

God Is Generous to the Gentile

(Acts 11:1-30)

2/26/20; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

As parents, we have a number of lines that we regularly use with our children.

When our kids asks why they should do something, we simply say, “Because I said so.”

When our kids ask are we there yet, we simply reposed with “in few minutes” regardless of how much time we have left on the road trip.

And when we give our kids a command the we expect them to follow, we often follow that up with this famous line, “don’t make have to repeat myself.”

Now more than likely, we will repeat the command once if not twice or three times.

This is the nature of parenting.

We repeat ourselves often, especially when the command is something important or urgent.

In the book of Acts, God uses all of chapter 10 and most of chapter 11 to say something 3 times.

And considering that God is known for saying so much in so few words, we need to take note when God takes such a huge section of a book to say the same thing 3 times.

And what truth is so urgent or important to require such repetition?

Simple - the gospel is going to save the Jew and the Gentile.

Now we sit here as Gentiles almost 2000 years removed from Acts 10 and 11, and we say..

“Well, sure we know that God saves Jews and Gentiles. In fact, we are proof of that.”

But understand that the Jew never considered such a possibility.

To them, the Gentiles were repulsive to God.

Sure, God had shown grace to a few in their history like Rahab and Ruth, but they were unusual exceptions.

In the Jewish mind, Gentiles were created for God’s wrath.

Now understand that this view of Gentiles continued even after some Jews put their faith in Christ and were saved.

In fact, the church for the first few years was composed entirely of converted Jews.

And though the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives in various way, one thing that took some time to root out was their prejudice toward Gentiles.

It was so deeply rooted that the Lord inspired Luke to tell the story of Gentiles being included in salvation 3 times.

Now we have heard it twice already in Acts 10.

If you look back at Acts 10, Luke tells us of Cornelius' vision in the opening part of the chapter.

Then Luke quotes Cornelius repeating the story in the song half of the chapter, and now in chapter 11, we are going to hear the story a third time.

And the point of such repetition is to be clearly teach that God shows no partiality with the gospel.

He is going to save the Jew and the Gentile as they put their faith in Christ alone for salvation.

Now tonight, we are setting our sights high.

Lord willing we will get through all of chapter 11 in one bite, and the reason for that is that the first 18 verses will already be very familiar to us.

But then we will slow down in verses 19 to 30 as we go from Gentile conversion to see those Gentiles come into the church.

Here's the outline that we will follow.

I. Gentiles Are Invited (1-18)

II. Gentiles Are Included (19-26)

III. Gentiles are Involved (27-30)

Let's begin by reading through the first 18 verses.

I will stop and make a few comments as we go to help us review by let's begin by reminding ourselves that Gentiles are invited into God's kingdom through the gospel.

I. Gentiles Are Invited (1-18)

Verse 1 of Acts 11..

To remind you of what is going on, Peter has been away from Jerusalem on the coast of Israel.

He was first in Joppa and then brought to Caesarea to share the gospel with a Gentile Roman soldier named Cornelius.

After Cornelius and his family heard the good news that Jesus is Lord and Savior, they believed and were saved.

And the last verse of chapter 10 tells us that Peter stayed with Cornelius a few days, and that allowed the word of what happened to Cornelius to get back to Jerusalem before Peter returned.

But when Peter finally arrives in Jerusalem, there are some upset folks.

Verses 2 and 3..

2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, [a]those who were circumcised took issue with him, 3 saying, “You [b]went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

Understand that the church is still quite young at this point.

The NT has not been written.

All that believers have to go on is the teaching of the apostles, and even Peter was still learning of God's intention for the church.

So naturally those under Peter wouldn't understand that the gospel is going to go to the Gentiles.

In fact, the Jewish Christians believed that the way to salvation included becoming a Jew through circumcision and then becoming a Christian by believing in Christ as the Jewish Messiah.

Now, we know that isn't the case because we have the NT.

But they didn't, and the thought of a Gentile being saved with our being circumcised was foreign to them.

Even the idea of taking the gospel to the Gentile was foreign to them.

So to hear that Peter has gone to Cornelius, shared the gospel with him and then stayed with him a few days is a total shocker to them.

And I think this drives home the point of how hard it is to overcome prejudice.

Even for the saved man, he fights an old nature that wants to view others with contempt.

But Peter is patient with these complainers and simple begins to tell them what happened.

Verse 4.

4 But Peter began speaking [c]and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an [d]object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from [e]the sky; and it came right down to me, 6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it [f]I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the [g]crawling creatures and the birds of the [h]air. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; [i]kill and eat.’ 8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing [j]unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 But a voice from heaven answered a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer [k]consider unholy.’ 10 This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into [l]the sky. 11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 The Spirit told me to go with

them [m]without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. 13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel [n]standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; 14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

And that is exactly what happened.

We read about this ourselves in chapter 10, and please note that Peter had 6 witnesses to support his testimony.

He took 6 brethren from Joppa with him.

So there are now 7 men who can testify that the Lord saved Cornelius and his Gentile family.

This is noteworthy simply because Peter is not standing alone as a witness of the Gentiles being included in God's plan of salvation.

But not only did Peter appeal to his witnesses, Peter also appealed to the Word...

Look at verse 16.

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized [o]with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could [p]stand in God’s way?”

Jesus had told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be evidence of salvation in the church age.

And not only had Peter and the rest of the disciples seen that promise fulfilled in their lives, they are seeing it fulfilled in the lives of the Gentiles who put their faith in Christ.

So now there are witnesses to what God is doing, but more importantly, there is the witness of Scripture to what God is doing.

This leads to verse 18....

18 When they heard this, they [q]quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

Three quick things I want to point out here..

#1 - When God’s truth becomes clear to you, the only proper response is worship.

There are plenty of times in my life when the Bible has corrected what I thought was true.

Those are humbling times for sure.

Pride tells us to hold on to our view despite what Scripture says, but humility causes us to quiet down and simply glorify the Lord.

You can argue with God if you like, but in case you don't know it, you won't win.

God is God, and God is sovereign.

And what God does, he is perfectly just and free to do.

The only problem is us.

So when the truth of Scripture is clear, the response of the humble is to quiet down and worship.

The second note to make here is this..

#2 - Repentance is a gift from God.

Like everyone else who has ever been saved, these Gentiles needed to trust in Christ alone and turn from their sin.

This lines up with what the Bible teaches.

In order to be saved, a person must repent and believe, yet both faith and repentance are gifts from God.

This is the nature of salvation.

You need to turn from your sin and trust in Christ, and yet both trusting and turning are made possible by God.

God gave Cornelius the gift of faith and repentance in order for him to be saved.

And note it is a repentance that leads to life.

2 Corinthians 7:10 says that there is a repentance that leads to death.

The repentance that leads to death is a worldly sorrow.

In other words, some people are sad over their sin.

They are sad because of the hurt that their sin has caused in their family or friends.

They are sad because their sin has been exposed.

But that kind of sorrow is not part of a repentance that leads to life.

The sorrow that leads to life is a sorrow due to the fact that a person has sinned against God and God alone.

That kind of sorrow leads to eternal life, and that kind of sorrow and repentance must be granted to the guilty sinner by God changing his heart.

And God had granted that repentance to the Gentiles.

And that leads to third note to make about verse 18..

#3 - The fact that God saves Gentiles is one of most shocking things that a Jew has ever heard.

If you remember the book of Jonah, he had no desire to go and preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh.

In fact, he preferred death by drowning than to see a Gentile saved.

But the truth is that God is a saving God by nature.

He desires to save people, and though the Jew has experienced the grace of God in salvation, it is not reserved for him alone.

God will save the Gentile as well, and these Jewish Christians are the first Jews to glorify God in this truth.

So that summarizes the Gentile's invitation to Christ.

Now let's look at how they will be included in the church.

II. Gentiles Are Included (19-26)

19 So then those who were scattered because of the [r]persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way [s]to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the [t]Greeks also, [u]preaching the Lord Jesus.

In verse 19, our minds are called back to Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr.

And if you remember, his death scattered the early church.

Remember, the first Christians were Jews that were converted from the preaching of Peter.

And though most of them were from regions all over the Mediterranean world, they stayed in Jerusalem.

They stayed because they had no Christians to fellowship if they went home.

They also stayed because the apostles were there, and their teaching was the only instruction about being a Christian that was available at that time.

However, the murder of Stephen scattered the Jews who weren't natives of Israel.

And verse 19 lets us know where many of these Jews went as they left Jerusalem.

Phoenicia is a description of a an area north of Israel along the Mediterranean coast.

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea and Antioch is a city in modern day Turkey.

Essentially, the Jews left Israel and went north after the death of Stephen.

Now note the end of verse 19.

speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

There's the Jewish prejudice and bias.

Even though these people were saved, their allegiance to their nation blinded them to the fact that God was going to save the Gentile as well.

As a result, these Jewish converts to Christianity only preached to their fellow Jews.

However, there were exceptions, and in verse 20, we meet at least men from Cyprus and Cyrene who began to preach to the Gentiles in Antioch.

Now for starters, Antioch was the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria Egypt.

It was home to over a half million people.

And it was a major city because everyone going east to west or west to east had to go through Antioch.

There were Jews who lived there but there was also a huge Gentile population.

So these men from Cyprus and Cyrene, which is on the northern coast of Africa, begin to preach the gospel to them.

And note what they preached about Jesus at the end of verse 20..

He was Lord.

The Greek word is Kurion, which simply means Master or Authority or Sovereign.

The preached Jesus as the King of kings.

And for the Gentile, this is necessary.

He wouldn't understand the concept of a Jewish Messiah.

But he would understand the idea of Lordship.

And how did the Gentiles in Antioch respond to their preaching?

Verse 21.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

As these men preached, God opened Gentile hearts in Antioch to hear the gospel.

The Lord blessed their preaching to give it clarity and power.

And the Lord blessed the listeners by granting faith and repentance.

This is gospel preaching.

The preachers are totally dependent upon God but so are the hearers.

So Gentiles are saved in Antioch, but the news of that doesn't stay in Antioch.

Verse 22..

22 The [v]news about them [w]reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off [x]to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and [y]witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with [z]resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable [aa]numbers were [ab]brought to the Lord.

In the early years of the church, everything bit of news flowed through the church in Jerusalem, which was fine.

Many of the apostles would be there to confirm or deny what was happening from what Christ had taught them.

And they would send me from Jerusalem to investigate.

This time, they sent Barnabas, who was not an apostle but well respected by the apostles.

He went because he was a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, which is always a great combination.

On top of that, he was a great encourager.

So he arrived in Antioch and assessed what was happening there among the Gentiles.

Verse 23 says that he saw the grace of God at work and then rejoiced and encouraged the Gentiles who had come to believe in Christ there.

He told them to remain true to the Lord.

But the sheer number of converts must have overwhelmed Barnabas because he seeks help..

Verse 25..

25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

Now we haven't seen Saul since he caused a stir in Jerusalem and the disciples sent him to his hometown of Tarsus on a boat from Caesarea.

Some estimate that 7 or more years had passed while Paul was in his hometown of Tarsus.

But now is the time for the Lord to return Paul to ministry.

So Barnabas leaves Antioch and goes around the corner to Tarsus to find Paul.

You see that journey on this map.

Little less than a 100 miles, but on foot would have difficult to say the least.

But Barnabas needs Paul's help at Antioch, and Paul is perfect because he is from the region.

Though he is Jewish, he would be familiar with the region and the customs.

On top of that, Paul has been taught by Christ Himself and would be the man to teach a group of new Christians about Christianity.

So Barnabas retrieves Saul and they head back to Antioch, and what is their plan for the Gentile church there?

End of verse 26.

And for an entire year they [ac]met with the church and taught considerable [ad]numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Let me remind you of what the church should be about.

The church is about the teaching of God's truth.

We are not primarily a place to entertain youth and kids.

We are not primarily a place to come and eat.

We are not primarily a place to host fund raising events.

We are a place to teach the world the truth of God.

Whether that it the truth taught to someone who needs to be saved or the truth that sanctifies believers, the church is a place for instruction.

And that is all that Barnabas and Saul did for an entire year in Antioch.

They taught these Gentiles about what it means to love and know Christ and share his truth with others.

And also note that the term Christian was first used in Antioch.

The title did not originate with believers.

It came as an insult of believers who simply spoke of Christ so often that the world essentially called them the party of Christ.

And that is what we are.

We owe our ultimate allegiance to our King.

He is our Lord.

We are of the party of Christ, and that description was first given to believers in Antioch.

So Gentiles are invited to the gospel of Christ.

And now Gentiles are included in the church of Christ.

But there is one more note to make.

Gentiles are involved in the church as well.

III. Gentiles are Involved (27-30)

Verse 27..

27 Now [ae]at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate [af]by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the [ag]world. [ah]And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

Since the church lacked the NT, apostles were necessary for a time to make sure the words of Christ were preserved and laid as a foundation for the church.

But God also used some prophets for a short time in the early years of the church.

And we meet one named Agabus in verse 28.

He simply comes up to Antioch to speak for the Lord and let them know that famine is coming on the world.

And what is the reaction of the Gentile believers in Antioch?

Verse 29..

29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the [ai]relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it [aj]in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

The response of the believers was to take up an offering for the church in Jerusalem.

Now why would they do that?

#1 - They had like been told by Barnabas how poor the church in Jerusalem was.

And why was it poor?

It was made up of former Jews who had been abandoned by families, who disowned believers.

Most had no resources, no way to get a job.

Though the Jerusalem was central to the initial growth of Christianity, it was extremely poor.

In fact, Paul will collect offerings for that church throughout his entire ministry.

But understand that these Gentile believers sent money to the Jewish believers because they understood their union with Jews in Christ.

Though they had been recipients of prejudice from the Jews, they would not return the favor.

Instead, they would support those Jews with whatever help they could send.

What a testimony to the power of the gospel.

It can change the leopard's spots and melt the heart of stone.

And the best proof of that is seen in how it changes our financial priorities.

If you want to know if someone is truly saved, take a look at how they use and spend their money.

It often reveals the heart.

And these Gentiles in Antioch truly know the Lord.

They are putting their money where they heart is.

Conclusion

So that wraps up chapters 10 and 11, which were devoted to a milestone event in human history and that is Gentile inclusion in the church.

Now what do we take from this?

#1 - The truth breaks down every incorrect theory of man.

In 1 Timothy 3, the church is described as the pillar of truth in the world.

In other words, we have the truth because Christ has given it to us in Scripture.

Our mission is to simply teach that truth and demolish the lies of the world.

The Jews had to learn that Gentiles were part of God's plan, so their thoughts on what God should do had to change.

The Gentiles had to learn that Christ was Lord and they spent a year learning that from Paul and Barnabas.

There is no greater commodity in the world than the truth.

Our mission is to submit to Scripture and repent when our thinking isn't in line with it.

#2 - The gospel breaks down every man made barrier.

It is incredibly sad to see the barriers that we build in our lives.

Every day, we build walls in the world designed to protect us from hurt and and heartache.

And though some walls aren't sinful, they do prevent us from sharing the gospel with the world.

There has been no greater wall in human history that the wall between Jews and Gentiles.

Yet, that wall was torn down in the gospel of Christ.

And our job is to keep those barriers on the ground in terms of the gospel.

May we never build walls on the ruins that Jesus demolished.

May we never build walls that keep the gospel from going to the world.

Let us pray.