

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### CRITICISM (ACTS 11:1-14)

#### THERE IS A LOT OF SCRIPTURE ABOUT THIS ITALIAN

There is more written about Cornelius' conversion than Saul's conversion and the Day of Pentecost. Why? Because a Roman soldier being filled with the Spirit represented a huge shift in the Bible narrative.

#### RAINING ON THE PARADE

As Peter gets back into Jerusalem from the experience with Cornelius' family, one would expect that the other Believers would be happy, but instead they criticized Peter for associating with gentiles.

- The "circumcision party" were the Jewish Christians that believed gentiles had to go through Judaism to be saved.

#### DOERS WILL ALWAYS HAVE CRITICS

It's interesting that Peter's critics didn't bring up the gospel or HS, but **pushed the majors aside to make sure their traditions were protected**. They didn't care about evidence; they were **offended** because the leader did something they were uncomfortable with. **People who take action will always have offended critics.**

#### THE OLD VS. THE NEW PETER

The old Peter would not have reacted well to this unfounded criticism and smallmindedness, but the Spirit-filled Peter is a different man.

- The **wisdom** in Peter helped him to **empathize** with offended Christians. **The Spirit helps us discern, be wise, and have compassion.**

#### HOW CHRISTIANS DEAL WITH CRITICISM

Peter dealt with undeserved criticism with clarity and composure. **He didn't get defensive, but clarified the truth to the critical people.**

- **We are to act like Christ in times of criticism: pray for wisdom, be kind, tell the truth, don't return evil for evil, and keep the greater good in mind.**

### DEFENSE (ACTS 11:15-18)

#### "I REMEMBERED THE WORD OF THE LORD..."

When Peter says, "at the beginning" he was referring to the initial outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2. He also remembered when Jesus told the disciples that they would "baptize with the Holy Spirit." Since this was a command from Christ, how could Peter "possibly hinder [oppose] God?"

#### "...HOW COULD I POSSIBLY HINDER GOD?"

Peter trusted Jesus, his calling from God, and that God would provide and protect him through his experiences.

- **Are we persuaded? Do we set up memorials in our lives to remember the things God has done for us? Do we trust God and what He has in store for us?**

#### SO, IT ENDED UP BEING OK. SORT OF...

Peter's response convinced the Christians to accept the gentiles, but the problems weren't completely alleviated.

- For years the Jewish Christians would debate on what lifestyle is appropriate for
- former pagans and what Jewish and Gentile relations look like.

#### PEOPLE CAN CHANGE

Not only can non-believers become devout Christians, but stubborn and closedminded believers can also change **if God touches their heart and we handle conflict in a Christ-like manner**. We must remember our efforts are first for the church, then to the non-Christians (Galatians 6:10).

### AGGRESSIVE (ACTS 11:19-21)

#### "...THOSE THAT HAD BEEN SCATTERED..."

Acts 11:19 is referring to 8:4 when the Christians had fled due to the persecution and martyrdom of Stephen from Saul. Luke says they went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. These scattered Christians started spreading the gospel in these areas. They began in the synagogues.

#### NOT JUST THE JEWS, BUT TO THE GREEKS

The scattered Christians only reached out to the Jews, but there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Libya) that went up into the heavily Greek area of Antioch and started proclaiming Christ to the Greeks. Peter says, "The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number turned to the Lord."

#### ONE OF THE MOST EVIL CITIES IN THE WORLD

Antioch was a Roman area immersed in paganism and hedonism. But because of **"aggressive" evangelism by the entire body**, many were saved in this city.

- These were the outsiders, but **because they loved the gospel and others, the world was beginning to change because of them!**

#### SIMPLE YET EFFECTIVE

Antioch models how we're to **engage** people, **evangelize** (share the gospel through actions and words), **teach the Word, minister to those in need**, and let people know that **they can be reconciled with God and forgiven**.

### LEADING (ACTS 11:22-26)

#### BRANCHING OUT

The Twelve seem content and comfortable to stay near Jerusalem and minister to the rapidly growing body of Christians near their home base.

- Barnabas, a "2nd generation" follower, has a heart to branch out into the uncomfortable pagan areas to build a bridge between Greeks and Jews.

#### YOUNGER GENERATIONS MOVING BEYOND US

We see Barnabas, a "second wave" Christian, **taking the gospel into unreached territory and making it his focus to bridge uncomfortable relationships**. Remember, he was the first to give Saul a chance!

- Ironically, this humble layman eventually becomes the pastor of the hedonistic city of Antioch!

#### THEN HE WENT LOOKING FOR SAUL

Expanding churches need to add additional qualified staff. So, Barnabas went looking for the gifted teacher Saul who was living in Tarsus (South Turkey).

- Saul had been in Tarsus nearly 10 years and had built up a large group of followers there. Barnabas brought him to Antioch for a year to teach "large numbers."

#### THEY WERE FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS AT ANTIOCH

The word **Christian** only appears in the Bible 3 times, but has become the title that followers of Jesus have adopted.

- **Christian** was a derogatory Roman term meaning "little Christs." Ironically, the term meant to offend, but was exactly what the disciples were trying to achieve; **lives resembling Jesus Christ**.

### SOCIAL GOSPEL (ACTS 11:27-30)

#### A PROPHET PREDICTS A FAMINE

A Christian man named Agabus "came down" from Jerusalem to Antioch (north) proclaiming that the Spirit told him a famine is coming. The reign of Claudius was marked with many famines, and this one was around 46 A.D. and went "throughout the Roman world."

#### RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Here we see a crisis that expands outside just the Christian community and beyond just telling people the good news. This was a situation in which the **gospel must be shown through good deeds**.

- **"Faith without works is dead" and if we only tell others we care, but don't take steps to show it, we've failed.**

#### HOW DID THEY HELP?

1. They **trusted** the prophet God had sent.
  2. They **prepared before the crisis**.
  3. **Every Christian participated** "according to their ability."
  4. **They didn't let cultural or theological differences stop them** from helping relieve the need.
- **Wisdom** and **discernment** also play a huge part in how we help others.

#### HELPING REGARDLESS OF THE RESPONSE

Christians are commanded by Jesus to **help the helpless and defenseless without enabling** (Matthew 25, 2 Thessalonians 3:10). We are called to do this **without manipulation or even expecting conversion or gratitude**. We are called to **show grace and love because He first loved us** (1 John 4:19).

#### CHRISTIANS?

- Do we handle criticism, whether justified or not, in a Christ-like manner?
- **Do we love people?** Are we evangelizing? Do we look for opportunities to share the gospel? **Do we build meaningful relationships?**
- Are we setting a good example for the next generation? Are we encouraging them to be the light in uncomfortable and unreached places?
- Can we say we are "**little Christs?**"
- Are we displaying the love of God through **charity, benevolence, and good works?**