

GTW – Acts of the Holy Spirit – Acts 11-12

The Church Struggles With Change and Responds Well;
The Holy Spirit Miraculously Saves Peter while James is Martyred

October 28, 2020 – Dr. C. Patrick Hartsock

Peter Explains His Actions

- **11 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”**
 - The apostles and other believers oppose Peter without any knowledge of Peter’s experience and how the Lord has moved.

How difficult it is for the church to embrace change.

- Contemporary worship, guitars and drums in worship were tools of the devil and have no place in a service of worship
- E. Stanley Jones standing up for India’s struggle for independence from Britain and being labeled a “liberal”
- Pentecostal revival of the early 1900’s being “satanic”
- Early reaction of the church to William Booth’s outreach to alcoholics and homeless was extremely negative for embracing such sinners. Some even said the numbers for his name added up to 666, he was the antichrist.

Personal reflection or small group interaction: When have you experienced a church you were in struggling with change? How did they handle the change?

What to do when facing opposition within the church?

- **Do not be defensive but simply explain what your reasoning is:**

“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 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.’”**

Acts 11:4-7

○ **Clarify any personal struggle you might have had with the change:**

⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’” Acts 11:8

○ **Clarify God’s word and will above your struggle:**

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.’” Acts 11:9-14

- God often prepares people for his salvation
 - Cornelius was sincerely seeking God and the Lord saved him
 - A Chief in Malaysia – Wooden Idol...rejected it...knew there must be a higher being...waited and prayed to “the unknown God...a Christian missionary came and introduced the Chief and his wife to Christ...”This is the true God we have been seeking.”

New Application Bible -- Acts Ajith Fernando

The Major Clarifying Issue is how the Holy Spirit has moved and is moving:

- 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^[a] water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.’** Acts 11:15-16
 - 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?” Acts 11:17
- ¹⁸ **When 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.”** Acts 11:18
 - The Holy Spirit opens the door to the Gentiles and the apostles and leaders submitted themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

How God uses persecution to accomplish His very purposes:

- "Now those who had been **scattered (*diaspora*) by the persecution** that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as **Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.**" Acts 11:19

Trials, suffering, and persecution are often God's penultimate work while his ultimate work is being accomplished in us and through us:

- "Not only so, but we¹ also glory in our sufferings, because **we know that suffering produces** perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Rom. 5:3-5
- "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles **scattered (*diaspora*)** throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father... ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles... ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans **so that**, though they accuse you of doing wrong, **they may see your good deeds and glorify God** on the day he visits us." 1 Peter 1:1-2, 11-12
- "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that **the testing of your faith produces** perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4
- "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer **persecution...Be faithful, even to the point of death**, and I will give you life as your victor's crown." Rev. 2:10

Personal reflection or small group interaction; When and how has God used persecution, a trial, or painful issue or loss in your life to ultimately work good, or his will in your life?

How the Lord chooses to build his church in unexpected places through nameless anonymous people:

- **“Some of them...went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks...”** Acts 11:20

Antioch:

- Located in biblical Syria – Located today in Turkey
- Population around 300,00 in biblical times, Jewish population from 22,000 to 65,000, Greek population around 250,000
- Third largest city in Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria
- An immoral city with prostitution at shrine of Daphne near the city
- An ideal place for the birthplace of Gentile Christianity
- “And a great number of people (Gentiles) believe and turned to the Lord...”
- **“Some of them...began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.**
 - “Some of them...” – God uses nameless people often to do his work
 - “Some of them” reached out to the untouchable, avoid at any cost Gentiles
 - Problem with unknown people doing significant things is they lack credentials
 - Therefore, a known and respected person was sent from the Jerusalem church

An encouragement for all of us: God may use you even though you think of yourself as a “nameless nobody” to move and work in his kingdom.

The church needs to question changes in the church and address them with strong leaders and gifted teachers

- **“News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.”**
Acts 11:22
 - Barnabas’ name = “Son of encouragement”
 - Barnabas encouraged Saul after his conversion – Acts 9:26-27

- Barnabas encouraged these new believers:
 - “When the church in Jerusalem got wind of this, **they sent Barnabas** to Antioch to check on things. As soon as he arrived, he saw that God was behind and in it all. **He threw himself in with them, got behind them, encouraging them** to stay with it the rest of their lives. He was a good man that way, enthusiastic and confident in the Holy Spirit’s ways. The community grew large and strong in the Master.” Acts 11:22-24

Personal reflection or small group discussion: Who has God used in your life to encourage you, and how did they do it?

A biblical principle for us to learn and employ. Two are better than one, especially when the second person has gifts that you may not have:

- ²⁵ **Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,** ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. **So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.** The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

James’ Martyrdom and Peter’s Miraculous Escape from Prison

- **Why is one rescued and the other martyred?**
- **One Martyred:** “It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ² **He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.**” Acts 12:1-2
- **One Rescued:** “When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he **proceeded to seize Peter** also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After **arresting him, he put him in prison**, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵ So **Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.**
Acts 12:3-5

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

⁸ Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that **the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.**”
Acts 12:6-11

Personal reflection or small group discussion: Have you ever experienced the Lord not saving someone you had prayed he would save?

Have you ever experienced the Lord saving someone miraculously that you prayed he would save?

“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, **“Peter is at the door!”**

¹⁵ **“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”**

¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.”
Acts 12:12-16

Personal reflection or small group interaction: Have you ever been astonished at what God had done? What did God do and why were you astonished?

"Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed."

Acts 12:17-18

Biblical Observation and Principle: God will ultimately accomplish his justice:
--

"Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

²¹On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²**They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."**

³Immediately, **because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died."**

Acts 12:19-23

Biblical Observation and Principle: The Lord will "build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it:"
--

²⁴**But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.** Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

²⁵**When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark."**

Acts 12:24-25