



Sermon Text: Acts 11:1-18

Sermon Date: March 4, 2018

As chapter 11 opens, Luke retells the story of Peter's recent ministry to the Gentiles. This is the third retelling of these historic events in the last two chapters of Acts. Clearly, God wants us to pay careful attention to what He is teaching through this story. We walked through the text by examining it in three stages.

THE CRITICISM

The news of the Gentiles receiving the gospel spread quickly, so Peter returns to Jerusalem to give an update. While there 'the circumcision party' criticized him for breaking kosher and eating with uncircumcised men. They don't complain that Gentiles are saved, they complain that Gentiles are welcomed as Gentiles—as equals. James Boice explains, "We do not have this exact problem today, but we have something like it. We are glad to have other people join us as long as they become like us." This same attitude infects Christians and churches throughout the world. We want to reach people for the gospel, but we want them to come on our conditions.

The reason God repeats this story three times is because in this historic event God unshackles the gospel and the church from a single culture. Wherever the gospel goes, those taking it should dress it in native garb. Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 9, we must become all things to all people, that by all means we might save some (1 Cor. 9:22).

THE CLARIFICATION

Beginning in verse 4, Peter gives an orderly account of what happened from his perspective. He highlights the divine vision (4-10), the divine command (11-12), the divine preparation (13-14), and the divine action (15-17). In doing so, he makes it clear that God was at work. It isn't simply Peter who welcomed "uncircumcised men," God has done so—He has welcomed believing Gentiles into His family on equal terms with believing Jews.

THE CONCLUSION

Hearing Peter's orderly retelling, the church's criticisms are silenced and they recognize that God is at work. Jews and Gentiles are saved in the exact same way.

TWO TAKE-AWAYS

The reason that God repeats this story is because this text is profoundly important, not just theologically but missiologically. If Gentiles were required to embrace Jewish culture in order to be saved, the church would never become the universal missionary force it has become. And yet, churches regularly fall into the mindset of verses 1-3—we will welcome you as long as you become like us. How can we avoid that common error?

1. The gospel is bigger than we think it should be.

Often we only want God's grace to apply to those who meet our standards first—who become like us. But the gospel decimates that falsehood. We will never meet God's standard or get ourselves to God's grace, so God's grace came to us. While we were still enemies, Christ died for us. Christ reaches out to Jews as Jews, Gentiles as Gentiles, Liberians as Liberians, and so forth.

2. The gospel is smaller than we think it should be.

Not everything is the gospel, and not every issue is a "gospel issue." The gospel isn't your political party or social issues or religious preferences or cultural expressions. The results of the gospel are not the gospel. The gospel is not what we do but what God has done for us in Christ. When we fail to firmly grasp these things we add to the gospel will eventually overshadow the gospel and supplant the gospel in our focus. When we add things to the gospel, we eventually lose the gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What are some ways churches today reflect the attitude of the Circumcision Party—"we will welcome you as long as you become like us?"
3. How must Peter's ministry to the Gentiles impact the way our church fulfills its mission?