

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 11:1 as we continue our study through the gospels, and now we are in the book of Acts.

It is a report of the thirty years of the early church, and we're currently with Peter. In fact, we're going to finish with Peter here at the middle of chapter 12; about verse 17, Peter departs to another place, and we don't see Peter, literally, at all anymore except for one meeting in Acts 15 where he shows up to give his testimony. But that's pretty much it for Peter. But we spent a long time with Peter.

And tonight we come, if you will, to the end of the story of how the gospel got to the Gentiles. Paul, after he was saved and he had spent three years away from the church, had come to Jerusalem; had really caused a stir. He'd only seen a couple of the apostles. And then the church said, "Just go home. You're trouble." And though Paul was saved, he wasn't ready to be used yet. So he went home, and we will pick up with Paul in chapter 11, actually. It'll be seven to ten years down the road, if you will. So we get this little filler of Peter's ministry. We read when Paul was sent home from Jerusalem that there was peace in the church for the first time in a long time. And Peter took advantage of that and began to travel to some of the fellowships to see the work of God only amongst the Jews and the Hellenists; so far no Gentiles were being saved. The gospel, as far as the church knew, wasn't to extend that far. So Peter went up the coast. He went to Lydda, where there was a fellow named Aeneas who had paralysis for eight years, and the Lord had used Peter; he prayed for him and healed him. Peter was called a little further down to a place called Joppa, where there was a woman named Tabitha who was known to all of her friends as someone that did good works of caring for those others. And the Lord raised up Tabitha from the dead. It surprised Peter as much as everyone else. But Peter stayed in Joppa with a man called Simon. He was a tanner. And we've talked to you for the last couple weeks about the changes God needed to bring to this Jewish heart that was very prejudiced against the Gentiles and how it took a long time for the church (and you'll read it throughout the rest of the Bible), especially the Jerusalem church, to embrace the idea that God could save, by grace, the Gentiles. First of all, to the Jew, the Gentiles were not chosen; they were. They were dogs. They were fodders for Hell. They were not to be

touched, not to be talked to, not to be befriended. And that was a culture that Peter grew up with for years. And not only was the Lord going to save Gentiles, but they didn't even have to become Jews first (which is the big argument in chapter 11 tonight, as well in chapter 15) - that somehow, "If you come to be like us, then maybe you can graduate to part 2," which wasn't true at all.

So, we've spent a lot of time talking with Peter. And we looked the last couple of weeks (and I'm not going to go over the story again because Peter's going to kind of mention it in the eighteen verses we want to look at tonight) - but Peter was moved by the Lord (in chapter 10) to go to the house of a Gentile forty miles away and preach the gospel for the first time to the Gentiles, to the house of Cornelius. And God put it together, worked on both ends, spoke to Cornelius, a God fearer, not a believer, but one who was open to the Jewish God in the sense of they were the only religion, if you will, that believed in one God as opposed to lots of gods. God gave to Cornelius a vision about sending for a fellow named Peter, by name, forty miles away. He gave a vision the next day to Peter about unclean animals that came down on a sheet, told him to eat it. He said, "I can't, never have, wouldn't do that. That's unclean." And the Lord said, "Don't you call unclean what I've made clean." And Peter realizes, by the time he gets to chapter 11, that that sheet is really the church. It's the gathering of all those who God made clean. But that wasn't his understanding initially. So, it happened three times. There was a knock at the door. These men that had come forty miles over the course of a day and a half were asking for Peter. The Lord told him that God had sent them, that he was to go with them without question. They spent the night with Peter and Simon. He got to have an earful of why they were there. And the next day Peter went with them; took six guys from Joppa with him. He thought this could be trouble, especially in the climate of that prejudice. And he went, and when he arrived, he saw the house full, he heard the testimony of Cornelius, and he was sure that this was what God wanted. And so Peter began to share the basics of salvation - not to the Jews, no Old Testament Scriptures, just to the heart and to the conviction of sin that all men suffer. And he wasn't near done when the Holy Spirit interrupted, and people heard what they needed to do to be saved, and they just started doing it. "Not waiting for Peter to do an altar call. Don't raise your hand. Forget it. I'm just going to pray right now!" And Peter's message was cut short by this action of the Holy Spirit. And Peter had them baptized, and he stayed for several days to minister to them.

Well tonight we want to come to the conclusion of that story. We want to hear from Peter himself, how he felt about what had happened. He is going to be called on the carpet by the less-than-freed-from-prejudice apostles and believers, Jewish believers (most of them) in Jerusalem, who still nursed the concept that they alone were God's people and the Gentiles would not really be welcome at all. And Peter gets called on the carpet for experiencing or, if you will, for defending the grace of God. Imagine you put in a position where you have to defend God's grace. He'll have to do it before the council in Jerusalem, here in chapter 11. He'll do it again in front of that same council, just a bigger group, in Acts 15. But it is the result of Peter being willing to listen to what God had to say to his heart, his obedience to go even though he didn't understand it, his boldness to trust God, and now to face the public sentiment that is unscriptural and it's sinful; but yet he has to stand up now because he's the only one that knows it. This is what God has done, and it is an eye opener to everyone.

Chapter 11:1 says this, "Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God." The distance from Caesarea to Jerusalem today is a little less than fifty miles. They were connected, in that day, by a main road (a Roman road). It is still the main connection today between the two cities. Peter stayed with his new brethren for quite some time, according to verse 48 of the last chapter. He hung around to help them grow. I don't know how many days he stayed. In chapter 9:43, it said that Peter stayed "many days" with Simon. In chapter 10:48, it said he stayed a "few days" with Cornelius. I don't know what that all means, but I know that he was there long enough to have word get fifty miles down range of what had happened. Somebody's been traveling, someone's been talking, and it's a big deal. It's a huge deal. In fact, the elite leaders in the early church - the apostles - had heard about it (the salvation of the Gentiles), and the news got back to Jerusalem quicker than Peter did. I like the fact that, though their salvation was unbelievable, it was spectacular. I mean, the way God put it together (if you've been with us through chapters 9 and 10), it is the culmination of many miracles of God. Yet once they get saved, the mundane begins. Their salvation was miraculous; their growth was like Mike was saying (Mike DeVroede, who gave his testimony before the study) - hard work. Peter had to say, "Let's have a Bible study. Let's get the Bible out. What does it say?" And they had to commit themselves to daily reading and study and prayer and spiritual diligence. And they had to grow up in the shadows, if you will, in the every-day steps of life. And that's pretty interesting because it's miraculous that Peter shows up the way that he does. A love for God and His Word caused Cornelius to

hear from God. But it takes time to grow. And so Peter hung around for a time; I don't know how long. But can you imagine how excited Peter must be with his team, as they sit in Caesarea in a very Gentile town, and every night or every day in Cornelius' house, people are rolling in with Bibles in their hands, or with manuscripts, and with questions and with prayer requests.

And God is doing these amazing things while fifty miles away the mood is extremely somber. They can't wait to get their hands on Peter. "He's violated every rule that we operate under." Right? And these prejudiced believers, who had yet to embrace God's all-encompassing grace, were now fuming while Peter was rejoicing. The experiences couldn't be any different if you'd have ..... I can just envision the late-night meetings in Jerusalem, the phone calls (okay, maybe not), the emails, the Facebook comments, the Tweets, and the whispers. "I'm not gossiping, bro, but we need to pray for Peter. He's lost his mind. Apparently he went to Gentile houses. He's gone over the edge. We've gotta stone him when he returns." (Laughing) "He's gotta go." And with their spiritual masks securely in place, the agitation was boiling over, considering their opinion of Gentiles at all. Maybe it's hard for you to relate to because though there are much prejudices today still - and Jesus, alone, I think can dissipate them - this was pretty radical prejudice. I mean, it was really an "us" against "them." I can just hear the calls to the apostles' office wanting to know what they were going to do about this. And bad news always travels much faster than the good news. I would also question this - I don't know where the other apostles were at this time. They were all there. No one seemed to step up for Peter at all. It's like he had no friends. It's one against ten. Right? And Paul's in the wing, if you will. There's really nobody there to support him. Because they needed, like Peter, time to work this truth out, and Peter stood virtually alone. But you see, Peter understood this was going to happen, which was why he took half a dozen guys with him. He didn't take them because he was lonely. He took them because he knew this was going to be trouble. And so he was able to recruit from the church, there, six guys who were willing to go.

So, there's that joy of what God does in one city, and then the sadness is brewing in a confrontation back home. The good news for Peter is he's been led by the Lord here, and he knows it. And he's not going to be able to back down from this, it is clear. But if you're going to withstand the pressure of a hateful public, especially if that public is in the church - which is exactly what these folks were, you're going to have to be sure you're walking with God to the best of your ability. You can take a lot of shots then because you just know that you're serving God. And that's

exactly where Peter's at. So, I don't know how long Peter stays, but I read in verse 48 (chapter 10) that he stayed with them a "few days." I guess not as long as he'd been in Simon's house but long enough to be able to let the news, I guess, filter back home. And understand that Peter was a prominent member of this group. These were his peers, the apostles' committee turning their backs on him.

Verse 2 says, "And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended" (the word means to fight) "with him, saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!' " They immediately accuse him of the worst thing a Jew could be accused of - eating with a Gentile. Because in the Jewish mind, eating with someone meant you became one with them. What they ate, you ate. What nourishes them, nourishes you. Which is why you'll find Jesus, in His ministry, totally going out to lunch all the time. He loved eating, and if there wasn't enough food, He'd just multiply it. But He's gonna eat! (Laughing) And so is everyone else. There was always this fellowship, and the Lord used it. He's "the bread of life" and "take and eat" because that was the understanding - you become one. So communion takes on a whole different view, if you will, when you look at it from a Jewish mindset. So he comes home - Peter. He's been around a long time, and he is immediately charged with this heinous crime, if you will, at least in their eyes, of going to eat with Gentiles - becoming one with them. There is no mention made of anyone saying, "Did they really get saved? That must have been cool. How did that work?" They were just angry. They were up in arms about traditions and Peter's behavior that had them upset. Peter, like I said, anticipated the problem, which is why he brought these six guys. In fact, they are mentioned in verse 12, "Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house." So Peter had his support group, if you will. But Peter is now set to offer these accusers the whole story. He wants to explain what he has been learning over the last many months from the Lord in all of these series of events. He went to the Samaritans, and he saw how the Lord, through Philip, was reaching half-Jews, if you will. Right? The fellows that were mixed together - the Samaritans - who had been intermarried and pushed together by conquest for years, who had all kinds of weird ideas. Go read about the woman at the well in John 4 and the questions that she asked Jesus. They're locked in to the weirdness of the beliefs of the Samaritans. So Peter had seen it there. And then he was comfortable enough to stay with a tanner who had dead bodies around (the Jews don't do that), and now he gets sent to Cornelius' house. This has been a journey for Peter to overcome a lot of his prejudices and to realize that God, through His Son, makes us able and delivers us, if you will. And so Peter wants to give them the answers.

And I'll give you the four points that Peter makes because these are the four points that affected Peter's life. One was divine vision, one was divine command, thirdly it was divine preparation (God went ahead and prepared the way), and finally, it was divine action (the Lord saved, he didn't). So divine vision, command, preparation and action.

And that's really his answers in these next couple of verses as we go through them; the very things that set Peter free over these prejudices which had held him for so long. Jesus said "the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). It freed Peter. And, if you will, chapter 11 will say it freed the church in many ways. Our best guess at how long after Pentecost this happened is well into ten years down the road. So Pentecost, chapter 2; ten years later, chapter 11. So it's been a while. It's taken a long time to bring them to this place. It was always God's intention. He never wanted them to be separated from other people. That was manmade sin and error.

Verse 4, "But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying, 'I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision,'" (there's your definition of a trance) " 'an object descending like a great sheet,' " (the word is 'sail') " 'let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But I said, "Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth." But the voice answered me again from heaven, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.' " First answer of Peter - "I received a vision from the Lord." Right? In fact, in verse 4 he says, "I'll tell you how this happened from the beginning. I was simply praying at lunch, God spoke to me in the most unusual way, and here's what I saw, and here's what motivated me to even travel with these men." And he recounts the sail coming down. He even adds (and we don't read that until here in verse 6) that he spent a long time looking at it. In other words, this wasn't an immediate response from Peter. He uses the words here he spent a considerable time intently gazing at it. The words "intently" and "considered," "considered" means to mull over. So, however Peter's experience was on the roof, he went, "That's an odd vision. Those are not clean animals, and there're a lot of them." And then when the command came to go and eat, or to participate, Peter was taken by surprise. Like I said, he would understand, by the time he now has come back, that the church is represented here. Everyone who the Lord makes

clean by faith in His Son - they'll all be clean without distinction. God provides salvation for everyone the same. Right? It doesn't matter what color you are, how much money you make, what part of the country you came from, what your background is. It doesn't matter. Salvation is of the heart. So, if you go to the mission field, what people would like to teach you is culture and environment. And it's good to know your audience, but you should know this - more than anything else, the Bible works everywhere because the power of God's Spirit saves, and the needs of man are always the same. So you don't have to study too much in the sense of, "Gosh, I gotta get a handle on where they're comin' from." No, no, no. They're gonna meet you where God's Word begins and where the preaching of the good news of His Son begins. So, Peter has this happen three times, and he responds to the Lord all three times with what we said to you last week are impossible terms to utter. You can't say "Not so" and "Lord" at the same time. Lord means "You're the Lord." To say "Not so, Lord" means "You're not the Lord, I'm the Lord." But it's understandable in the growth curve that Peter was going through as God was preparing him to preach to the uncircumcised. This was a big leap again. These are big hurdles to cross, if you will.

While Paul was somewhere in Tarsus for the next seven to ten years, mulling over the words of the Lord to him that one day he would be a vessel through whom God would reach the Gentiles, Peter sits in a house by the seashore, hearing from the Lord He wants to reach the Gentiles. And Peter will be the guy that officially opens the door. So, three times the vision, three times the refusal. Peter is still calling unclean what God is calling clean. And about that time, that second part of the vision arrives at the door - the three men arrive, they stand at the gate, they ask for Peter. And then there's that relationship. So Peter said, "Look, first and foremost, it was God's communication to me of what He wanted that drove me to act. It was the divine vision." And I'll tell you what - if you want people to get saved, God has to show them their sin. Salvation starts with God. He has to reveal Himself to man. You can't talk people into it, you can't force them into it. You can have them stand and say whatever you want, but their hearts have to come as a result of God's Spirit. Vision starts first.

Second of all, there is that command from the Lord. We read in verse 11, here, " 'At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing.' " Literally, the words are (in Greek) make no distinction among them. Don't doubt anything. " 'Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we

entered the man's house.' " We have a vision from God, but we also have a direction from God or a command from the Lord. Peter said this, "God showed me a vision, and then God told me what to do. At the very moment that that sail went up into heaven, the Holy Spirit said to me, 'Go join these guys. I've sent them. Don't make any distinctions. Don't try to figure it out. Just join them and follow them. Literally, make no distinctions.' " Which is quite an order considering what he would have heard from these three men. Now I don't know if Cornelius told them the whole story, but if you go back and read chapter 10 and chapter 9, he did meet with these men, and he laid out for them what they were being sent to do. So, don't know how much they told him, but whatever they told him, Peter knew that they were going to a Gentile's house, and he was a God-fearing guy, and he did a lot of praying. And while all the soldiers partied in town, he would have prayer meetings, and his family was very devout and religious. And he was told to go find, "Are you Simon? Are you Peter? Then you've got to go with us." So he got to hear all of that, but it was the divine command from the Lord. "They invited me to Caesarea. It's a Gentile stronghold. They want me to meet with a guy named Cornelius, who had a visit from the Lord. And just to be sure I took six guys with me because I didn't want to get caught in any kind of a trap, if you will. And so they've come back with me today." And Peter's standing on very good ground. Right? Everything he says is about, "God directed me. I wasn't doing this on my own. I wasn't impetuous" (like Peter normally is). He doesn't usually pray as much as he runs first and then prays later. He'd been waiting on the Lord. There's no self-will here. This is just God's doing. Peter is standing before his detractors. God's vision, God's command.

Thirdly, verse 12, God's preparation. So the Spirit said, "Go with Me. I took these six men with me, and I entered the man's house." Verse 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, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved." ' " The third thing that moved Peter was God prepared the audience. When Peter arrived, he ran right into the work of God at the other end of the line. Cornelius couldn't wait to tell him of his experience. "I saw an angel, this is what he said." Now notice (in verse 14) that we are told by Peter exactly for what reason Cornelius had been praying and what God had told him he could do as he diligently sought the Lord. The question that - in his heart and in his prayer life - Cornelius had was, "How can I and my family be saved?" Now, we aren't told that until here. We're told that he was praying and that he sought the Lord, that "Your prayers have been heard on high, they have come up

before the Lord. God's going to answer your prayer" (chapter 10:31). But here in verse 14 we're told what his prayer was. Back in chapter 10:32, it was just that he was praying, and he needed to send for Peter. But here we're told what he was praying. So here's a man who is an unbeliever although he is a God-fearer, he's a moral guy, and his prayer to the Lord is, "How can I be saved? How can I be right with You? How can I surely know that I'm going to go to heaven? How will I know if I've come far enough, done the right thing?" And the Lord said, "Let Me send you a guy. Go get Peter. And Peter will come, and Peter will tell you how salvation comes from God." The entire impact was too much for Peter. He saw God working and preparing all of these things together, if you will, and Peter's vision and his summoning, the trip over there, the questions of his heart, were all answered when he arrived. God prepared a people. "He gave me a vision, He gave me a command, and He prepared a house." There was a house full of people goin', "We've been waitin'." Now put yourself over in Cornelius' house. You don't know if Peter is coming. Cornelius could have just had a bad burrito. And he's sending his guys on a walk (eighty miles round trip), and they come back and say, "We couldn't find anybody named Peter, and there was no Simon, and we're out of luck." No. They were all there waitin' with great anticipation that the vision God had given to Cornelius would come to pass. So God had prepared the people, and Peter walks in, and he sees that the will of the Father and the heart of God is to save Gentiles. Blows his mind. All of the prejudice goes away. All of his hang-ups, all of his beliefs - they all have to be folded and handed back in. They're all wrong. The basis for them is all wrong. Peter is touched. Everything has become clear. And now he's about to walk in the door, tell them the good news of Jesus - a straightforward message to Gentiles who had little or no biblical knowledge. But he was going to tell them what he knew, and he was going to put it on the lowest shelf, and God was going to save. So he had a vision and a command. He saw that God prepared the way.

And what we're left with, then, is God's action. What's God going to do now? We read, in verse 15, " 'And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 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." ' ' " So Peter says that he began to speak and that, as he was speaking (and again, if you go back to the previous chapter), and you look at what the Lord said through Peter, it literally is a 25-second message. Every time I think that I should go long, I'm realizing how short, when God really used people, they were. You'll be encouraged. I'm going to be shorter, not longer, as we go. But what an amazing thought! He got

thirty seconds into a message that he didn't have prepared, and God began to work. His point, however (and I think is very clear), was, "Look, I didn't do this. I was just gettin' on a roll, I hadn't even told the joke that I like to tell at the beginning." Because Peter's a speaker now. He's gone a lot of places and spoken, if you will. But his main point, his emphasis, was God moved. Peter said, "I didn't. But you remember when we met together that first time in chapter 1:5, and the Lord, fifty days later but ten days after the resurrection Pentecost came? And we were all filled, and we spoke with new tongues, and we were empowered, and we preached, and three thousand people got saved? Remember that day? Yeah, that's what happened there. There was just a house full of people. Do you remember how glorious that was, when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as we'd been waiting for the promise of the Father that Jesus said would come? Well, I'm here not ten days later, but ten years later in Caesarea. And it happened again. This is Gentile Pentecost, and it happened right before my eyes. It's just amazing! Except this time they were filled and saved and empowered with the Spirit all at the same time; no waiting period for them." The apostles had gotten saved on Easter evening, and they had to wait nearly seven weeks by the time that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, a little bit more. It was the experience that he had had with Philip in Samaria. It was the experience that he saw at the house of Cornelius, and the Holy Spirit fell on them, and he knew. Peter knew. God wants to save everyone. We've just got to preach Jesus. He's going to save everyone. It doesn't matter where you come from. It was amazing to Peter, it was awesome, and it was clear this was God's plan; that God accepted their faith as He did ours, that the message of His Son - even the faith of these Gentiles was accepted by God. No difference in their hunger. No difference in ours. And I think the most liberating thing for you and me as Christians, when you start to talk to people from different cultures or backgrounds or sometimes language, it all works the same. Right? God's Word saves. We had a lady get saved (Pastor Doug was telling me) this Tuesday at our food ministry, where he shares, and it was translated into Spanish. And this lady just heard the gospel and gave her life to Jesus. God's Word just works. And you be encouraged to just share it.

But the lesson from Peter is not just that God wants to save everyone - that's the big overall emphasis - but that Peter overcame all of those hang-ups to become a man that God could use. That's an amazing thought, and that certainly happened to him.

So we read in verse 17, and he says this, " '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?' " Now I like the way Peter does this because he puts the ball back in their court, back in the laps of the believers like himself who are still dealing with two thousand years of developed religious prejudice and incorrect thinking about the heart of God towards all men. And you should be careful about that. "How was I going to withstand God?" to enforce some obviously wrong idea I've been carrying around all of my life when it's obviously wrong? God doesn't feel like that at all.

I think one of the hardest things, as you grow as a Christian - especially if you come out of a denominational church, is knowing what to lay aside and what to hang on to. My dad had a really hard time. He was a really devout Catholic. I mean, most Catholics pick and choose what they want to believe. And in America it's pretty loose. If you go to the Philippines or to Mexico, there're a lot more devout Catholics than you find in the U.S. by practice. My dad was as devout as they come. So when he got saved, for him to stop praying to Mary was a huge move; that he'd go, "Well, she can help," and I'd go, "No! She cannot." "Well, I don't know about that. I feel....." and we had these great arguments into the night. Sometimes he'd get mad. But it took time. It takes time to let go of your hang-ups and find the freedom that you have in Christ. And it took a long time. He never did take that Christopher medal out of his car. That was his ..... "Our car is safe, man. I've got St. Christopher." And think he's even been demoted since then. I don't even think he's a saint anymore. Somebody voted. But he used to be the guy that'd protect your car. My dad got in more wrecks than anybody I know, (Laughing) but somehow it didn't jive together. But he came around. And over the many years that he was saved (before he went to be with the Lord), you could just watch. Every year he was freer from the rules of man, and then he had the freedom of the things of God. But it takes a long time. My mother was very prejudiced against Germans. We grew up in Holland. She watched her neighbor shot to death in the streets during World War II. She hated German people. And, "Mom, it's not the Germans. It was Hitler, man! It was them guys. German people are all right." "No they're not, they're all the same!" she'd say. But once she got saved, and when the Lord began to deal with her, she began to mellow out. I understand the prejudice. I understand we develop it in a hundred different ways. None of it's any good. But we do. And God can free us from that. And today, everybody's mad at every Muslim. Every Muslim isn't a terrorist. They need to get saved! You go love them, you pray for them. "Oh, yeah, they're trouble." Yeah,

some are trouble, but there are some non-Muslims that are trouble, too. Lots of them. So be careful when you start to live apart from the heart of God because the heart of God is such that He wants to save.

But I love Peter's answer in verse 17. He literally says to the people, "How can I withstand what God was doing?" It's a good question to ask yourself. Right? "How can I withstand the will of God by my stubbornness or reason or prejudice or presumption? The Holy Spirit is a gift of God, and God gave Him to them. What could I do? I couldn't stop Him. Hey, Lord. Don't give Him to them! He's a Gentile centurion!" No. They heard the Word, they believed in their heart, God did the rest.

So Peter just said, "I had a vision, God gave me a command, I saw His preparation, and He acted. I didn't. So it's on Your shoulders. Hey, guys, I was just along for the ride. This is all a work of God."

And I like verse 18, and we'll stop at verse 18. It says, " 'When they heard these things they became silent.' " These loudmouths (in verse 1) no longer were so upset, and instead " 'they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." ' " What could they have said? There were way too many coincidences to write this off as chance. God had done a work. The move towards freedom from prejudice for these early saints was well underway. But understand, this was not going to happen overnight. Like I said, we're ten years into the church's history. But even Peter is going to run into that Galatians conflict, where Paul has to confront him to his face. When those narrow-minded believers from Jerusalem come to Galatia, Peter moves from the Gentile feasting to the kosher table so that he doesn't want to get hassled by these believers who aren't yet free from all that hang-up. And Paul says to Peter, "You're stumbling everybody!" In fact, he stumbled Barnabas, a guy that is held in such high esteem in the Scriptures. But he so looked up to Peter that, "Hey, if Peter's gonna do that, I should do that." So it's going to take a while. The work of God takes time, and I only bring that up to say to you sometimes you have to be patient with one another while the Lord works out the junk in our lives. We're all in the process, aren't we? We're saved, but we're being saved every day. Not that we're not going to go to heaven, but we need a lot of delivering. Some of you a lot more than others. (Laughing) No. That's not true. We all need to have that moving forward. So be careful when you start setting people aside and removing them from your hearts and minds through prejudice. The grace of God will, indeed, bring life.

So, for now, these in Jerusalem held their peace. It's a blessing when God takes our vision and understanding of His ways, and He takes us beyond our circle of heart, if you will, and He expands our vision. In the next couple of years, as we watch the church unfold, you're going to find this constant - these guys kept silent here. If you get to Acts 15, they're hardly silent. They're angry, they're debating with each other, they want to make rules, they have the conflict about circumcision and joining the Jewish church before being part of the church of Jesus. And there's a lot of testimony. And even James finally has to go, "Well, I think we'll just go with grace, then." But James - you've read the book of James. He's a tough guy with grace. And yet he's saved by grace. It took him a long time. For some of us, we come, and it takes us a long time. But, look, if you can discover God's leading as Peter does - it's a good outline, I think - then God's interested in unity of the church, not prejudices that divide. God's grace is color blind. He doesn't know any cultural qualifications, and He's not interested in nationality or social class. We've just got to be where Peter was. "Peter, the Lord has sent you to tell us how we can be saved, me and my family." That's the question. That's the issue that we need to be dealing with. We must love as God loves.

I think if you go back and read these eighteen verses, especially, you'll find there's this great focus on the work of the Holy Spirit. He's mentioned in this account several times. And Cornelius is a good guy. Everything you read about him up until he gets saved is that he's a good guy. But being a good guy doesn't make you saved. But if you're hungry, God will find you, and He'll feed you life.

From this point on in the book of Acts (verse 19, forward), literally the focus is upon the salvation of the Gentiles. Oh, there're some stories about Paul going into the synagogues, but for the most part it is the gospel going to the uttermost parts of the earth. It's gone to Jerusalem, it's gone to Samaria, it's gone to the next county and, for this matter, to the next land over. But now it's going to go to the world, and Paul will be that guy that takes it to the Gentiles. So next week, we will see Barnabas in Antioch. Antioch - we'll show you where it is, but it's quite a ways from Jerusalem, and there God will start a work amongst Gentiles in Barnabas' life. But he's not a pastor, he's an encourager. Encouragers can get a lot of people gathered together. Everybody loves an encourager. But he doesn't feel like he's much of a teacher, so he goes to Tarsus (which is just outside of Antioch, not very far), finds Paul, drags him back to Antioch, and says, "Come on, teach us. Teach these Gentiles. God's got a calling on your life." And Paul, ten years later, goes, "All right." So he stays there for a year and begins to teach. They call the

believers Christians for the first time in that church, in Antioch. And Antioch becomes the center of missions around the world (in the book of Acts). Jerusalem is a place for impoverished, struggling, poor and kind of under-the-thumb-of-Rome Christians. But up here, in Antioch in Syria, they are just on fire for the Lord, and they're sending out pastors everywhere. And they become, really, the basis for the missionary center for the early church. And, like I said, that's where the Christians are first called Christians. They're tagged with that title. "Christ-like." But it wasn't a compliment; it was a criticism, it was a curse word. "You bunch of Christians, you bunch of Christ-like people." I don't mind people calling me that. How 'bout you?

So we'll pick up with that next week. So read ahead beginning in verse 19, maybe to the end of the chapter.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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