

Series Title: FOR ALL PEOPLE: A Journey through the Book of Acts, Part 6.

Sermon Title: Week 6: An Invitation into Life. Scripture: Acts 11:1-18

Date: 03-21-21

† Peter, Cornelius, the Holy Spirit, and what happened next...

- **SO! We have finished the story of Peter, Cornelius, and what God DID THROUGH THEM by the Holy Spirit. Acts 10. Absolutely essential part of story of ACTS, story of birth of Christianity, and history of God's work in the world to reconcile to himself ALL THINGS (Colossians 1:20). Truth that all people- Jews, Gentiles, men, women, slave, free... ALL are welcome and invited to respond to good news of Grace of God through Jesus Christ.**
- **NOW, as we move into Acts 11, we see WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. And what happened is that the WORD GOT AROUND. Something like this is not going to be a secret.**

Acts 11:1 *The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.*

- **This word got back to the apostles in Jerusalem- the church leadership, which is still all Jewish at this time, and they are not amused. To them, this still sounds unthinkable- that God's messiah to the PEOPLE OF ISRAEL could also be the messiah to all the world? How can that be?**
- **So Peter is recalled to Jerusalem to explain his actions. At the end of his talk, Peter says something you can almost miss, but it's incredibly important...not only because it shows the spiritual transformation happening in Peter, but because it points to a key truth about WHO GOD IS, and the nature of WHAT HE IS DOING... both then, and now.**

Reality! God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is alive and active in all the world! His agenda is to accomplish His activity through YOU.

- **Might not be best grammar... but it is a central truth of ALL SCRIPTURE.**
- **BUT, before we go there... SUNDAY MARCH 21st, PE, TO, Thanks...**
- **Ready? Have you Bible? Notes? Let's jump in. SO, Peter heads back to Jerusalem... he still has to be just blown away, astonished at what God had done, and he probably had both great excitement and some trepidation about the response he would receive from his fellow apostles. And he was right to have trepidation, because when we arrived, he was faced with...**

† **Pushback!**

Acts 11:2 *So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

- **'circumcised believers'... ALL the believers in Jerusalem were circumcised, so Luke here probably refers to the MOST conservative of the believers, for whom the LAW of Moses was still of paramount importance. To their thinking, Peter had committed a fundamental violation of God's law, a view held by Peter himself before God showed him different.**
- **The sense here is that they weren't so much upset that these gentiles had become believers (although that was astonishing), but that Peter had associated with them in the first place. By his actions, Peter had crossed two VERY strong religious and cultural barriers**

- **First, he ATE with them. As it was a gentile household, it's very possible, if not likely, that the food served would have been UNCLEAN by the standards of the LAW. This would have made PETER UNCLEAN... again, something no self-respecting or God-fearing Jewish man would EVER willingly do.**
- **But just as bad, if not worse, Peter experienced 'TABLE FELLOWSHIP' with Cornelius, his family and friends- likely over an extended period of time (end of 10, Cornelius invited Peter to stay for a while).**
- **We can relate to this. When you have a meal with someone... a lovingly prepared, lengthy meal—the food is important, but even MORE IMPORTANT is the time together. The conversation, sharing of your lives... it is VERY INTIMATE – sometimes almost sacred- EXPERIENCE... picture of FAMILY.**
- **PETER AND HIS FRIENDS had done this with UNTOUCHABLES.**
- **You see, for the apostles in Jerusalem, they weren't necessarily opposed to Gentiles becoming believers, but FIRST they needed to become JEWS. They needed to become CLEAN, circumcised, according to the Law of Moses, THEN they could become believers. This will set up a conflict that won't be resolved for several years, until an event we call the Jerusalem council, which we will see in Acts 15.**
- **The irony here is that these Jewish believers who were offended by Peter's actions are behaving just as the Pharisees when they criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. YOU JUST DON'T DO THIS!**
- **Peter! If God wants to convert these gentile sinners, then he can do that. But we shouldn't associate with them. They are unclean, immoral, DIFFERENT. If they want to join us, they first need to become like us. HOLD THAT THOUGHT.**
- **Peter has been chastised. The English translation doesn't really do it justice- this was a strong rebuke. AND SO, Peter responds... he doesn't get defensive and try to justify himself, rather, he simply tells....**

✠ What God had done

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ “I 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. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

⁹ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

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

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. 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. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?”

- *In telling the story, Peter makes it clear that this was GOD AT WORK. Every step of the way, GOD is the one taking the initiative, calling Peter to follow, even over his objections.*
- *PETER'S ending here is remarkable! "If this is what God was doing, WHO WAS I to stand in God's way?" (Hinder). Hearing this, I can just imagine the other apostles thinking 'WHO ARE YOU, and what have you done with Peter?!' You see, being prideful and objecting to Jesus' plan was one of Peter's hallmarks!*
- *But now, after years of God patiently teaching Peter to trust... Peter confesses... WHO AM I, to even think I could stand in God's way? Who am I to think I could hinder God?*
- *THIS BRINGS us all the way to TODAY. Just like Peter, we need to realize that...*

✠ Reality! We cannot hinder the work of God, but we can hinder our PARTICIPATION in the work of God.

- *CHURCH- God will accomplish His work. God is sovereign, and his Grace will not be without effect. Peter and the disciples learned this as time and again they watched Jesus do things they couldn't have imagined with people they wouldn't have imagined. But all along the way, Jesus continued to call these men and women- with all of their doubts, flaws, and failures- into His work of redeeming the world.*
- *HERE's the amazing thing: just as certain is the reality that God's will WILL be done, is the certainty that God's plan, his strategy, is to carry out his will- to express his goodness, reveal himself, and accomplish His work- THROUGH US.*

Philippians 2:13 *for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

- *AND CHURCH- here, we have a choice. We CAN CHOOSE to stand in the way- as individuals and as a church- of our participation in the goodness and work of God.*

How do we do this?

- Through our SIN that so easily entangles
- *I don't need to belabor this. If we are honest with God, he will show us the areas of our lives that keep us distant.*
 - *Outright disobedience. Moral issues, areas of disobedience we are well aware of, but do our very best to rationalize and refuse to lay down*
 - *More subtle.. our PRIDE. Dishonesty. Fear. Lack of spiritual and emotional health.*
- *IN CHRIST, WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE FROM OUR BONDAGE TO SIN AND SELF. But we can still choose to live according to the patterns of that OLD PERSON we used to be... according to our flesh, our own wisdom, with life centered on self. When we do this, there are so many ways we can be taken out, hindered, and entangled....*

Hebrews 12: 1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.*

- *It is very difficult to love and follow God in one part of our life when we are resisting or ignoring him in another part. GOD WILL STILL USE US, but we won't experience the JOY of being his hands and feel (preaching from the flesh)...*
- When we value our SCRUPLES more than we value PEOPLE.

- *Scruples... great word! It literally means ‘doubt or hesitation due to the perceived morality or propriety of an action’.*
- *HEAR! God calls us into the freedom of biblical morality, but it is all too easy to use our sense of morality to AVOID PEOPLE, or even condemn people, because we don’t think they live according to our standard of what is right. Another way of putting this is that we can be WAY TO EASILY OFFENDED.*
- *It was religious scruples that led the Pharisees to accuse Jesus of being a glutton and a drunk, because Jesus hung out with people who didn’t meet the Pharisees religious standards.*
- *Likewise, it was the Apostles scruples about not being ‘unclean’ that made it so hard for them to accept gentiles as fellow believers.*
- *This requires great wisdom and honesty of heart! God will lead us to have boundaries, and it is a biblical principle to surround yourself with healthy people! But it is a sad legacy of Christian culture that at times we have valued moral performance more than we have valued people.*

- **When we are spiritually MYOPIC**

- *Another great word. It means near-sighted, or unable to see beyond ourselves. We are spiritually myopic when we only see and interpret the world through the lens of our own needs. Life is about me, and I can’t be bothered.*
- *THE THING IS, we don’t have to be consciously selfish to do this. We just get into a pattern where we DON’T LOOK UP. We’re all busy, we all have our pressures, our routines... but its way to easy for our routines to turn into RUTS. CHURCH! God call us to LOOK UP! LOOK AROUND, with a desire to see what is going on, other people’s needs, what God is wanting to do through the church, and to SEE WITH A HEART to be part of what God is doing!*
- *DIRECTLY RELATED is this... we miss out on being part of God’s work...*

- **Through our lack of EXPECTATION**

- *This is a struggle for me! In my flesh, it’s so easy just to get on autopilot, absorbed in the details around me, and not really expect God to open a door, present an opportunity, and invite me to be his hands and feet.*
- *CHURCH! GOD IS ALWAYS DOING THIS! Famous verse, Ephesians 2:10...*

Ephesians 2:10 *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

- *What if part of our prayer each morning was ‘God, help me see today what you are doing! I want to see- and respond- to whatever good work you have prepared for me to be part of today’*
- *SO, honest question to ask ourselves from time to time...*

- **What is hindering my experience of the goodness, presence, and purpose of God?**

- *Luke tells us that when Peter finished his story, the believers there HEARD HIM- they heard what God had done, and they LET GOD CHANGE THE WAY THEY WERE THINKING.*

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

- **NOW, as I said before, this wasn't the end of the drama regarding the Gospel and Gentiles. In the mind of the Jerusalem church leadership, the Gentiles were now welcome, but they would still need to FIRST be circumcised and obey the law of Moses- which would have included all the laws of what makes something clean and unclean. Even Peter will fall prey to this way of thinking, and it will be several years before this too is clarified.**
- **But this story is so wonderful because it shows that these Jewish believers, just like us, were ON A JOURNEY. One step at a time, we see God peeling back the layers of law, of religion, of tradition, so that ALL PEOPLE could hear, and receive, GOD'S INVITATION INTO LIFE.**

† In Christ, we have been given an invitation into LIFE!

- **NOT just life that we will spend with Christ in heaven when we die. LIFE that is HIS LIFE- God's goodness, God's purposes, lived out through us, RIGHT NOW.**
- **For some reason, in his sovereignty and by His grace, God has chosen to do his work through US. You. Me. Through the community of believers- his church- as we share our lives and serve alongside each other. THAT IS WHAT GOD IS DOING!**
- **As individuals, and as a church, may we not stand in the way.**