

Acts Ch. 11 (DDC) – January 11, 2009

- Well in Ch. 10 we see the Gospel being extended very clearly, very definitively, very purposely to the Gentiles.
- The magnitude of the events in Chapter 10 (and 11 which we're covering tonight) could seem kind of pedestrian if you don't have a clear understanding of the walls that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles.

(pause)

- So who are the Gentiles?
- When we open the Bible the world really is broken up into two groups... from a Jewish perspective
- First.... the Jews
- The Jews are all the people who are descendants of Abraham.
- If you recall in the old Testament God promised Abraham that among other things... a nation would come from him
- That nation is the Jewish nation

(pause)

- And second... you have the gentiles
- When the Bible talks about the Gentiles – it simply means anyone who is not a Jew...
- So anyone who is not a part of Abrahams lineage... is a gentile

(pause)

- Now through out the Bible.... (In Isaiah and many many other places) it repeatedly says the Jews (these descendants of Abraham) were intended to be a light unto the Gentiles
- A light unto the world.
- God tells us that he is going to use the Jewish nation to show the world how they should live and in who they should believe... that was God's intent.
- They were to be an example unto us all...

(pause)

- Well... Jews are humans just like we are humans.... and over the years:
 - Instead of the Jews being a light unto the gentiles
 - They began to look at the Gentiles as despicable
 - Not as people that God loved... but something that should be completely avoided

(pause)

- God had given the Jews the law... and had spoken to them through the prophets...
- And with that... they were able to see the impurities in the world... and the fact that the world is unclean... dirty... and deserving of punishment.

(pause)

- And I want to make it clear... they weren't wrong in seeing the Gentiles this way.
- They were unclean... they were defiled... and sinful.

(pause)

- But... (and this it is so easy to do) in seeing the dirtiness of the world... and how unclean it was... they began to miss that they are included in the world.
 - God chose to enlighten them...
 - but having that light of knowledge didn't make them any cleaner than the Gentiles

Story: Reminds me of my kids..... example about Logan pointing out that Thad is dirty when he was dirty too...

- Well... over the years they fixated on the fact that Gentiles were unclean... and dirty...
- At the time of Jesus the devout Jews, if they had to walk amongst the Gentiles would...

Example about rubbing against a Gentile- ceremonially unclean – burning cloths

- In fact it got to the point that some Rabbi's were teaching Gentiles existed for one reason... to be fodder for hell...
- To keep Hell Hot.
- They were basically a fuel supply for hell

(pause)

- So... in light of the very real view they had of the Gentiles....
- Imagine what a shock it would have been... when the Jews heard Peter (a Jew) went into the house of Cornelius (an unclean gentile).
- And he shared the Gospel with him
- And..... He shared a meal with them!!
 - The implications of sharing a meal with someone in that culture is huge.
 - It was special sign of fellowship.
 - To partake of the same food was to be come one... it was a communing and mixing and sharing of their lives....

(pause)

- This would have been shocking!!!

Example: Story about if you needed Blood and picked some one with AIDS as donor would be similar to this situation

- This would have been completely SHOCKING!!

(pause)

- Now as we move into Chapter 11... keep that in the back of your mind.

- So as the news that Peter went into the house of a Gentile and shared the Gospel spreads...Ch.11 records how the Jews at this time reacted to this.
- Without understanding the walls that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles... it's tough to understand why this chapter is so important.

(pause)

- Well additionally as we read Ch.11 notice how clearly and intentionally God extends his salvation to the world.
- This is something I like to remind myself of quite frequently.
- God has extended salvation to the whole world.

(pause)

- So in Ch.10... Peter entered the house of a Gentile... shared the Gospel to the Gentiles...
- And the Holy Spirit fell on them (showing very clearly Gods approval) and then... the reverberations of the events that follow begins in verse 1:

Act 11:1 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

- Now this is before the internet and email and cell phones.
- So how did they hear this, given that Peter was not back from Jerusalem?
- Well important news travels fast.... even back then
- And this is big news.

(pause)

- And the obvious reaction of the Jewish people is “how could this be?”... “tell me it’s not so”
- It goes on in verse 2 (and remember the Holy Sprit is inspiring Luke... a Gentile to record this):

Act 11:2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him
Act 11:3 and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."
Act 11:4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened:

- So the news travels to Jerusalem and the circumcised believers (who were the very devout Jewish believers) criticize Peter for what he has done.
 - We find out later that this sect of Circumsiced believers believed if a Gentile was to become a believer he must first become Jewish.... and hold to the Jewish laws and regulations

(pause)

- And Peter in his rebuttal to these circumcised believers... (understanding the importance and the delicate nature of this situation)... is careful to give them all the details.
- He is specific and throughout... careful not to leave anything out.

- So he goes in to a very detailed discourse on exactly what happened.
(pause)
- Now... it's interesting and important as we read on... to note Luke records for us in Acts 11 almost a word for word account of what was said in Ch.10.
(pause)
- This is significant because as Luke sits and pens Acts he is limited by space.
- They didn't publish books with bindings and pages etc.
- Rather the New Testament was written on scrolls.
- And the writer of each book was limited to the amount of text that could be written on a scroll.
(pause)
- In fact... historically we find that 35-feet is really the maximum length of a scroll
- If they got longer than that they became very bulky
(pause)
- Now the book of Acts, because of its length, ends up being about a thirty-five feet long scroll.
- So as Luke was penning this book... a consideration he would have definitely thought of was... how can I conserve space?
- What am I being inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell... and what details can I leave out?
(pause)
- So that being said.... Why would (as we will see as we continue on) Luke Record this vision twice?... almost word for word?
- Why not just write a simple sentence that says.... "and Peter told them what happened"
(pause)
- Well the answer is obvious. This is very important!!
- It's the Holy Spirit telling you and me... You must hear it again.
- Don't miss this understanding!!!

Story about me wanting to glaze over this section because we already covered it but being convicted and surprised...

- So this is very important.
- Peter is before Jewish Believers in Jerusalem and he begins to... in a very detail manner... recount the events that occurred.
- And God (through Luke) is telling you and me... to listen to this story again.

In verse 5 it says:

Act 11:5 "I [Peter] was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was.

Act 11:6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air.

Act 11:7 Then I heard a voice telling me, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Act 11:8 "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

Act 11:9 "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Act 11:10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

- Now as Kevin talked about last week these animals were unclean animals according to Jewish Law.
- At first Peter thought God was talking about food.
- But when we read the whole story in Ch.10 we see that the unclean animals are really representative and symbolic of the unclean defiled world.
- The Gentiles... you and me.

(pause)

- Now notice... God doesn't say "it turns out those animals weren't unclean after all."
- No... He says "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."
- In other words, They were unclean... but I've made them clean... I've done something that has made them clean.

(pause)

- The Holy Spirit wants to drive that point home... and that's why He repeats it.
- What God has cleansed don't call unclean!!!

(pause)

- Now picture this.... this is you... and this is me.
- Think about it.... aren't you glad it doesn't say... these four footed beasts were have actually always been clean?

(pause)

- Because we would see that observably that's not true.
- I am defiled. I am sinful. And I'm the first to admit that.
- We are aware that we have a nature like the things brought down to Peter
- But... it says... What God has made clean... don't call unclean.
- That's me. God has made me clean.

(pause)

- In Isaiah 61 it is put a different way.
- It says that we've been robed w/ righteousness.
- He covers our uncleanness in a robe of righteousness.

(pause)

- This should thrill us beyond measure... you are clean!! – by the blood of Jesus
- It's a fantastic day when we say "I am righteousness" – by the blood of Jesus
- That which is unclean... has been called clean.
- He has made me clean positionally
- We can boldly come to the father... and cast our cares upon him

(pause)

Tell Story: about phone call w/ one of my wives friend... and her not feeling good enough to be saved...

- I explained to her... you want to feel like you deserve this gift.
- But the fact is you're not good enough.
- Satan likes to whisper to us... you are unclean... you are a four footed beast
- And it hits home because we are.

(pause)

- Some times it so hard for us to receive grace unconditionally.
- And this is the **CENTRAL TRUTH IN THE STORY**

(pause)

- What does the father say?
- "Don't call unclean what I've called clean!!!!"
- I'm telling you guy's salvation is the most wonderful thing ever!!

(pause)

- We should take our preconceived notions of what we see as righteousness and throw them out the door.
- There is one way to righteousness... and that is through Jesus.
- What I've called clean.... don't call unclean

(pause)

- So Peter explains to the Jewish believers his vision then tells them starting in verse 10:.

Act 11:10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

Act 11:11 "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.

Act 11:12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house.

- I would note that Peter was smart in taking 6 men with him.
- That way as he moves forward with something that Lord is clearly drawing him to he has witnesses that it was from God...

- And we will see based on the way the Jewish church reacts to this... it was a very smart move on Peters Part
- He goes on:

Act 11:12b ...we [Peter and the 6 men] entered the man's house.

Act 11:13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.

Act 11:14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

Act 11:15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.

Act 11:16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

(pause)

Act 11:17 So [Peter says to them] if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

- In other words... guys I wasn't looking for this to happen.
- But this is where God directed me... and God made it know that this is his will by giving them the same gift as he gave us.
- So what was I to do?

(pause)

- It's interesting in the Bible that when we see physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit (which we see here) it was almost exclusively to confirm what God was doing.
- In other words there was a very exacting purpose for the manifestation.

(pause)

- Now I've heard it argued that these manifestations don't occur any more.
- The reasoning being that God used them in the early church to form it and to direct the writing of the word.
- And now that we have the Bible... which they didn't have... God interacts with us through the Word.
- I'm not saying necessarily that is what I believe... but it might be a good topic to discuss afterwards.

(pause)

- Never the less... Peter relays these events to them.
- And in his defense (as to why he did these un Kosher things) he says who am I to withstand God??
- What could I do?

(pause)

And in Verse 18 their response I think is incredible:

Act 11:18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

- I suspect it was quite for a few seconds once Peter had answered all their objections.
 - And I think this is wonderful... they set aside their biases
 - And looked to God... and because God and done this... in humility they praised God.
- (long pause)

- Now true change is slow.
- Minds don't change over night.
- So we will see over time many more walls between the Jews and Gentiles that still need to be broken down.

(pause)

- For example... as we move along into the book of Acts, Peter goes up to Antioch and is eating with the Gentiles.
- Well certain men come up from Jerusalem and while these men are there Peter stops eating with the Gentiles and separates himself from them.
- Well this causes some division in the church.
- In the book of Galatians Paul rebukes him strongly for this.
- So there's still hurdles that need to be overcome...

(pause)

- But... never the less this was the beginning.

(pause)

Now... after verse 18 there is a bit of a section break

Act 11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

- Remember in Chapter 1 there is outline of the book of Acts which follows the spread of the Gospel.
- Jesus tells the disciples... "the Holy Spirit will upon you and you will be my witnesses first in Jerusalem... then in Judea and Samaria... and then unto the ends of the earth."

(pause)

- Well before Stephen was martyred... the spread of the Gospel had moved as far as Judea and Samaria.
- But had kind of stopped there.
- But with the death of Stephen a wave of persecution began... and the church was scattered

(pause)

- It says here some went as far as: Phenice:
 - Which is old Philistine country, in the southern part of now day Israel over on the coast of the Mediterranean sea
 - So some went down there
 - And others went to Cyprus
 - which is an island off of what is today Syria
 - And others to Antioch...
- (pause)

- So these believers have scattered into Gentile country
- And it says... the majority of them were only witnessing to Jews.
- As I mentioned before it takes time for these walls to be broken down.

(pause)

- But take note of this... the stage is set perfectly
- Because of persecution... believers are in gentile country.
- And when they hear that the Holy Spirit had come to the Gentiles... the stage is set.
- Things began to change, walls begin to break down.

And it goes on to say:

Act 11:20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

- Now this is a key turn in the book of Acts
- They are beginning to spread the gospel to the Greeks.
- And the focal point begins in the city of Antioch.

(pause)

- Well Antioch is located in what we would call modern-day Turkey... where the Orentes river comes and meets the Mediterranean sea...
- Antioch was founded around 300 BC by Seleucus the First...
- Seleucus was one of the eventual inheritors of one of the pieces of Alexander the Greats Empire that broke apart after Alexander died.
- Well Seleucus had a thing about founding cities and naming them after his father Antioch.
- It's recorded that he did this somewhere around 15 times in various areas.
- Well over the years this city grew very large... probably because of its port location on the Mediterranean sea
- Well at the time of Acts Chapter 11 Antioch was the third largest Roman city (after Rome and Alexandria)
 - So it's a very large City in the Roman Empire.
 - And considered very sophisticated and influential in culture.

(pause)

- Well Antioch was also an exceedingly wicked city.
- The inhabitants of the City were dedicated to the god of Daphene.
- In fact Roman historians report that there was a huge temple to Daphene in a laurel grove located approximately five miles from Antioch.

(pause)

- Well according to the story, Apollo fell in love with Daphene and was pursuing her in order to take her and ravage her.
- But in order to save her self from being raped by Apollos, she turned herself into a laurel tree.
- So they built this temple to Daphene there in the laurel tree grove

(pause)

- Well the priestesses in the worship of Daphene were basically prostitutes.
- And there in the laurel groves they would reenact in their worship the seduction by Apollo of Daphene.
- So their worship was all about seduction.
- It was very licentious and wicked.

(pause)

- In fact the city of Antioch became a synonym for people who lived a very loose, wicked life.
- The City was kind of like a modern day Las Vegas.
- Its name itself was synonymous with sin.

(pause)

- Now it is interesting that it was in this wicked pagan city that the Gospel of Christ gained such a strong foothold... as we will eventually see.
- In fact the Church in Antioch became one of the main centers of the early church... and was really a hub for the Gospel to be spread to the “ends of the earth”

(pause)

- So these men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks now, telling them the good news about Jesus.
- And it goes on to say in Verse 21:

Act 11:21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

- So God is with these men as they spread the Gospel to the Gentiles.
- And it says a great number of the people believed and turned to the Jesus.
- And it's important to note... a ministry can't turn people to the lord unless the hand of God is with them.

(pause)

- Well in Verse 22:

Act 11:22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

- They sent Barnabas to check out what was going on.
- Now as you real Barnabas befriended Paul (who was called Saul at the time) after his conversion.

Act 11:23a When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad...

- I would note that God's grace always produces great gladness.
- To see his unmerited undeserved gift being given... always produced great gladness (pause)

And it says:

Act 11:23 ... he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

- So they send Barnabas down and what does he do?
- He sees what God is doing... is filled with Gladness... then he encourages them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.
- The King James says "he Exhorted them to with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord" (pause)

- Barnabas was a person with the gift of exhortation.
- To exhort someone is to challenge them and to encourage them.
- And here he is exhorting them to cleave to the Lord with all their heart.

Explain: importance of following God will all of our heart... the mind changes quick / the heart does not

-circumstances don't affect

-if Christianity is intellection only... watch out

Act 11:24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

- So people are coming to the Lord.
- Their being exhorted and encouraged and motivated...
- Now what happens next is interesting. (pause)
- As Barnabas looks around... all these gentiles... Hellenists... Grecians...

- And he thinks.... who could speak and teach these guys effectively???
- You can almost picture him as he's thinking... hmhhh
- And as the Holy Spirit revealed it to him.... ahhh the guy I left in Tarsus many years ago... Saul
- He would be perfect.

(pause)

Act 11:25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,

- Now Saul's been in Tarsus for 7 to 10 years... not knowing what the lord was going to do with him.
- He has this radical conversion. And then we really don't hear much about him for many years.
- Well after Paul's conversion... he was no doubt been disinherited from his family for his commitment to Christ.
- And it says he was living anonymously in Tarsus... probably making tents... as he makes reference to in Philippians.
- He's just kind of waiting... serving the lord in day to day life in obscurity... learning from the Holy Spirit in preparation for future service.
- Probably living in that thankfulness that God had chosen to save him.

(pause)

- Well when it says Barnabas went to Tarsus to "look" for Saul...
- The word used for looking (as in looking for Saul) is the word Anizaito
- It is only used one other time in Luke's gospel... and that is to describe Mary and Joseph as they looked for Jesus when he was 12 years old

Story about Jesus' parents searching for him... and that being the same word.

- This word implies frantically energetically... searching
- And this is what Barnabas is doing.
- Searching high and low desperately searching for Saul!!!
- A man who had a heart for the lord and a mind for studying the scriptures and who was a Roman citizen and understood the Grecian culture.
- Saul was perfect.

Act 11:26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

- Now notice it began with believers were preaching to people and many were coming to Jesus
- Then came Barnabas in vs. 23 came and exhorted them...
- And then last Paul comes and teaches the people

(pause)

- There is a pattern here. First... you see... preaching
 - Then you see exhorting the believers
 - Then you see teaching ministry (of Paul primarily)
- (pause)
- That is generally the model that we've been given and really how it should take place.
 - Preaching – proclaiming the good news to the unbeliever
 - Exhorting – then comes the Barnabas kind of ministry “cleave to the Lord”
 - But that must be followed by teaching
 - Christians MUST be grounding in the Word and in the doctrines and the tenets of our faith.
 - So here we see these three ministries working in perfect harmony.
 - Preaching.... then exhorting... that leads into teaching.
 - I'm convinced this must be done systematically and consistently.
- (pause)

- On a side note... it also says in Verse 26 this is the first place that they were called Christians.
 - So... what does the word Christian mean?
 - The word Christian literally means little Christ... little Jesus
 - And originally this was intended to be a derogatory term... a criticism.
 - But the fact is... for a Christian... being called a little Jesus is a complement.
 - So it stuck
- (pause)

Going on in Verse 27:

Act 11:27 During this time...

- So while Paul is in Antioch teaching them... it says:

Act 11:27 ... prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Act 11:28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)

- It says Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.
 - Now many of the prophets in the early church were sort of nomads.
 - They would roam from church to church as we see here.
- (pause)
- Well as you can probably imagine... there were also men who were not prophets who would travel from church to church falsely claiming they were a prophet.
 - They would come to a church and claim “I'm a prophet of God”

- It was actually one of the problems in the early church.
 - How do you tell whether a man is really a prophet of God or not?
- (pause)

- In fact around 100 A.D. there was a little “church handbook” written by the Apostles called the Didache that began to be circulated among the church.
 - And in the Didache among other things there were rules for discerning who was a true prophet and who was a false prophet.
 - Practical rules... beyond what is written in the Bible.
- (pause)

- For example if a man came to a church and declared himself to be a prophet of God, you were to listen to him for one day.
 - If he stayed the second day without going to work then he was a false prophet.
 - He was just looking to leach off of the church.
- (pause)

- Or... If a man came in and declared himself to be a prophet and he said, "Thus saith the Lord, fix a large dinner, of this this and that!"
 - If he ate that dinner himself, he was a false prophet.
- (pause)

- So the Didache was an interesting little guidebook for the early church to help them with this problem of false prophets before they were established with elders, and pastors etc.
- (pause)

- Well... at this time a prophet named Agabus (who we will hear more about as we move through Acts) comes up from Jerusalem to Antioch
 - And Agabus stands up... (which implies it was perhaps during one of Paul's teachings)...and prophesies that a famine is coming
 - So there is going to be a shortage of food in the land.
 - And Luke here is deliberate in mentioning the famine actual came to pass.
 - And many extrabiblical sources confirm this.
 - In other words Agabus was a true prophet... and that is confirmed later on in the book of Acts as well
- (pause)

- So a Famine is coming...
- What do you do? Save up food... protect what you have...
- In verse 29 it says:

Act 11:29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

- So... in light of hearing there is a famine coming... they respond to this news by deciding to provide help to the believers in Judea.

(pause)

- Now we read earlier in the book of Acts the church in Jerusalem had gone through heavy persecution and had been scattered.
- They had also experimented with communal living and found that to be disastrous financially.
- So when Agabus predicts this famine to come.... these men decided to take up an offering to send it back to the saints there in Judea to help them out.

(long pause)

- Now I want to note.
- First, we are told specifically that they are being taught in person by Paul.
- And second that Agabus comes and they are told a famine is coming.
- Why is this important?

(pause)

- Well the order of events here is important and highlights the significance of their response.

Explain: Describe how I typically selfishly respond when I hear stuff like this...

- But as we grow in the Lord, increasingly our response becomes more like theirs.
- ...there is a famine coming...what should we give?

(pause)

- I was listening to Jon Courson while preparing for tonight.
- One of the things he noted was... he has a hard time when people tell you prophesy... and use prophesy as a reason to say ... “we better save food buy guns and.... protect what we have and shoot those who could threaten your survival”

(pause)

- But rather our response should be... this is an opportunity for me to give... and show the world who provides for me.
- God...

(pause)

- So... after coming to the Lord... being exhorted to follow the lord with all there heart... and after been taught by Paul...
- it says rather than hoarding... they gather a gift to give to those they know will be in need.
- And going on in verse 30:

Act 11:30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

- Obviously Barnabas and Saul are completely trusted by the church.
- Which is pretty miraculous considering many of these Christians fled under the persecution of Saul.
- Never the less... they entrust Barnabas and Saul with the gift.
- And they agree to transport the gift to the church in Jerusalem.
- And thus they being the 300 miles journey south to Jerusalem with the money.

And that concludes Chapter 11

Closing Prayer

- Next week Bob Carter will be covering Chapter 12.