

# The critical time, the critical place

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[0:00] So, Holy Spirit, we do pray indeed that you would breathe upon the Word and bring the truth to light.! We may behold great things from your Word. Amen.

So, if you'd like to have your Bibles open then, at these two chapters of Acts. We've been working through the early chapters of Acts and you remember the agenda is set by these words of Jesus in Acts 1 verse 8 that I put up on the screen there.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses. And then we get this list. First of all in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And we come now in Acts 10 and 11 to that third stage, to the ends of the earth. The church was born in Jerusalem and we have that described in Acts 2.

And then it was extended to Samaria in Acts 8. And that was a difficult step itself. For those from an Orthodox Jewish background, let me just remind you of those verses in Acts 8 that we read.

[1:24] This is Acts 8, 15 to 17. When Peter and John arrived, this was in Samaria, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them, that is the Samaritans.

They'd simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. That event had to be marked by a special pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

But now a much greater cultural shift is going to be required. The time has come for what we might call phase three, preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And Luke describes this shift in these two chapters. The implications of Peter's visit to Cornelius are so important that Luke feels the need to tell us about it twice.

Luke is, as far as we know, the only New Testament writer who was not in fact Jewish. And yet, in a sense, these two chapters are written in a very Jewish way.

[2:32] Certainly, as we were hearing this morning, when something's particularly important in the Jewish culture, they'd say it twice. And of course, if something was really absolutely vital and absolutely true, they would say it three times.

And did you notice that Peter had this vision three times? He had to absolutely get his head around that. Well, anyway, let's think a bit about the times and the place.

The coming of the Spirit, the foundation of the Church, is generally agreed to have been in our calendar, AD 30. You will notice right at the end of the passage, there's reference to the Emperor Claudius and the famine in the Roman world.

The Emperor Claudius ruled from AD 41 to AD 54. And in particular, there was a famine in the Roman world around the period AD 45 to 48.

So we can date the end of this chapter 11 to somewhere around AD 45. So we're talking somewhere like 15 years.

[3:45] Maybe five years or so for the conversion of Saul. And maybe another 10 years, perhaps, until the conclusion of this passage in the end of chapter 11.

And what about the geography? If you remember, if you were here last week, after Paul had been converted in Damascus, which is halfway up the map there on the right, he had gone to Jerusalem, but things had got a bit too hot for him in Jerusalem.

And so he'd been more or less hustled out of the city by his friends, sent off to Caesarea and then off up to Tarsus, which is right at the top of the map there.

You can see where it is. And in chapter 11, we read of the city of Antioch. And Antioch is sort of the top right-hand corner on the map there.

As you can see, it's on a river. The river Arontes, if I remember the name correctly. And there's a kind of picture in that, because the River Jordan runs, of course, south from the Sea of Galilee down into the Dead Sea.

[5:08] And in fact, most rivers in that part of the world run in that direction. But the Arontes actually runs in the opposite direction. It's sometimes called the Rebel River, because it goes in the opposite direction.

It runs north towards Antioch and then to the sea. And there's kind of a picture really in that. I don't know whether Luke intended it or not, but there is a picture in it of the change that is about to come about.

Distance, it's about just over 300 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch. So it's a significant difference, significant distance.

But it's not a vast distance. What is that about the distance from here to, well, Liverpool, a bit further than that?

Not an enormous distance. People did travel about quite a lot in the Roman Empire. In fact, you'll notice that Barnabas earns an awful lot of air miles here.

[6:12] He starts off in Jerusalem. He goes to Antioch and then to Tarsus and then back to Antioch and then back to Judea. So he must have travelled a good thousand miles or so, one would think.

All this beetling about. But still, 300 miles or so isn't a tremendous distance. But culturally, it's a million miles.

Antioch is an important Gentile city. It's a city not with the Jewish culture, but a city with a Greco-Roman culture. And it's interesting that Christians are called there Christians.

He tells us that Christians are first called there Christians. They're not called Messireans or something like that, which they would have been, of course, if they'd been given the name in an Aramaic, Jewish-speaking culture.

Christ is a Greek word. And they're given a Greek name. And in fact, Antioch would be the early centre of Christianity.

[7:19] And in fact, as conditions gradually deteriorated in Jerusalem, it became more and more the early centre of Christianity. And of course, in AD 70, another 30 years or so from what we're reading here, but in AD 70, the city and the temple would be destroyed entirely and worn by Jesus' prophecy that, again, Phil mentioned this morning, the remaining Christians fled the city and escaped the destruction.

But until that time, actually, there will be a continuing and a recurring tension, in fact, between the churches of the Hebraic Jews, and particularly the church in Jerusalem, which, in a sense, was the centre of the Hebraic branch, if you like, or flavour of Christianity, and the churches of the Grecian Jews and the Gentiles, with a focus in Antioch.

And they'd actually need to struggle to maintain unity. And you notice Luke hints at this in 11, 2 and 3, when there was criticism by Jews, Jewish believers, and then right at the end of the passage, where the church in Antioch feels its need to assert its unity with the church in Jerusalem.

So, we're talking probably some, as I said, some 10 or 15 years at the end of the passage, from the original coming of the Spirit.

And in Galatians 2, verse 1, in fact, Paul writes, 14 years later, that's after leaving Jerusalem for the first time, I went up again to Jerusalem, and this time with Barnabas.

[9:04] So, the trip at the end of this passage might well have been that passage that Paul refers to, when he said, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas.

That may be the same trip that he's referring to, that Luke refers to at the end of Acts 11. The time seems to be roughly right. Time seems to be roughly right.

But again, you can't be totally certain about these things. So, what are we to make of this passage itself? There are critics who assert that it was actually Saul, or Paul, as he became known later, who wasn't even present during Jesus' life on earth, and who was actually born in Tarsus, right up in the north there, certainly not in any Jewish city, and that he reinvented Christianity as a Greek religion.

And yet, if you look at the Scriptures, the Apostle John also writes in many ways, in a way that's accessible to Greek readers. And yet, John gets no mention at all in this passage.

And for most of it, Paul was still in Tarsus. The break, as it were, if there is a break, was not made by Paul or John at all.

[10:31] It was made initially, as we see, by Peter, and then by Barnabas. But it is true, of course, that Paul was going to play a key role, and that's why Barnabas went to find him.

And indeed, Paul was going to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. But the crucial step here is actually taken by Peter and the unnamed disciples that we read in chapter 11, verse 20.

Or rather, perhaps it would be even better to say the crucial step is taken by the Holy Spirit as he works through those people. So let's examine, if we can, this cultural shift in a bit of detail.

So I'd like to look at these four, look, as it were, under these four headings. I'm sorry, I've missed this five, actually.

I missed one out on the slide. I'm sorry about that. I want to look at clean or unclean. I want to look at the word preached. I want to look at this phrase, as at the beginning, that Peter uses.

[11:41] And then I want to just look at what, over to, spend a bit of time looking at the shift over to Antioch, which I'm afraid I forgot to put on the slide there. I apologize for that. And then at the end, we'll just say, well, this is all very well, but this is all 2,000 years ago.

Is it of any relevance to us today? And I want to suggest to you that it really is. So let's first of all look at this issue of clean or unclean.

Peter's problem is clearly stated in chapter 11, verses 2 and 3. And indeed, he explains it himself earlier in chapter 10 to Cornelius. As an Orthodox Jew, he wasn't really allowed to go and eat with uncircumcised believers.

Well, uncircumcised Gentiles, I should say. Sorry. It was against, apparently against the law. And of course, if he did go and eat with them, he was going to be fed food that, according to the Jewish law, was unclean.

And we read in 11, 2 and 3, this was a real problem for Jewish Christians. In chapter 11, 2 and 3, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, you went into the house of uncircumcised men.

[13:11] That was bad enough. But you actually ate with them and therefore ate food that wouldn't have been kosher, that wouldn't have been according to the law. And without the vision, without this vision and this coming of the Spirit, of course, Peter would have raised exactly the same issues himself, as he explains when he does go to Cornelius' house.

In accepting Cornelius' invitation, he had to eat unclean food and he had to meet with unclean people. That's the way the Jews would have looked at it.

The food was unclean. It didn't meet the rules of the Mosaic law. And even worse, the people were unclean.

They did not have that mark of the covenant circumcision. The circumcision and the food laws were absolutely at the heart of the Jewish culture.

They were above all the marks of the covenant, the marks of the old covenant and the law of Moses. They marked out the Jewish people as being clean in God's sight.

[14:23] And in contrast, the Gentiles were unclean or dirty in all sorts of ways, in the way they behaved, in what they ate, and that they didn't have this mark of God's favour that circumcision was supposed to represent.

Now actually, this shouldn't have been entirely new to Peter because Jesus himself had said something on this and it's actually in Mark 7 verses 18 and 19 where you have Jesus' words reported.

Are you so dull, he asked. Dull is a bit of an under-translation there. It really means are you so stupid or are you so, can't you understand anything?

Are you so dull, he asked. Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean for it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach and then out of his body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean is Mark's comment on that. But Peter hadn't got his head around this yet. He says so as much in verse 10, for instance, in chapter 10, 14, he says, I've never eaten anything unclean.

[15:48] I've always stuck strictly to those Jewish food laws. Those rules. And certainly no Jew would ever eat a reptile. Did you notice there are actually reptiles in this sheet?

I think many of us would balk at eating a reptile. But certainly no Jew would ever eat a reptile. He'd find it disgusting, frankly. God was telling Peter that what he thought and indeed actually Moses had said was unclean.

God was now declaring to be clean. It is a change. The law of Moses did say that eating reptiles and pigs and the like were unclean animals.

But God is now declaring those to be clean. And as I said, there's a particularly Jewish twist to this vision. It's repeated three times.

If you wanted something to be made absolutely sure in the Jewish culture, you would say it three times. Peter's being told unequivocally in no uncertain terms that it's okay to go and eat Cornelius' food.

[17:05] But even more importantly, he's being told that it's okay to go and take the gospel to those who were uncircumcised, who were Gentiles. And it takes Peter and the other disciples and say a while to get used to this idea and get their heads around it.

But he does take the first small step in chapter 10, verse 23 you notice that he invites the messengers of Cornelius into his house at least.

Actually, it's not his house. Of course, it's the house of Simon the Tanner. But he invites them in as guests. But we might raise the question if the food laws, if circumcision are no longer relevant, for marking out the covenant, marking out the boundary of God's people, what are, what is, what are the marks of the new covenant?

And actually, Peter had knew this from Acts 2, but we're reminded again here in Acts 10, verses 34 to 48. the marks of the new covenant, are the preached word received in faith and the presence of the Spirit.

And it's the preached word mixed with faith and the presence of the Spirit who endorses and authenticates the word as we sung in that hymn, who breathes on the word and brings it to light.

[18:42] And these are, indeed, the marks of the new covenant, the boundary markers of the new covenant. So let's examine them in a little bit more detail. I'm not going to spend very long on these, but it is worth just looking.

So first of all, the word preached. Now what is quite interesting here, actually, is that Peter very much embeds his message.

If you look at it, it's in verses 36 to 43 of chapter 10. I won't read it all out again because it is quite long. But you notice he embeds his message very much in the geography and the history of the Jewish nation, of Judea and Jerusalem.

And so he says, where did this all happen? It happened in Judea and Galilee and where did this Jesus come from? From Nazareth, a northern Jewish town that was originally at least a Jewish town.

It had become known as Galilee of the Gentiles in that area, but still it was part of the original kingdom. And he says, where does these ideas come from?

[20:02] Well, they come from the Jews. They come from Jewish history, from the Jewish prophets. It's not that this is something, you know, we're just throwing away everything that came before, went before and starting over afresh.

We are starting afresh, yes, but that is what these events were all pointing to. And that reminds us suddenly to Jesus' own words when he says, yes, salvation does come from the Jews.

And Peter needs to remind them of that. Salvation does indeed come from the Jews. but it's now declared to all who will accept it in verses 34 and 35.

As Jesus said, the Lord now, the Father now seeks those who will worship him, not in Jerusalem or any other mountain particularly, but those who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

And so, the opportunity to repent and believe are offered to Cornelius and his friends and relations as they gathered together in verse 34 and 35.

[21:07] And Cornelius and his household are about to see this demonstrated in a dramatic fashion. Now, I don't want to, I feel almost in a sense I ought to spend more time on that but I don't know what else to say.

But it is important that salvation is from the Jews. It's embedded in the Jewish history. That's why we still study the Old Testament. But it's not something new in that sense.

It is what the old covenant and the old laws were pointing towards and yet, in another sense, it is entirely new. The covenant written in hearts and in, by the spirit.

Now it's offered to all. Now, in 11, chapter 11, verse 15, Peter makes the crucial observation here and he says the Holy Spirit was poured out as at the beginning.

The Holy Spirit did indeed come on Cornelius and his household in a very obvious way. It says as at the beginning and it talks in 10:46 about speaking in tongues or other languages as of course exactly what had happened in Acts 2.

[22:31] And I suppose one could get hung up on this and say, is he talking about other languages or was he talking about ecstatic tongues and people getting a twist over this? But really, that's to miss the point.

We don't know the answer to that but that's not really the point anyway. The point is that it was as at the beginning. He doesn't say the Spirit comes as usual because that does seem to have been the case whenever the Gospel was proclaimed the Spirit came and that was the promise.

The promise is to you and to your children everyone whom the Lord shall call. But this was something special. This was something undeniable. And there's a reason for that.

We can't say it was quite unique though because it's actually happened twice before. And of course the first time was in Acts 2 when the Spirit came in the wind and the fire and people, the disciples gathered in Jerusalem.

Note where they were, they were in Jerusalem. And that marked the end of the wait, the coming of the Spirit and it was time to preach in Jerusalem. And then a similar thing as we read earlier happened in Samaria in chapter 8 verse 17.

[23:51] Hang on, where was the Spirit? The Gospel had been preached in Samaria but they hadn't received the Spirit. The Spirit came in a special way to show that, yeah, that's part 2 now, time for phase 2.

The Gospel will now be preached in Samaria and Judea. And now the Spirit is saying that the final wait is over and the Spirit is now coming upon the Gentiles.

And so, although in one sense it is as usual because the Spirit comes when the Word is received with faith, and yet in another sense it is special and undeniable and it had to be of course because it had to be something very obvious in public because people had to be able to see it.

There had to be no doubt. It had to be beyond question because otherwise the Jewish Christians were going to find it very hard to accept.

So I don't think we should expect this to be the norm in this sense that when the Spirit comes, He comes in such a spectacular way. Again, we were thinking this morning, weren't we, of Elijah on the mountain where the Lord had come to Moses in the earthquake and the wind and the fire but the word, the Lord comes to Elijah in a small voice and sometimes that is the case.

[25:19] The Spirit comes with a whisper quietly but here He needed as it were to shout because it needed to be entirely clear. And we shouldn't underestimate the shock of this event.

First of all for the Peter's Jewish companions those he took along to Cornelius' house we read in chapter 10 verse 43 they found this was astonishing.

They couldn't quite compute it they couldn't get their heads around it. How did this make any sort of sense? Yes they'd been told that the Spirit would come your sons and your daughters will prophecy

your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions as Joel had prophesied but that surely was a prophecy for the Jews but it seems not.

It seems that Peter had been right earlier when he'd said the promises to you and to all who are far off even though that had only been addressed to those who were Jews apparently that promise was not only addressed to the Jews but to the Gentiles also and it was a shock they really found that hard to understand they found it frankly astonishing that's what we're told but it was unmistakable and so they went back Peter and the others went back to Jerusalem and this was such a remarkable event that the news had apparently preceded him back to Jerusalem because when he got there the Jewish believers were up in arms he said look what are you up to Peter you've eaten uncircumcised you've eaten with uncircumcised

Gentiles you've eaten unclean food what on earth are you up to and Peter has to explain it all again lost the text but never mind the actually what he says is it's quite strong it says Peter explained it all carefully precisely I think is the NIV translation actually the authorised version translation is probably a bit more closer to the original it says he expounded it all in order in other words he went through it all in great detail explaining as he went there's no executive summary here you might think it was a bit tedious but as far as Peter was concerned it was absolutely essential that they understood every detail they understood the significance of this so far from being bored and saying come on

[28:44] Peter cut to the chase they really needed to see you know really have time to absorb it to think about it and get their heads around it as we say and when they heard all this and when they seen that the sign was unmistakable then the conclusion was unavoidable although Luke slightly understates he said when they heard this they had no further objections I feel it might have been a bit stronger than that but that's the way Luke describes it and what was their conclusion well so then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life that was the really astonishing thing that was the thing they had to get to grips with but they didn't have any objections and in fact what did they do they praised God they weren't put off by this rather long winded explanation of

Peter's on the contrary they said yeah that's really mapping out what God is doing and they praised God for it and they said no it's clear there can be no doubt God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life so let's move on and in the latter part of chapter 11 the focus moves to Antioch and if Peter's vision was graphic and all rather Jewish and if the outpouring of the spirit was something quite spectacular then in these last verses of this chapter Luke's description seems almost rather low key and prosaic doesn't it whether he did that deliberately whether the first part was aimed at the Jews and the last part was aimed at a

Greek audience I don't know but certainly there's a change of style here it's all really quite laconic and understated and indeed things almost seemed to be happening by accident the scattered disciples remember had been driven out of Jerusalem by the persecution that followed the martyring of Stephen and they hadn't just some of them hadn't just stayed in Samaria they travelled all the way up to well let me go back just briefly to the map they'd gone all the way to Cyprus and round towards Asia Minor particular some of them had found their way to Antioch now there were of course

Jews by this time scattered all over the Roman Empire don't entirely know why that was but it does seem to have been the case there were Jews in Rome the Emperor Claudius threw them out at one point in fact there were Jews all over the empire they were Jews always been good at business trading and they were scattered all over the empire and the as the disciples had fled the persecution in Jerusalem and Judea they had met up with their fellow Jews scattered about and they told them why they left Jerusalem and they told them the good news of Jesus but we read almost you know it's almost sort of it's off the cuff as it were there's some of them men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to

Greeks also telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus so in that half sentence Luke describes the point when the world changed and what's his comment he said the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord and if Luke's description is quite low key then the reaction in Jerusalem seems to have been quite low key as well actually you remember that when this issue arose in Samaria and people need to go and see what was

happening in Samaria they sent the two chief apostles Peter and John and yet this event in Antioch doesn't even seem to have rated a full apostolic mission they just sent Barnabas who wasn't an apostle himself the son of encouragement but the

[33:54] Holy Spirit knows what he's about this was Barnabas full of the Holy Spirit and faith the son of encouragement as we were thinking last week this is Barnabas the fixer the guy who knows how to make things happen and it was the man who had originally bridged the gap between Saul and the disciples in 927 Barnabas the practical man the encourager and a man who knew his limitations also I mean what could have happened of course is Barnabas might have thought well at last I'm out from under the thumb of the apostles this is my chance to build my own do my own thing to build my own empire as we say here out in Antioch but he doesn't do that at all he knew that he wasn't a great thinker he knew that something important was happening here and the right man for the job was needed but he wasn't a great thinker himself but he knew a man who was and what's more he knew where to find him because he'd sent him off there a few years earlier he'd sent him off to Tarsus so

Barnabas is off to Tarsus finds Paul and brings him back to Antioch and so in verse 26 of chapter 11 finally the right man is in the right place at the right time this is the critical place and the critical time no longer just one of the many Jewish sects has it been regarded by the Romans up to then more or less the disciples are now Christians and as I said that's a Greek name not a Hebraic name the disciples are Christians and the world is changed but still things haven't quite finished in Jerusalem and in fact Luke directs our attention back there in the next chapter and we'll defer that till next week but what can we what can we conclude for us from these world shattering events which is what it were this was the time when the world changed forever but it was all 2000 years ago it was all important to

Jewish believers but as far as I know I'm not aware of anybody here who is of Jewish descent maybe some who are most of us are certainly not we're Gentiles and so do these things have any relevance to us at all well I'm sure they do firstly of course let's not miss the obvious point that it was indeed true this passage assures us that God has granted Gentiles us Gentiles us who are not Jews repentance unto life we might have gathered here tonight and said like Cornelius probably did to some extent it said he was a God fearer but he was never going to qualify as a fully fledged Jew and we might have thought well you know at best we're going to be God fearers second class citizens of the kingdom as it were but no we are told by this that

God has granted us Gentiles repentance unto life we can't be excluded on the grounds of not being Jewish but we can be excluded on the grounds of unbelief and not believing what the spirit says not receiving the word in faith because those are the markers of the new covenant and if we don't receive the word in faith then we will indeed be chopped off and excluded but we can't be excluded on grounds of not being Jewish because God has indeed granted us Gentiles repentance unto life and this reminds us also that we don't have to be in Jerusalem kind of under the old covenant although of course believers understood that

God was everywhere in the world and if you took the wings of the morning God would still be there and yet it was true in a sense that the best place to meet with God into the old covenant was in Jerusalem but now people are meeting with God in Antioch and people can meet with God here in Brighton or anywhere else in this world we don't have to go to Jerusalem because the spirit of God is poured out now throughout the world and secondly it's important here to see how this works and to see that salvation comes not by word alone and not by spirit alone and certainly not by word or spirit in competition with each other as sometimes you hear proclaimed nowadays do you hear this said don't you we have the spirit we don't need to teach the word or we have the word we'll keep quiet about the spirit because we find that a bit embarrassing something like that but you can't do either of those faith comes by word and spirit not in competition but working together if we look again at chapter 11 14 to 17 how were they saved they were saved by having faith in the message that was preached to them and through that the spirit was poured out and they were baptized in the spirit or we could look at chapter 11 verse 24 where we are reminded of

[40:31] Barnabas who was Barnabas he was a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith so did he say well I don't need therefore to worry about

studying the word or teaching the word because I am full of the Holy Spirit exactly the opposite didn't he what did he actually do how did he work out his faith and how did the Holy Spirit work through him well it tells us in verse 26 he became a teacher he taught the word if we ignore word or Spirit we are going to be in trouble but it really shouldn't be a problem for sometimes it is sometimes we see that we feel that Spirit undermines the word somehow or the preaching the word suppresses the Spirit it shouldn't be like that it isn't like that really we need word and Spirit working together and so the most important gifts if we can say they are most important gifts of the

Spirit in the list that we read are those word gifts those who teach the word of God in one way or another and this is how Barnabas' gifts was worked out he became a teacher as did Saul Paul of course and how does that work well oh dear I missed a point out of this as well there was another point which kind of follows on from the one I've just said actually perhaps that's why I didn't put it on the slide but the Spirit works primarily through the understanding not through some ineffable experience yes there is a vision here Peter has a vision but the point of the vision is those words that word of God don't declare unclean what God has declared as clean it's a vision with content it's the fulfilment of the

Lord's promise to lead the apostles into all truth Peter's gut reaction if you like if you want to use that phrase was to eject the food before him in the vision what he needs is a change of mind he doesn't need some experience he needs a change of mind he needs to be reminded that it's God who declares what's clean or unclean and even then we notice that his conclusion is tentative it's not until he sees the vision worked out in practice in 11:17 when the spirit is indeed poured out that he is fully convinced and another point then I'll put it as three on the slide there whatever faith is faith is not blind we talk about blind faith and Dawkins tries to say that Christians believe faith is believing things without evidence faith is not believing things without evidence at all and it's certainly not blind faith is exercised through understanding understanding

Peter could have said to his detractors in 11:2 he says well I'm the apostle hang on a minute you've got no right to criticise me I'm the apostle I'm the one who met with the Lord I'm the one who had a vision and that's what God told me and what I say goes and to be honest sometimes those who claim to be in the descendants as it were the apostolic succession of Peter have said exactly that that you need to believe this because the church teaches it not because you understand it but that's not Peter's way at all this idea of implicit faith or believing it because Peter says so is not the way that Peter looks at it himself he doesn't do that as we've already said he explains everything precisely he goes through it all in great detail to make absolutely sure they've understood every point they didn't stop talking until they had the full story and as we've said the result was twofold they rescinded their objections and they praised

God faith is not blind faith comes through understanding through having heard the word preached having heard the good news of Jesus and understanding what it means and what it means for me and you faith is never blind in that sense and then finally just thinking of those these last few verses when the believers in Antioch who would have been mostly Gentiles decided that they were going to deal with the practical need of the believers in Jerusalem why they particularly needed I mean the famine was about throughout the Roman world so why particularly in Jerusalem I don't know but maybe Jerusalem was already beginning to come apart probably by this time the events that led up to the revolution and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 perhaps are already beginning to take hold and so the famine obviously was particularly bad in Jerusalem in Judea that seems to be the implication and so even though these people out in

[46:04] Antioch would have been having problems themselves with this famine they said well there are those who are worse off than we are let's see what we can do to help them and there is one Lord one faith one church one spirit yes there would be cultural tensions and there are still cultural tensions in the church they still happen we need to be careful not to put up barriers and divisions the spirit does not endorse yes we need to put up barriers where there need to be barriers where the word is being undermined or destroyed but we shouldn't put up barriers that the spirit doesn't have it's not our job to declare things clean or unclean

in that sense there would be real cultural tensions between Jerusalem and Antioch and as we move on in Acts we find these pop up quite repeatedly and also in the letters of Paul particularly of course in Acts 15 where they had to have a big meeting to sort out some of these issues and yet it was still one church the Jerusalem church was glad when they learned of the success of the word in Antioch notice 11 23 they didn't say oh dear don't like this they're doing better up the road than we are they were glad that the

Lord had that the spirit had been poured out among the Gentiles they were glad of it and the Antioch church didn't say well this is where it's all happening now it's not those people in Jerusalem don't matter anymore God's forgotten about them no they were really concerned for the welfare of the believers in Judea and so this reminds us we may not be it might not be a Jew Gentile thing but still there are these cultural barriers that come and we mustn't put up barriers that the Lord himself doesn't acknowledge we need to guard against party spirit so I've chosen as we close and then we'll move over to communion a hymn that says that there is one Lord one faith one church 579 reminds us that the ending