

Acts 11:1-30

“Getting A Grip”

Now the context of ch 11 connects us *to*, or is a continuation *of* what was happening there in ch 10, and as far as context goes it probably would've been a better ch break at the end of vs 18 of ch 11 rather than at vs 48 of ch 10. But be that as it may perhaps you remember the particular premise that's developed throughout ch 10 as we seen Peter using the keys to the kingdom to open up the door of salvation to the Gentiles. and From that we're able to perceive the premise, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Gal 3:26-28 That's sort of the condensed version of what we find being expressed to us throughout the 10th ch of the book of Acts. That common ground that we share in Christ, the fact that ethnicity, gender, social/economic status means nothing to God with regard to His love *for* us, or His desire to seek *after* and save us.

The bible teaches us that God is not willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He doesn't have favorites, or look upon one group of people with more respect than the other, He loves humanity period. So that if you're apart of humanity, you qualify as one whom God loves, you qualify as one whom God desires to forgive, to save, and to set free from the bondage of sin. and God not only wants to save you, (because I have a suspicion that most of us here are already in that category) but once He saves you, He wants to sanctify you, He wants you to grow in your love relationship with Him, He wants to work more and more of you *out* of the equation that more and more of Him might be worked *into* your life. You're familiar with how J.B. said it, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* John 3:30

You see after salvation comes the process of sanctification, not *positionally*, because your position in Christ is perfect from the moment you receive Him, you are robed in His righteousness, but *practically* it's an on going ever growing process this side of heaven. The apostle John put it like this, *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”* 1 John 3:2-3 Well all that to say that Peter came to understand that though salvation was *of* the Jews it was never intended exclusively *for* the Jews, and how that the love and salvation of God extended even to the Gentiles.

You see Peter was open to God challenging him, stretching him beyond his own ideals and understanding that God might use his life in a greater way. We have a tendency to get set in our ways, once we think we've got a grip on something we resist the idea of perhaps being wrong, or needing to gain a deeper insight or understanding of the matter.

A few days before the events of ch 10 you'd have never convinced Peter that God would receive a Gentile just like he was. But because he shared God's heart for the lost, was willing to re-evaluate his position in the light of God's Word, God was able to bring him along in his maturity, was able to use him in a greater capacity. Listen, the same will lie true for you, and for me, as long as we remain open to being challenged and changed by the *Spirit* of God, as long we're able to receive and re-evaluate our position in the light of the *Word* of God, remaining flexible, and teachable He'll be able to use our lives in an ever greater capacity. Peter was blown away at what God was doing, how He was extending His mercy *to*, causing His Spirit to fall *upon* the Gentiles, but he was able to accept it, because he wanted his heart to be right with God's. Now its time for the other apostles, and the church back in Jerusalem to get that same grip, notice.

Vs1-3

Few things, again we're able to see here that Peter wasn't at all regarded as any kind of a pope, or overlord in that he's immediately called to the carpet and placed on the defensive. Because these guys have some concerns, and they're *concerns* that have elevated to *contentions*, they really weren't in the mode of *conversing* with Peter, they were *contending* with him. and The primary point of contention wasn't so much that he shared a *message* with the Gentiles as it was that he shared a *meal* with the Gentiles. They say, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" and You have to remember the intimacy with which the Jew in that culture perceived sharing the common meal, because they didn't do the utensil thing so much, you used your God given meat hooks. and You would both pull from the same dish, dip in the same bowl, and the idea there was that the same thing that is sustaining you is sustaining me and in essence we're one with each other in this way. and Gentiles were ceremonially unclean, detestably defiled in the eyes of a kosher Jew, and they just couldn't believe that Peter would be willing to defile himself, and share sustenance with a Gentile!

Now there's sort of an interesting thing taking place here in that when Peter was told by the Spirit back in ch 10 to go with the 3 Gentiles that were pursuing him, he was told to go with them "doubting nothing." The words translated "doubting nothing" could also have been translated, "making no difference" or "no distinction", the point being that he was to go with them making *no difference*, or no distinction between him (as a Jew) and them (as Gentiles). But this word that's translated "contended" here in vs 2 speaks of just the opposite, it means "to make a difference" which is to say that though Peter was told to make *no* difference, here they're making a very *definite* difference, and forcing sides to the situation.

You see they haven't yet been brought into this clarification that Peter has, they're confused, and what I want you to see here is how easily *confusion* can bring about *contention*. They didn't understand the situation, there was a lack of clarification, which resulted in contention. Man how the enemy loves to weave confusion into the midst of a situation, all the more if it's a work of God. Why, because it creates discord, makes for a division in the body of Christ, as we've mentioned before this was a radical pivoting point in church history, the doors of resistance are about to be blown off and the gospel will pour forth into the entire known world. Now do you think that sounds like a good idea to our enemy? No way, so it doesn't take much, just a play on some natural prejudices here to get the pot stirred up, and because there's confusion, there's contention, and a real potential problem. Now this places Peter in a real precarious position, because how he handles this moment is critical.

Even so when *you're* placed in a confusing/contentious situation you need to know that how *you* handle it is critical. Peter could've gone on the defensive, gotten offended at the fact that his integrity would be placed under scrutiny. After all he's an apostle, a leader in the church, hand picked by Jesus to be apart of laying the foundation that the church will be established on. "and *You're* contending with *me!*" and It would've gotten real ugly and no doubt gone down the path toward division. But I love the fact that Peter didn't take offense over the fact that they would examine him in this manner. He didn't consider himself above reproach, I'm sure that to some degree he anticipated their response because its exactly the way he'd have responded if he were in their shoes. They're confused, and don't know what to make of the matter, so rather than getting all uptight, Peter just takes the time to tactfully explain the situation. The bible says, "*A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.*" Prov 15:1 and Again, "*The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.*" Prov 17:14

Peter exercises real wisdom here in doing just that, he senses the strife, and so he speaks to them calmly, tactfully, no doubt softly so as to turn away wrath and stop the contention before a quarrel starts. and This is some real practical advice for us when we find ourselves in a sticky situation, don't get all offended and blow up, stay calm, and explain the situation so as to bring the contention to an end. Don't give the enemy a foothold, be wise as serpents, gentle as doves. I'm sure that this is why God used Peter to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles as opposed to Philip who was already there in Caesarea, because they would at least give Peter a hearing due to his position/platform in the church, Philip they would've just excommunicated, they'd have never even given ear to him. (Notice vs 4)

Vs4-12

Notice how God is emphasizing over and over again His love and salvation for all mankind alike. That it doesn't matter who you are, where you've been what you've done, how "unclean" or "defiled" the rest of the world may see you, it's His desire to save you and shed His grace *upon* you.

You see this wasn't originally written in type, it was penned on a scroll. and Scrolls were very limited in their space, the longest you could get would be 35' because any longer than that they'd get all bulky and difficult to handle. But the point is that every inch of space on that scroll was precious, you wouldn't take the time to repeat yourself just because you needed some "filler" material. So by the fact that the Holy Spirit saw fit to have Luke record this incident almost verbatim *twice*, and certain parts of it 3x, speaks of its importance in the heart of God. "What God has cleansed you must not call common," .

Now this could very easily segue into a self condemnation type topic. Because this not only goes for our views of other people, but what about you? Has God cleansed *you*? If so, you're not to be beating up and getting down on yourself as though you're just a "creep", "beastly" "unclean." Isaiah wrote, "*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*" Isa 61:10

It's an awesome thing to be vastly aware of the fact that we're "creeps" with "fowl" mentalities, and yet God would/has cleansed me eternally, out of His great love with which He loved me. But so often I'm unable to stop there, just rejoicing in the work of salvation that He's accomplished for me, I'm unable to simply receive grace gracefully, there's something in me that says, "You don't deserve that type of unconditional, unmerited love, you've got to earn God's love, somehow prove yourself worthy of it." and I suspect there's something similar in you, and when we seek to just cast our care upon the Lord joyfully, and just abide in His presence freely, here comes that voice, "What are you doing? You're a creep, a four-footed beast, foul, and unclean." Listen, God help us to learn this response, "What God has cleansed you must not call common, and He has cleanse *me*." You've been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, *walk* in it, *rejoice* in it, *rest* in it, receive *peace* through it.

Now there in vs 12 Peter reveals why it is that he doesn't have anything to hide, he's open to their scrutiny, and welcomes their challenge to his integrity. Because "The Spirit told me." Which is to say, "This isn't my doing, it's the Lord's, and if you have a problem its not with me, it's with God." and Notice how accountable Peter was, he took 6 men with him, the law required that a matter be established by the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses, Peter took 6. Why? So that they could testify of the fact that everything he did was above board, and blameless. The bible teaches us that we're to lead accountable, blameless lives. Now blameless isn't the same thing as sinless, we're going to make mistakes, but we're to be blameless in our activities, not willfully subjecting ourselves to questionable circumstances. You see had Peter gone alone, there'd have been a big question mark on his integrity.

But because he had 6 witnesses they were able to affirm his credibility. So the principle at work is that he's only being obedient to the leading of the Lord, but on the practical side he has witnesses to back him up, I just can't stress how important accountability in a given matter is.

Vs13-14

Meaning that he would share the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ with them, and through adhering to the message they would be saved. The bible tells us, “*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;*” Ps 19:7 Paul the apostle said, “...*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,*” Rom 1:16 and again “...*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Rom 10:17 There’s power in the Word of God, the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, now the angel wasn’t guaranteeing Cornelius that his whole household would be saved, though that’s exactly what happened. The idea here is that the message that Peter will bring contains the power to save not only you, but everyone you know as well if they’ll by faith believe just as you. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, not just you, but your whole household to, there’s no one who’s beyond the saving grace of God, now that’s good news.

Vs15-16

You see Peter continues to affirm to them that he had nothing to do with it, he’s saying things like, “The *Spirit* told me” “The *Holy Spirit* fell upon them” he’s pointing out to them “The word of the Lord” in vs 17 he’ll say, “*God* gave” them the same gift, so this isn’t my deal, it’s God’s.

But notice vs 15, when he says that “...the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us at the beginning,” that tells us a couple of things. What he’s saying (as we seen in ch 10) is that they began to speak in tongues, and the reason that the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles in an identical manner as He did the Jews is so that they might understand that God loves them, cares for them, and wants to save them and use them just the same. That God makes no difference between Jew and Gentile, we’re all sinners in need of a savior.

But then #2 It tells us that speaking in tongues wasn’t as quite of a common phenomenon in the early church as some may perceive. We’ve read of it 3 or 4 times so far, but the history of the book to this point is some 10yrs or so since Pentecost. and Peter takes them back in their minds clear to that point so that they’ll have a reference as to what took place. and Even Peter had some difficulty with what was taking place, but the key to unlocking his understanding was what? Underline it, vs 16 “I remembered the word of the Lord.” How important it is to *remember* God’s Word as it pertains to your given situation. It brings peace to your life, discernment to your situation, direction to your circumstance. Peter didn’t know what to make of what was happening, “Then I remembered the word of the Lord.”

Maybe you're considering a questionable (at best) situation to be involved in, "Remember the word of the Lord" What's God's Word say about that? Maybe you don't understand why it is that as a Christian you're undergoing such difficult times, "Remember the Word of the Lord." How the testing of your faith produces patience, how that tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. How that hope doesn't disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. God's Word will speak to your every situation, look for it, wait on it, remember it.

Vs17-18

They just sat there in stunned silence, what could they say? Peter had the leading of God's Spirit, the support of God's Word, and the credibility of witnesses, to verify it all. and It's so important with us that we don't just try to justify ourselves by simply trying to get people to see that we were led of God's Spirit, but that we have the support of God's word to back it up. Peter had both, with witnesses to boot.

Again we see how they were willing to re-evaluate *themselves* and *their* position in the light of God's Word, and God did an awesome thing. Sure it'll be a struggle for awhile to come, but they were willing to allow their prejudices and predetermined positions to be overcome by God's Word and God's work, and may that be all of our testimonies.

Vs19-21

So the page flips back here to the stoning of Stephen as a reference point as to why these guys were scattering all over the place. The persecution of the believers caused them to flee for their lives. and They were scattering up the coast line going even as far as Antioch, the 3rd largest city in the Roman empire after Rome and Alexandria some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. and So far they'd just been preaching to the Jews, but there were a few of them who had grown up in predominantly Gentile areas, "Cyprus and Cyrene" who when *they* came to Antioch they began to preach to Greeks. We read "Hellenists" in our NKJV but it would be better translated "Greeks" or "Grecians" the whole point here is that in vs 19 people were preaching to Jews but these guys in vs 20 are preaching to pure pagans in contrast to what's happening in vs 19. Antioch had about 500,000 people populating it and it was predominantly pagan. and Vs 21 tells us that God was really honoring the fact that they were giving out the gospel to the otherwise pagan people because a *great* number believed, as evidenced by the fact that they turned to the Lord.

Vs22-24

You remember Barnabas, he's the one who gave so generously, the one who took Saul when everyone else was terrified of him, trusted him, took him to the apostles and extended the right hand of fellowship to him. His name means "Son of encouragement" so he was just the right man for the job here. Now how did he *see* the grace of God? He saw it in the transformed lives of all the people who were believing *in* and turning *to* the Lord.

I love what it says here, “He was glad” because often times we grumble, when God blesses a work down the street, and ours seems to be just limping along, but Barnabas *was glad*, just excited to see God moving and blessing anywhere that He saw fit for His glory. and Being true to his name “He encouraged them all” or “exhorted them all” that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. (Underline that in your bibles) A huge key in your continuance with the Lord lies in your *purpose of heart*. If you don’t purpose in your heart that you’re going to abide in, or persevere in, or be steadfast in your commitment to the Lord, you’re only setting yourself up for a fall and a slipping away. Notice it doesn’t say “with purpose of mind” why? Because my mind is fickle, I’ll change my mind over and over again about the same thing. But my heart won’t budge so quick, God is always after our heart, purpose in your heart to abide in Christ, through the study of His Word, time spent in prayer, and in fellowship with the body.

Vs25-26

There’s a little history lesson for ya, “Christian” basically means “Follower of Christ” or some say “Little Christ” “Christ people.” Commentators vary as to whether or not the name was given out of disdain, or why exactly they were labeled as Christ people, or Jesus people so to speak. But that doesn’t really matter anyway, to me its just neat to think of being so closely identified with Christ, that you become labeled accordingly. Paul said that he determined to know nothing among those to whom he ministered except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. and So focused was his teaching on Christ, that they became labeled “Christ people” “Christians”

Why do you think that Barnabas took off for Tarsus for Saul anyway? Because Barnabas was a man who wanted what was best for the kingdom, he didn’t feel like he needed the spot light.

“ I just happened to know a man who was raised in a Grecian culture, who can identify with these people, yet he’s a scholar in the scriptures, who just happens to have a divine call on his life to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles.” So he takes off another 100 miles or so to find Saul, and he brings him back and says, you’ve got to check this out. and For a whole year, they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.

Antioch will become the new “home base” if you will of the church, as opposed to Jerusalem. Now I want you to see something before we close, in vs 20 these people received “preaching” the gospel was proclaimed, the people were being saved, then in vs 23 they received “exhortation”, that encouragement to continue on with Christ, not to grow weary in doing well knowing that their Labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Now in vs 26 they're receiving Saul's "teaching." From preaching, to exhorting, to teaching, and that's the proper order. There's a lot of preaching that goes on in churches today, and that's part of it, but preaching is for the lost, it's the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But once people have come to Christ, we need to be exhorted to continue in Christ, and taught practically how to do that. That's not something we learn over night, they were there a year, just teaching them, rooting them, getting them grounded so that they could with purpose of heart continue with the Lord. and The *teaching* of the scriptures is what will make for a spiritually healthy body of believers. "Do you love Me Peter, feed My sheep"

Vs27-30

So God was beginning to yoke together the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, with the Gentile believers in Antioch, and He used this famine as a means for the Gentile believers to really minister, and demonstrate the love of Christ in them to the body there in Jerusalem, they weren't 2 different organizations, they were the same organism, no difference, all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Vs 29 gives us just a glimpse into the proper protocol for the believers attitude towards giving. "Each according to his ability" there are those today who would encourage you to step out by faith and write out a check well beyond your ability, that's not biblical, we call that greed. But we're to determine each according to our ability, there are those who really press to give all that they can and God honors that (widows mite), but by the same token there are those whom God has blessed tremendously in the area of finances who don't give anywhere close to their ability, that's wrong as well. We're to give unto the Lord according to our ability, it's really an aspect of our worship, the giving of ourselves.

But Ch 11 shows us how the church had gotten a grip on God's heart, or perhaps more accurately how God got a grip on their heart, and they were opened up, and willing to receive the further purposes of God's work through their lives. and May you be open to giving God a grip on your heart, that you might be opened up and willing to receive the further purposes of His work in your life as well.

Maybe the 1st work He wants to do in your life is to forgive you of your sin and make you brand new in Him. You've never given your heart to Christ, why don't you make yourself available to God getting a grip on your heart, just open your heart and your life to Him, ask Him to forgive you of your sin and to come in to your life and fill you with His Spirit.

Prayer points: Search us, show us the areas that You want to change in us. Thank You that You've cleansed us, help us to receive Your grace gracefully, and to continue with You with purpose of heart.