” <sup>4</sup> But Peter began and explained it to them in order: <sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup> But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup> But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. <sup>11</sup> And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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; <sup>14</sup> he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ <sup>15</sup> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> 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?” <sup>18</sup> 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.”*

This week marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Challenger disaster.

In January 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after take-off, killing all 7 of the crew members. One of the crew members was not an astronaut. Christa McAuliffe was a high school teacher from New Hampshire. She was to be the first high-school teacher and first civilian in space.

You might remember NASA arranged a broadcast of the full mission so that children at school could watch and be inspired. I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Independence High School and vividly remember seeing the distorted contrails of a vaporized shuttle and later that

evening watching President Reagan tell us the Challenger Crew “had slipped the surly bonds of Earth to touch the face of God” and how that brought a shifting and a seriousness to my 17-year-old mind.

So often it takes those kind of events to rattle and wake us to move and grow us.

Here, there is a shifting in the story of monumental proportions. The news about the Apostle Peter going to a Gentile's house and going inside the house and winning him to Christ, that news the Bible tells us in v. 1 got to Jerusalem before Peter did.

Now think of the context. The church is in a difficult time. In the next chapter James (Jesus's brother) is going to be killed and Peter arrested. The Roman emperor Caligula is losing touch with reality and making relations tense between the Romans and Jews. And now Peter has gone into a Roman officer's house and called him "brother."

Cornelius was baptized by Peter. Don't forget who wrote this Book of Acts. It's Luke. He's a Gentile convert and he devotes an inordinate amount of scripture to his people being accepted in the church, and here you have genuine Gospel progress. In v. 1-18, Peter is telling the angry Circumcision Party, Jewish Christians who want to maintain a Jewish connection with Christianity.

And I want to look at the way Peter handled the problem. He handled it by keeping the Gospel at the center and moving the church forward. How are we going to do that? How are you going to do that? Today I'm hoping you can start seeing the difference between God being on *your* agenda and you being on *God's* agenda, and part of you being on God's agenda is understanding how to handle crisis in a Gospel-centered way. It's what Peter does.

## **The Gospel Always Moves Us Forward**

To move forward

### **Understand the Value of Face to Face**

Here's the setup. In Chapter 10, Peter finds himself in a Gentile's house by divine order. He did what he was supposed to do. He preached the Gospel, God spoke, the Holy Spirit awakened the hearts of Cornelius and his family. They repented and were baptized.

In Chapter 11:1 *Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.* News of what Peter had done got to the church leaders – ones especially tied to being Jewish. Up to this point, Christianity was viewed as little more than a Jewish sect. The leaders here wanted to keep it that way. V. 2 tells us Peter went to Jerusalem to meet his critics face-to-face and give them his account. And because he dealt with the issue in a Christ-like way, this sectarian discrimination was resolved and the church became a global force of redemption.

By God's grace, so much can be accomplished when Christian people quit swiping at one another and talk. I don't mean text or email where you can't judge tone, inflection or intent. We are part of a dynamic faith that presses us to resolve and reconcile. Christ our Savior showed us the ministry of reconciliation at the cross and then modeled face-to-face with all His disciples, James, John, Peter and even Judas.

The Gospel was in us and the God above us calls us to deal with the issues or crises face-to-face. I don't mean with daring bravado and pride. I mean with a crucified mind and a broken heart. We don't let things fester and build and harden and rot. The cross of Jesus and health of the church and the mission of the Gospel demand that we see value of face-to-face. Pray, act and then wait. The Gospel always moves us forward, but to do so we must understand the value of face-to-face.

## **Understand the Poison of Criticism**

Look at the story. Can you imagine Peter's excitement? A Roman officer and his family have joined the church and Peter goes to Jerusalem expecting the church to rejoice with him. Instead look what he gets. Verse 2-3, *So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, <sup>3</sup> "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

Notice the nature of the criticism. They weren't upset with Peter because he had preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. No one doubts you ought to do that. They didn't mind Peter taking a mission trip to the Gentiles, but to break bread and teach them as equals, that's a different matter altogether.

Now in light of the conversions of Cornelius and his family and this new paradigm of Gospel expansion, these complaints and criticisms seem so asinine. Notice Peter in v. 4, but a contrast. Peter began and explained it to them in order. Peter didn't say "you bunch of low flying, non-thinking bigots." Criticism has a way of bringing out the worst in us, especially if what's being criticized is personal or Gospel-related.

But look at the patience here in the epitome of what Paul says in Col. 3:12-13 <sup>12</sup> *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* Peter didn't go on the defensive or descend into an argument. He knew that God doesn't make distinctions in this new organization called the church and we have no liberty to make them either.

The truth of the matter is: Peter knew that his critics were doing what he would have done if God had not changed his heart. And really, that's the root of the issue, isn't it? A changed heart or, better yet, a *new* heart that comes through faith and repentance and that's really what Peter is getting at. Unfortunately, that's what's been lost in today's church. The Gospel always moves us forward and that includes patience.

## **Understanding the Gift of Repentance**

After Peter tells his story, notice how the hardness of the critics melts and look what they say (in v. 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." "

The idea of repentance has grown strangely out of fashion in today's evangelical lingo, so we say things like "Accept Jesus," "Make a decision for Jesus," "Try Jesus," "Say 'Yes' to Jesus," when the Bible commands we *repent* of the sin and rebellion and *believe*. And when we offer a salvation with no repentance, we offer a Gospel with no change and it leads to a death with no hope.

More than 30 times in the New Testament, the Bible commands repentance and faith. Jesus said in Mark 1, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, Believe the Gospel." Charles Spurgeon said, "sin and hell are married unless repentance proclaims the divorce." The Bible says that God commands all men everywhere to repent. And repentance is more than just a change of mind. It is an unconditional turning to God. Martin Lloyd Jones said, "Repentance means you realize that you are a guilty vile sinner in the presence of God and that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that apart from Christ, you are bound for an eternal torturing Hell. The best way to understand repentance is to hear what Jesus said in Luke 9:23, <sup>23</sup> *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

Our gracious Lord had held back the day of your death to offer the gift of repentance for your sin and faith in the work of Christ, His perfect work of a sinless life and His perfect substitution, taking the wrath of God for sinners on the cross. Your response must be to turn and believe.

*(Pastor Prays)*