

27—Act 11.1-18—God Did This!

- I. Introduction
 - a. The book of Acts is the story of how the word of God spread and at this point, particularly how the Gentiles received the word of God—the gospel.
 - b. I’m not sure we feel how strange and difficult this change was for Israel when you had been told all your life to stay away from the nations and their gods. It would be like me saying to you, “Stop reading the Bible and praying.” This was a major change they had not worked through yet.
 - c. In fact, the length and repetition of these events are necessary to confirm the implications brought about in this change.
- II. Main Point
 - a. Salvation to the Gentiles, planned and wrought by God, is questioned then accepted
- III. Outline
 - a. They Heard the news but Contended
 - b. Peter Explains...God did it
 - c. Criticism to Worship
- IV. Exposition
 - a. The Bible never shies away from the hard stuff. The Lord did not edit out the challenges of the church. Therefore, we must learn from them too...maybe more so. The excitement they may have had from rejoicing with the angels in heaven over Cornelius and his household being saved eventually turns to conflict. Let’s not avoid those contending with Peter. They heard but some took issue. Let’s figure out why this happened.
 - i. Obviously, there’s no conflict if they had not heard the news. In verse 1, Luke tells us that the apostles and brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God.
 1. The primary thing we learn in verse one is that they heard.
 - a. I’m not sure how Facebook worked in the first century but somehow the report went throughout Judea.
 - b. They now have to process this information without having been there. Second-hand information has its limitations. As Abraham Lincoln once said, “You can’t believe everything you read on Facebook.”
 - c. But seriously, this is a big deal. Luke tells us it’s a big deal by how large this story is and how often the primary message is repeated.
 - d. Luke seems to imply the entire church has heard the news which had been exclusively made up of Jewish people.
 2. Let’s take note of what they heard
 - a. They heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God.
 - i. What if you heard that I had gotten a ticket for reckless driving before asking me about it? There could be a wide range of thoughts about what really happened.
 - ii. But let’s say you all come and ask me about it and I confirm that I did get a ticket but I drove like a madman because a spider was crawling on my neck. I killed the bloody thing leaving no evidence of its existence. Therefore, the officer did not believe my story and wrote me a ticket.
 - iii. All the church knows is that the Gentiles received the word of God.
 1. Obviously, some of them started thinking and talking among themselves and asking questions like you would have done when you heard of me getting a ticket.

- b. To receive the word of God is to repent of one's sins and trust in the saving work of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit that we might follow Christ.
 - i. This is something that should bring about praise to God for saving the souls of these people.
 - ii. And we might note that 10:47, it says that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit. To receive the word is to receive the Holy Spirit. Faith is the receiving of the gift of Christ and his salvation.
 - iii. But it's *more* than receiving information but rather responding to the demands of the gospel.
 - 1. You cannot have the promises of the gospel without submitting to the demands of the gospel.
 - 2. You must repent. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other.
 - 3. Repentance "is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." (Grudem)
 - 4. Our confession of faith says: "We believe that repentance and faith are inseparable graces wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God and are essential to salvation."
 - 5. Have you repented? The promises belong only to those who have faith and repentance.
- ii. We must move on now. Let see what some concluded from hearing that the Gentiles received the word of God.
 - 1. We only know from 10:48 that Peter stayed with Cornelius an uncertain number of days. Some translate the word as "few" while others "several." There's no way of knowing how long Peter stayed.
 - 2. We get the impression that Peter could have gone other places before returning to Jerusalem.
 - a. However long it was, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision criticized him.
 - i. We really don't know who this group is but it becomes more distinct by the time we reach chapter 15. But they are Jews who bore the mark of the covenant people of God. Circumcision was the sign that you were in a covenant relationship with God bound by the law of Moses.
 - ii. The term could be understood a few different ways.
 - 1. It could simply mean—the Jewish Christians.
 - 2. My translation goes with Circumcision Party.
 - 3. Others use circumcised believers.
 - 4. Literally translated is says, "those from the circumcision"
 - 5. However one translates it, it needs to maintain the word circumcision because it is setting up a conflict with the uncircumcised.
 - b. That's the primary thing we need to hear—the circumcised Jewish Christians took issue.
 - c. They concluded from the information they had that Peter had crossed the line.
 - 3. Here's the first thing the circumcised believers say to the apostle Peter:
 - a. They say nothing about being saved and baptized. But in V. 3 "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

- b. As I mentioned in the introduction, this would have been like me telling you to stop reading your bible and stop praying.
- c. We struggle to understand why this is problem. Why can't they eat catfish? Why can't they sow two different seeds in their fields? Why do their shirts have to be made of only one type of fabric? What does a cloven foot and chewing the cud have to do with uncleanness?
 - i. All of these things are declared unclean or unholy because God said they were. He was teaching his people to be holy, that is distinct among the nations. I would argue this had to happen because of the fall. More about that in a moment.
 - 1. "Violating any of the regulations relating to clean and unclean animals rendered one unclean and thus unable to enter into community worship" (Sailhamer p. 110).
 - 2. Also, if you touched that which was unclean you became unclean even if you are unaware of it.
 - 3. With such laws in place, avoiding Gentiles who were perpetually unclean was necessary.
 - 4. This transition within the community of those who had repented and believed in Jesus wasn't easy.
 - 5. But Jesus had taught his disciples:
 - a. (Mk. 7:18-19) Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)
 - 6. What comes out of a person is what defiles him.
 - a. (Mk. 7:20-23) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."
 - ii. These laws were aiming at the heart but the people failed to see it.
 - iii. How did this change? These guys have a legitimate question that Peter is just now beginning to figure out and these who take issue want help figuring it out.
 - 1. Paul's statement in Ephesians makes it clear what changed this: (Eph. 2:11-13) ¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
 - 2. The blood of Christ changed this!
 - a. Paul's explain the change effected by this: (Eph. 2:8) ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith.

- iv. Look. We can easily do the same thing as these contending with Peter.
 - 1. Do you think giving of your tithes and offerings, an outward sign, is because Jesus wants a hand out or needs your money? No. He's after your heart.
 - 2. We will be taking the Lord's Supper here in a moment—another outward sign that we are people of the new covenant. Like these Jews who ate kosher food and keep their distance from Gentiles, you can participate outwardly before everyone here but have never inwardly changed. You can whitewash a grave but it's still dead on the inside.
- b. As we move to the next point, I'm going to make it shorter even though it is the bulk of this section. We have heard it multiple times but I want to highlight what Peter is making clear to those contending with him—God did this. This new beginning was brought about by God himself.
 - i. He tells the story from his perspective and his timeline by beginning where the Lord began with him, not Cornelius.
 - ii. I think it's worth noting that just because Peter is an apostle doesn't give him automatic approval rights. He has some explaining to do.
 - iii. This new beginning that started after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ now has implications for Gentiles too.
 - 1. These are not new categories that the scriptures are silent on. I mean, Peter has already stated that **all the prophets** bear witness that EVERYONE who believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins through his name.
 - 2. The Abrahamic covenant in (Gen. 12:2-3) ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
 - a. How will all the families of the earth be blessed?
 - i. (Gal. 3:8-14) ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"-- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.
 - iv. Now Peter's explanation: God did this; not me!
 - 1. Peter retells the story.
 - a. He's in Joppa praying, and in a trance, I saw a vision.
 - i. Where did that come from? The Lord!
 - b. Something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me!
 - i. Who lets the sheet down from heaven?
 - ii. Who causes it to come directly to Peter?

- c. The sheet has all kinds of animals.
 - i. Who put those in the sheet?
 - ii. Who created all the animals?
 - 1. Were not all of them at creation good?
 - 2. So, we might conclude this new beginning under the second Adam who did not fail begins and remains differently...maybe the way it was intended?
- d. A voice said to Peter, "Arise, Peter; kill and eat."
 - i. Who does Peter respond to? The Lord, right?
 - ii. Who responds to Peter? The Lord
 - iii. This happened three times
- e. The sheet is drawn up into heaven
 - i. Who did that?
- f. Three men arrive at the door.
 - i. Who sent them? An angel with a message from the Lord.
- g. Then Peter is told to go down to them, making no distinction.
 - i. Who told him? The Spirit
- h. The man tells the story about where he got the instructions to send for Peter in Joppa.
 - i. From the angel!
 - 1. He will declare a message by which you will be saved, you and your household.
 - 2. Not might be saved. Will be saved.
- i. Peter begins speaking the gospel
 - i. This new beginning, begins for the Gentiles when they hear the gospel!
 - ii. While Peter is speaking, what happens? The Holy Spirit falls upon those who have faith and repent.
- j. Peter remembers the word of who? The Lord Jesus
 - i. (Acts 11:16) 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'
 - ii. The implication is, God gave...(hear that)...God gave the same gift to the Gentiles and he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- k. Peter asked the circumcised believers a question
 - i. Who was I that I could stand in God's way?
 - ii. In other words, God did this...all of it.
- l. Are you okay with that?
 - i. Peter's question implies that he did not have the power to hinder what God was doing.
 - ii. (Tit. 3:4-7) ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
- c. The final point ties into those verse: the criticism ceased; their worship began.
 - i. The explanation from Peter is accepted. They saw the clear working of God carrying out his redemptive plan to gather a people for himself from all nations. The blood of Christ made that possible. This is what happens when we see that God is the one who saves.

- ii. Praise is the obvious outworking of the work of God's grace. Let the nations be glad! And may the Lamb receive the reward for his sufferings!

V. Response

- a. As we come to the table this morning, we need to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:3). (2 Pet. 1:10) ...brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.
 - i. Prayer...silent reflection.

VI. The Lord's Supper

- a. Our posture should be humble and lowly. We do not deserve to come to the table on our own merits but on the merits of Christ alone!
- b. What should we remember?
 - i. (2 Tim. 2:8-9) ⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David
 - ii. (Phil. 3:7-11) ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
 - iii. (Tit. 3:3-7) ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
 - iv. (Heb. 12:2-3) ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.