

Commentary on Acts chapters 11 by Chuck Smith 3.19.23

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March memory verse 1 Peter 1:25 (NKJV)

But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

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And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come back to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision had a fight with him, and they said, You went to men that were uncircumcised, and you ate with them. But Peter just rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it to them according to how it happened in order, and he said, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet ([Act 11:1-5](#)),

And he repeats this vision.

Now it is interesting that Luke really is limited by space. At this time, of course, they did not publish books, but they wrote everything on a scroll, and there was a limit to what you could write on a scroll. And the longest scrolls were about thirty-five feet long. And they would write these epistles on these scrolls. And, of course, they would roll it and write as they were going, rolling and unrolling the scroll. And they became very bulky if they got over thirty-five feet long.

Now the book of Acts, because of its length, would have to be recorded in the scroll of maximum limit, about thirty-five feet long. The original copy that Luke wrote of the book of Acts was probably in a thirty-five foot scroll so that you would want to conserve the space so you could tell as much of the story as you could. But for a definite reason, the Holy Spirit has this account of Peter being called to the Gentiles recorded twice in the limited space of the book of Acts. No doubt that God might bare witness to all of the Jews and to all men everywhere that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the free gift of God to every man regardless of his color or his ethnic background. So the Gospel is open to all and so the Lord sees fit to record this vision of Peter twice in the limited area of the thirty-five feet of the scroll of the book of Acts. So he tells again the vision of the sheet with the four corners.

Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold,

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immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them ([Act 11:6-12](#)),

So Peter is not taking the responsibility for what happened and he's not taking the blame. "The Spirit bade me to go. I was being directed by the Spirit of God."

doubting nothing. Moreover I took these six brothers with me, and we entered into the man's house ([Act 11:12](#)):

So Peter took the witnesses probably because he didn't know what was going to happen and he wanted witnesses when he got back on the carpet in Jerusalem to verify that the story that he told was true, that it wasn't really me, it was God who did it. I wasn't responsible. So that he wouldn't get kicked out of the early church.

And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who will tell thee words, whereby you and all of your house shall be saved ([Act 11:13-14](#)).

So the Spirit bade me to go and bring them the Gospel, the word of salvation. God has ordained to save the Gentiles.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning ([Act 11:15](#)).

I didn't touch them; I didn't do anything!

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch then as God gave them [I didn't do it. Don't blame me. As God gave to them] the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God? ([Act 11:16-17](#))

Good question isn't it? "Who am I that I can withstand the work of God?" Better that I not try to withstand the work of God. Unfortunately, there have been a lot of people who have been in that position who are trying to withstand the work of God. God begins to work and they try to withstand that work. They criticize or they find fault or, "Well, it didn't happen according to our traditional standards."

So Peter is explaining, "Who was I that I could withstand God?"

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then God also to the Gentiles has granted repentance unto life ([Act 11:18](#)).

And they accepted the work among the Gentiles. Now they weren't really ready to enter into full fellowship with the Gentiles. As we move along into the book of Acts, we will find that Peter went down to Antioch and he was eating with the Gentiles until certain

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brethren from Jerusalem came down. And then Peter separated himself because of the feelings that they had still of eating with Gentiles, and it caused a division in the church of Antioch for which Paul rebukes him. And Paul refers to that in the book of Galatians.

So the walls are tumbling, though they're not completely down. Not by a long shot. And we'll come in the fifteenth chapter to some issues that arose over this very thing.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, they traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch ([Act 11:19](#)),

Now Antioch was the third largest Roman city. After Rome and Alexandria was Antioch. A very large metropolis where the Orentes river comes into the Mediterranean sea. The basic or the chief god of Antioch was Daphene and there was a huge temple to Daphene in a laurel grove five miles from Antioch. And according to the story, Apollo fell in love with Daphene and was pursuing her. But in order to save her from being raped by Apollos, she turned into a laurel tree. And so they built this temple to Daphene there in the laurel tree grove, and the priestesses in the worship of Daphene were prostitutes. And there in the laurel groves they would reenact in their worship the seduction by Apollo of Daphene.

So their worship was very licentious. And the city of Antioch became a synonym for people who lived a very loose, licentious life. Gambling was rampant, as was all kinds of vices, moral and all. They were prevalent and rampant, so they said that a person in Antioch is a person that is living a very lustful life of vice.

But it is interesting that it was in this pagan city that the Gospel of Christ gained such a strong foothold. And the church in Antioch became the center for the mission to the Gentiles. And it was from this church of Antioch that the Gospel really spread through the Gentile world, and the missionaries would come and report to the church in Antioch. And it became one of the centers of the early church, especially the Gentile element of the early church. Now they had gone to Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch,

preaching the word but only to the Jews. [They weren't preaching to the Gentiles.] And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come Antioch, they spake to the Grecians [the Hellenists], as they preached the Lordship of Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then the tidings of these things came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would [stick or] cleave unto the Lord ([Act 11:19-23](#)).

Now Barnabas was really the ideal man to send, because his ministry was that of reconciling within the body of Christ. He was the one who, when the church in Jerusalem would have nothing to do with Paul after his conversion, brought Paul to the brothers and said, "Look, he is a brother. Receive him now as a brother." And he was the one that brought Paul into fellowship there into the church in Jerusalem. The son of

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consolation is what the name Barnabas means, and a man who reconciles opposing parties or differing parties. And so he was an ideal one to send to Antioch when this revival has broken out now among the Gentiles. He is a man who has great grace and understanding and was able to accept the work that God was doing there in Antioch.

Now he exhorted them that they should purpose in their hearts to just continue in the Lord or to cleave to the Lord, or abide in the Lord. So he exhorted them that they should purpose in their hearts, that is, make a total commitment. Not just decide in your mind. Too many decisions are made in the mind. The heart is the seat of a man's will. When you purpose in your heart, you are setting the course for your life. You're making the full commitment. He's calling on them make a full commitment of yourself to Jesus Christ because Barnabas knew that they were going to be facing persecution; they were going to be facing real problems in the Gentile world which was antagonistic to Jesus. A Gentile world that, especially there in Antioch, was given over to every vice and sexual impurity, and if you don't make a total commitment to Jesus Christ, you're going to fall by the wayside. You'll be sucked back in to that whole world system.

So he exhorted them, "Purpose in your heart you're going to stick with the Lord." Make that complete commitment. Purpose in your heart this is the way that it's going to be. Even as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah purposed in their hearts not to defile themselves when carried away to Babylon.

For he [Barnabas] was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and [many] much people were added unto the Lord. Then he departed to Tarsus, to look for Saul ([Act 11:24-25](#)):

Now he recognized that here is a work of the Holy Spirit being wrought in this Roman culture or a city that is steeped in actually the Grecian culture, but it is a major city of the ancient world. And he realized that the ministry here would take a special kind of a person, one who had been liberalized by the Holy Spirit, one who understood the Grecian culture, and yet, one who was strong in the Word.

Now Paul the apostle, at this time he was still called Saul, when he left Jerusalem, went back home to his home city of Tarsus, and this is some eight years later. I am certain that those eight years were spent by Paul making tents in Tarsus, but also sharing his faith there in the city of Tarsus. As God was preparing him still for the work that God wanted him to do.

We oftentimes make a great mistake in seeking to jump immediately into the ministry the moment we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord. It is important that our lives be prepared by the Spirit and that preparation is not an overnight preparation. During the war we had what were known in the Air Force as the ninety-day wonders. Through basic primary school and all and your first lieutenant bar is in ninety days as we were training men for the Air Force. But God has no ninety-day wonders.

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It's important that we be rooted and grounded in the Word of God and in the work of God. And it is interesting to me that this is some eleven years after Paul's conversion. He spent the first three down in Arabia there learning. Now eight more years of silence in Tarsus before Barnabas, seeing the work in Antioch, realizing that Paul would be the ideal person for this ministry, went to Tarsus to look for Saul.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch ([Act 11:26](#)).

The word Christian is actually Christ folks. Now during a period a few years ago, there was a title placed upon a bunch of the hippies that were accepting Jesus as The Jesus People. That's much like this title. It was given in sort of a derisive way to church. They would say, "Oh, they're Christ folks, they're Jesus people." And it is much as the accolation, Jesus people was put upon those young people who were committing their lives to Jesus Christ during that period of time. They're Christ folks. It wasn't really a title of admiration, but more or less of sort of a derision as they called them Christians or Christ folks first there at Antioch. Now, notice, that in verse 19 they were preaching the Word to none but unto Jews only. And in verse 20 they came to Antioch and they were preaching unto the Grecians the lordship of Jesus. They were preaching to Gentiles.

Now when Barnabas came, it said that he exhorted them, and when Paul came, it said he came for the space of a year and taught them. And there is an important difference between preaching, exhorting, and teaching. I believe that in the church today there is far too much preaching. I think that we need more exhorting and I believe that we need, most of all, teaching. You see, the most part was spent in teaching, for the space of a year they stayed and taught the people.

Preaching is to the unconverted. It is proclaiming to them God's good news that He has provided for man's salvation through the death of His Son who was raised again by the power of the Spirit on the third day. And by believing in Him you can have the remission of sins and you will receive the gift of eternal life. That's what preaching is all about: proclaiming God's good news to man.

Now when a person believes the message, then they need exhortation. Now Barnabas was exhorting them, "Now stick to the Lord. Purpose in your heart you're going to stick with Him." But Paul came and he spent a year teaching them. Teaching them how to stick, teaching them how to pray. Teaching them how to walk. And teaching is a vital function in the church. And the church today in many places is very weak, very anemic, very ineffective, because the people have not been taught in the Word of God.

So we have dedicated our ministry here at Calvary to the teaching of the Word of God, and then we have Romaine as the exhorter. I'm telling you what you should do, and he's there kicking you in the seat of the pants getting you to do it. Exhorting us in to what we should be doing for the Lord. And it's a vital, important ministry and it balances here. We have Randy on Saturday nights preaching to all of the young people that gather. So

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there's a place for preaching, there's a place for exhorting, and there is the important place of teaching within the church. And if the church is going to ever become strong and effective, it's got to be Paul.

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch ([Act 11:27](#)).

Now these prophets were sort of roving men in the early church. They were sort of nomads; they would roam from church to church. Now as the result, there were men who took upon themselves the title of prophet and they would roam and they would come into the church and they would say, "I'm a prophet of God." So it was one of the problems in the early church to tell whether or not a man was really a prophet of God or not.

So there were the writings of the apostles that were called the Didache, which was sort of a little rule book in the early church that first began to be circulated about 100 A.D. And this Didache had rules for discerning who was a true prophet and who was a false prophet.

Now the man came in and declared himself to be a prophet of God, you were to listen to him for one day. If he stayed the second day without going to work then he was a false prophet. He was just sponging off the church. If a man came in and declared himself to be a prophet and he said, "Thus saith the Lord, fix a large dinner, fried chicken, rice pilaf, mashed potatoes!" If he would eat of that dinner himself, he was a false prophet. So these were some of the rules by which they were to discern some of the false prophets in the early church written in the Didache, an interesting little guidebook for the early church before they were all established with elders and pastors and so forth.

Now, there was one prophet by the name of Agabus, and we're going to be coming across Agabus again later on, years later, and we'll find him in Caesarea when Paul is returning towards Jerusalem. But this one prophet Agabus,

he signified by the Spirit that there was going to be a great drought throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar ([Act 11:28](#)).

So he was a true prophet. This drought that he predicted did come to pass.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea ([Act 11:29](#)):

Now the church in Jerusalem had gone through heavy persecution and had been scattered. They also experimented with communal living and found it disastrous financially. So when Agabus came and predicted this great drought that was going to come, these men decided to take up an offering to send it back to the saints there in Judea to help them out. And so Christian love, stretching across national barriers, stretching across state lines, and stretching across the confines of our church. We're

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reaching out to the body of Christ elsewhere to help others, sharing that abundance which God has bestowed upon us.

Here at Calvary Chapel we have that glorious privilege of reaching out because God has given us an abundance. God has given us a surplus. We have the glorious privilege of reaching out and sharing this surplus with churches in other areas, with Christians in the body of Christ throughout the United States and throughout the world. So here's where the practice really began, in the church of Antioch. Became a center, even as God has more or less made this a center from which many have gone out to establish churches. Well over two hundred churches now having come out of this church, being established around the United States. So God has made us sort of a center from which the Word of God has spread. And it's a blessed thing to be in this position of being able to reach out and help the brethren elsewhere.

Now that's not what was happening here. Actually, in a sense, the church began in Jerusalem and they're sending the help back to Jerusalem. But we don't need the help of the churches and we are able to help them, and we thank God for that. It is more blessed to give than to receive, so we are on the blessed side. So they took up the offering for the brethren in Judea.

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul ([Act 11:30](#)).

So Saul is coming back now to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas, bringing an offering from those brothers in Antioch. And the walls now of difference have been broken down. This beautiful generosity expressed now by the Gentile believers towards the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

Father, we thank You for Thy Word, a light unto our feet, a lamp unto our path. What a blessing, Lord, to gather together to study to show ourselves approved, approved unto God, workman who need not to be ashamed. Lord, help us to rightly divide Your Word of truth. Lord, may each of us purpose in our hearts that we're just going to continue in the Lord. We're going to walk with You Lord no matter what. Lord, bless Your people. Place Your hand upon each of our lives. Anoint us for Thy service. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.