

Our Response to God's Plan

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Date: 07 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Imagine you're walking through your neighborhood and you see a new family moving in. They're from a different part of the world and they have a different culture, different customs, and they even speak a different language.

And you hear some whispers from your neighbors and they're expressing some disapproval of this family and knowing that it's going to kind of disrupt, potentially disrupt your neighborhood. And there's a sense of unease, questioning how this new family will fit well into the established norms of the community.

Well, this scenario isn't just about a neighborhood. It's a reflection of a common human reaction. Because we often view anything different through a lens of skepticism and judgment.

It's almost a reflex action. It's almost normal for us as human beings that we do that to assess and sometimes dismiss what doesn't align with our understanding or our experience.

[1 : 11] Now, let's look back to the days of the early church. We're going to be in Acts chapter 11 this morning. That's where we have come up to. We finished last week with the end of chapter number 10.

And in Acts chapter 11, we find a very similar situation that we just spoke of. The apostle Peter, who was a key figure in the church, has just done something groundbreaking.

He's taken the gospel and he's brought it to the Gentiles. Aren't you glad of that? That you and I are not Jews. And so, therefore, it's amazing for us that God included us in his plan.

But what he did was something that rattled the early church believers to their core. He shared the message of Jesus with a Gentile.

Mind you, not a Jew. Now, this was more than just stepping into a neighbor's yard. It was stepping into unchartered territory and even entering into a Gentile's house.

[2 : 31] But not only that, eating with them as well. And when he did this, he broke down barriers that had existed for generations.

And just like our neighborhood scenario that we just talked about, the early church had its shares of whispers and disapproving glances.

We see that over and over through the book of Acts. We're going to see it again in Acts chapter 15 with the Jerusalem council. They questioned, they doubted, and yes, they even criticized like we're going to see in this morning's section in verses 1 through verse 18.

But what unfolds in Acts chapter 11 is not just a story of overcoming cultural barriers. It's a powerful example of how God's vision often challenges our limited perspectives, inviting us into a broader understanding of God's kingdom and God's plan.

What we see in the book of Acts, especially in the first 11 verses or 11 chapters, is the transition from a more Jewish culture and a more Jewish understanding, a more traditional understanding of what God wanted to beginning about learning God's new plan and how God was now going to begin working in order for His church to reach the culture that was around them.

[4 : 06] And so He is inviting them into a broader understanding of God's plan, God's will, and His very own mind. So as we dive into chapter 11, the first 18 verses, let's open our hearts and open our minds and learn from the early church's experience and see how God's plans might be inviting us to step out of our comfort zones and to embrace a vision that is bigger than our traditions, bigger than our culture, and even bigger than our perspectives.

Because I don't know about you, but God is bigger than me. And, you know, I don't know everything that God knows.

And so God is showing the way that He wants to work with mankind in fresh new ways over and over and over again. He did it for the early church, and He's still doing it for us today.

So welcome to Acts chapter 11, a chapter that challenges, a chapter that convicts, and invites us to see the world through God's eyes.

Now this entire section of chapter 11, verses 1 through 18, is about the Jewish Christians in the church who criticized Peter for offending their traditions by doing God's will.

[5 : 37] Now you would think people in the church shouldn't be offended by God's will. But obviously this is what we see here, especially in this transition time in the book of Acts.

And this is kind of a situation that in the early church didn't go away. Because there were always the traditionalists that wanted to do things the way they thought they've always done it.

And God said, no, this is not what I want. And it's something that just didn't seem to go away. As we said, we saw it again and we see it again in Acts chapter number 15.

Now I know this chapter begins on a negative note, the first three verses. And then Peter has to explain himself. But what we find is, it ends up with the Jewish believers reconciling and showing how their difference, they realize their differences and they began to work together.

And they began to follow God's plan and God's will, which is the mark of a healthy biblical church.

And chapter 11 teaches us that we should acknowledge God's will and submit to it, regardless of its unpopularity.

[6 : 56] You know, we heard this morning, for those that were in Sunday school, Joseph in the Old Testament did some things that were pretty unpopular. He went against his culture.

Do you realize that there's some things that you do today that goes against culture? Culture says, you know what, it's okay to be involved in this.

It's okay to be involved in that. It's okay to, you know, well, you know, so and so, maybe they're just living together. And, or maybe this, or maybe that. Or maybe on your job, your boss might say, well, why don't you just fudge a few numbers?

Or how about you just not turn this in to OSHA? Or not do this, or not do that. And you say, no, I have integrity. I can't not do that.

And as we heard this morning, you know, you might lose your job. You might, you may lose your position for doing what's right. But when you do what's right, God will honor that.

[7 : 57] And God is going to accomplish His will and His plan, which is what we see here in chapter number 11 with Peter. So let's turn to chapter 11, and let's start with verses 1 through 3.

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of the Lord. And when Peter came to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them.

What is the first thing that we see? We are prone to criticize others based on our limited understanding. See, when we share the gospel, some will receive it.

Some will reject it. Some will surrender to it. Others will be stirred up because of it. In this section, verses 1 through 11, it shows us the obedience of Peter, number one.

Number two, it shows us the opposition to Peter. And then number three, the opportunity for Peter in sharing the good news of the gospel to those around us. And I heard, I read one commentator from about 100 years ago who said, The gospel is only the good news if people hear it in time.

[9 : 22] Have you ever heard of a sale or have you ever heard of something? And it was awesome news, but the sale ended last week. Oh, that's terrible.

And so it's only good news if people hear it before they die because we have the opportunity to trust Christ as our Savior. We have neighbors who are hurting, who...

I know we talked this morning in Sunday school about Pharaoh and about... And also, it brought to my mind this morning the story of Jesus with a woman at the well.

She too was trying to satisfy her life with the things of this world. And Jesus said, Those things won't satisfy. So we know people all around us who are trying to satisfy the void in their life, who are trying to satisfy an emptiness in their life that only God can fill.

I've heard it said that within every human being, there is a God-shaped void. And only Jesus can fill that void.

[10 : 36] And that's what Peter was doing. Peter was just simply obeying God and going to a Gentile's home, share the gospel with Cornelius and his family that we saw in chapter number 10.

And by the way, Peter is going to recount that in verses 4 through 17. So we're not going to spend a whole lot of time rehashing verses 4 through 17, but we will do it by way of review.

So we need to understand that there's always been opposition to the work of God. And there's always been opposition to the Word of God.

You can go around and tell people that, you know, I'm a Baptist, I'm a Catholic, I'm a Presbyterian, I'm a whatever. And people will probably say, Oh, okay, well, that's different.

That's not my cup of tea. But the moment you mention Jesus, that's when people get uncomfortable. That's when people say, You know what, I don't want...

[11 : 45] And I've heard people say that, I don't want to hear about that Jesus stuff. You know, they'll talk about religion, but they don't want to talk about Jesus. So there's always been opposition to the work of God and the Word of God from those that are without.

But most of the time it comes from those who don't know Jesus or from unsaved religious leaders. But here we learn that opposition arose from within the church.

There was opposition to the work of God. There was opposition to the man of God. So this was a, as we said earlier, this was a major transition period in the time of the church.

And God's new way of doing things and the rapid changes that resulted upset some within the church. So verse number one, Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God.

Do you realize that news travels fast? We learn here in these first three verses that news got back to Jerusalem even before Peter got back to Jerusalem. Now we learn in the last verse of chapter 10 that Peter hung around Cornelius' home and he was teaching them.

[13 : 01] He was spending time answering their questions. He was spending time discipling them. So we don't know the time frame, but word of the Gentile salvation got back to Jerusalem even before Peter got back.

The news spread like wildfire, even though, excuse me, the speed of news has changed. We can know of something that happened across the world within seconds of it happening.

Literally, while it's happening, people will open up their phone and start, begin recording. And we can see the news around the world immediately.

Now, even though that speed of news has changed, human nature hasn't changed. So let's see their response to the news of the Gentiles being saved.

And it's not what we would expect from believers. Verse number two, And when Peter came to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him.

[14 : 08] The Jewish believers chose to criticize rather than cheer. They had heard the news that the Gentiles had trusted Jesus and received the Holy Spirit.

But instead of cheering what God was doing, they wanted to criticize the man of God for what they thought he was doing. Those of the circumcision that we see in verse number two tells us that these were Jewish Christians that were still attached to the law of God and to the traditions of men.

And we know that many believers were still hanging on to the rituals and the teachings of Judaism. And we'll see that, as we said, come back up again in Acts chapter number 15 at the Jerusalem Council.

The issue just wouldn't go away. These Jewish believers back in Jerusalem that confronted and criticized Peter clearly represented a conservative minority in the church, and they were dedicated to protecting the Jewish perspective on Christianity.

They were determined to protect their perspective on what they thought Christianity and the church should be looking like.

[15 : 29] And verse two says, they contended with Peter. That word itself means to divide, to withdraw from, to oppose, or to criticize.

So they were criticizing Peter. Now understand this, there will always be those who oppose the work of God. They will oppose God's servant doing God's work in God's way.

That tends to happen over and over again. Now this is nothing new, because when God is at work, and when there's change from the old to the new, many people don't like the change of bringing new people in that don't look like them.

And that's what the Jews were having the issue with. These Gentiles were, in their own words, they considered them dogs, they considered them unclean, they considered them nasty.

And so for the Jews who were still stuck in their prejudices, if you will, what Peter did was something that offended their sensibilities.

[16:51] They were upset by it. But what was all the fuss about? We'll see in verse number three. The fuss was, they said, you went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them.

So what was the criticism over? The criticism was not over the Gentiles receiving Christ or receiving the Holy Spirit. Their criticism centered around a breach of their tradition.

Their problem wasn't that people were being saved. Their problem was the people that were being saved. That was their issue. They were more concerned with their legalist, traditional standards than the Lord's servant sharing the gospel with lost sinners.

They were more upset with upsetting the apple cart than they were with seeing God's work done by God's servant in God's way. So we need, here's the thing, we need to be careful about our convictions and make sure our convictions are in line with the word of God, not traditions.

We need to make sure that our convictions are in line with the word of God, not traditions. And I've heard it said that the definition of legalism is taking a principle and the application of that principle and placing the application on the same level with the principle.

[18:25] That's legalism. We need to make sure that they're carried out, our convictions are carried out in the spirit of God. So they were angry at Peter because he ate with Gentiles.

They weren't concerned about, they weren't concerned at this point about the conversion of people. They were more concerned about the condition of Peter. They were more concerned that Peter wasn't who Peter needed to be rather than being concerned about people trusting Christ as their Savior.

The problem was their focus was all messed up. Their focus was on the wrong thing. Luke said this about Jesus in Luke 15, 2. And the Pharisees and the scribes complained, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

David Jeremiah said, it's interesting that Peter was accused by his fellow Christians of the same thing Jesus was accused by the Pharisees, eating with sinners.

He goes on to say, at least Peter was in good company. Most of the time, dissenters' issues are not with the main thing, but with side issues.

[19:41] Getting the gospel to lost people is God's mission, and He accomplishes it through His servants. Most church fusses could be diffused if people could just keep the main thing the main thing.

Herschel Ford, pastor and author from the beginning of the past century, wrote this. You notice here, he was referring to Acts chapter 11.

You notice here that these people did not rebuke Peter for preaching Christ to the Gentiles, but for eating with them. It is usually that way.

When a quarrel starts in a church, it is not over big doctrinal questions, but over some trivial thing which cannot compare with the main issue. You see, some people are going to be critical no matter what you do.

You've got family members that are going to be critical of you no matter what you do. You're doing this too much. You're doing this too little. You're doing it this way.

[20:44] I'd rather you do it that way. People are going to be critical. When we're doing the work of God, some people will criticize you for the way that you're doing it.

It might offend their sensibilities. The thing is, you have to do what God has called you to do based upon His will and His word.

But we need to remain faithful to Jesus and not turn aside or give up when we face opposition. See, Peter was attacked and criticized for going to the home of the Gentiles and eating with them.

What could have Peter done? He could have easily thrown up his hands and say, I quit. I give up. You know, they don't get it. But we need to realize that we can't please everyone all the time.

It reminded me of one of Aesop's fables. One of Aesop's fables tells of an old man and his son bringing a donkey to market. Passing some people along the way, they hear the remark, look at that silly pair walking when they could be riding comfortably.

[21:54] The eye just seemed sensible to the old man, so he and the boy mounted the donkey and continued on their way. Soon they passed another group. Look at that lazy pair they heard, breaking the back of that poor donkey, tiring him so that no one will buy him.

The old man slid off. But soon they heard another criticism from a passerby. What a terrible thing! This old man walking while the boy gets to ride.

They changed places, but soon heard people whispering, what a terrible thing! the big strong man riding and making the little boy walk. The old man and the boy pondered the situation and finally continued their journey in another manner, carrying the donkey on a pole between them. As they crossed the bridge, the donkey broke loose, fell into the river, and drowned. Aesop's moral? You can't please everyone. See, these Jewish Christians blew right past the fact that these Gentiles had trusted Christ as their Savior and received the Holy Spirit and that embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They heard Peter's message. They said, that's right. That's it. It's Jesus. And we trust Jesus. Peter didn't even get a chance to finish his sermon.

[23 : 16] They believed in their heart and God poured His Holy Spirit upon them while Peter was still talking. They blew right past that fact and they focused on what offended their sensibilities rather than on what God was doing and was wanting to do.

Now, it drives Peter to have to defend his actions. Now we move to verses 4 through 17. We're going to move a little bit more quickly through these verses.

Verse 4, Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning. Peter goes all the way back. Peter didn't have anything to be afraid of. He was merely following orders from God. He says, I was in the city of Joppa praying and in a trance I saw a vision. An object descending like a great sheet led down from heaven by four corners and it came to me when I observed it intently and considered and saw four-footed animals of the earth wild beasts creeping things and birds of the air and I heard a voice saying to me rise Peter kill and eat.

But I said not so Lord for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth. The old Peter when he was confronted by these criticizing Christians the old Peter might have been tempted to lop off an ear or two.

[24 : 50] But that was the old Peter. You see now Peter has matured. He's received the Holy Spirit. What we're seeing now is the spirit-filled version Peter responding to these critics.

Peter had matured enough to understand why these brothers struggled with what they were struggling with and the problem the unclean and clean problem that plagued them.

So what we see in verses 4 through 8 Peter admits his own hesitation in going to the Gentiles. You know at some level Peter says you know what I'm with you guys.

I didn't want to either. you know I know where you're coming from because my own sensibilities were my own traditions were my own preconceptions my own prejudices were violated but God showed me three times and he said I even told God I didn't say no he said I said no Lord and he said I'm not doing it.

So even Peter opposed God and even Peter opposed God's will. So he starts off by saying listen guys I get it. I didn't want to either.

[26 : 06] But then he explains how God showed him that what God wanted him to do was God's new way of doing things don't be afraid of it just do what I say.

And Peter decided to be open to God's guidance even though it challenged his preconceptions. What do we see in verses 9 through 14 but the voice answered me again from heaven and what God has cleansed you must not call common.

Now this was done three times and all were drawn up again into heaven at that very moment three men stood before the house where I was having been sent from Caesarea then the spirit told me to go with them doubting nothing.

moreover these six brethren accompanied me and we entered the man's house and he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house who said to him send men to Joppa call for Simon whose surname is Peter who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved. So what did Peter do? First of all Peter admitted his hesitation but then Peter aligned himself with God's plan. Peter tells his brethren here that the Holy Spirit of God spoke to him to go with go to these men that were sent to him.

[27 : 35] You know it's always good to obey the Spirit of the Lord. It's always good to obey what God is telling you to do. See when we're facing a tough decision James in his book in the New Testament tells us if you lack wisdom he said ask.

If you have a problem in your life if you have problems with your finances and you're trying to make a decision based on do I take this job do I take that job do I do this do I take out a loan do I do whatever whatever it is in our life it might be a medical question what do I do do I do I take this

course of treatment do I take that course of treatment do I do this or do I do that we're all faced with all of these types of decisions in our lives you know it's always best to go to God first and allow his Holy Spirit to teach you James said don't worry God won't chide you for it he'll give you the wisdom that you need to make the best decision in so when we're facing that tough decision in our life we need to seek the mind of the Lord and the direction that he sends you on John Phillips wrote this it's a great thing when contemplating some course of action to be sure that we have the mind of the spirit that is true of all life's decisions but particularly so when contemplating some major change of direction or some wholly new course of action wants to know this the Holy Spirit doesn't lead you down dead end streets the Holy Spirit will lead you to what's brighter and better and his will but particularly so when we are looking for opportunities that he is wanting to place ahead of us he won't lead us into wasted opportunities he leads us to accomplish his will and to bring glory and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ so what does Peter do in verses 15 through 17 we saw that he hesitated doing God's will then he says okay I'll go ahead and do God's will he aligned himself with God's new plan but what about verses 15 through 17 verse 15 and as I began to speak so here he's already there he's already at Cornelius his house his family his friends that had Cornelius had gathered Cornelius if you remember from a few verses before in the previous chapter Cornelius was so excited about hearing from God so excited about hearing from God's servant that he gathered as many people as he could he filled his house to hear the gospel or to hear from God and so Peter says in verse 15 and as I began to speak I wasn't finished as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them and again we see this again see Peter's trying to help them see the real thing just like we receive just as the Holy Spirit came upon us at the beginning he's referring back to Pentecost then I remembered the word of the Lord isn't it good to remember God's word then I remember what Jesus said how he said John indeed baptized with water but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit now I get it that's what Jesus was talking about that's what Jesus said John was talking about we got that at Pentecost the Samaritans received it when Philip went to the Samaritans and now the Gentiles have received the Holy Spirit the same way we did as Jews so he says if therefore verse 17 if therefore God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to stand against God so Peter got out of God's way literally it's what he says I couldn't withstand God so I got out of God's way Peter remembered what Jesus said Jesus came and told his disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit Peter realized God is sovereign and Peter finished up by saying who am I to stand in God's way and as [32 : 11] Paul Harvey some of you who may or may not know who Paul Harvey was he was a news commentator from previous generation couple of previous generations the way he would end segue into the next portion of his broadcast he was saying now for the rest of the story these Jewish Christians learned verse 18 when they heard these things when they heard these things what what are the these things when they heard Peter's explanation when they heard what God had done when they heard that these Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit the same way they had received the Holy Spirit when they realized that God had instituted a new plan not they weren't the only ones now God was accepting Gentiles also what happens they accepted they decided that they couldn't argue with God so we learned don't argue with God so how did these

Jewish believers respond the believers accepted Peter's explanation and they stopped objecting so when they heard these things verse 18 they became silent Peter's explanation of what God was doing and the new plan that God had instituted shut their mouths I think they were wise enough to realize who are we to speak against God they listened and they got it they had missed the will of God by not seeing the Gentiles the same way God saw the Gentiles and were not willing to receive the Gentiles the way God received them John G.

Butler from many years ago said this so often critics in churches will not listen to explanations let the pastor or some church official try to explain something in a business meeting and do it ever so well even as Peter did here and these people interrupt or pay no attention to what he says as soon as he stops speaking they start in again making charges with evidence they did not listen at all such critics only oppose themselves as the problem not the answer so what did they do they said you know what we can't argue with God and they accepted the new way of thinking they accepted the new plan we says the latter part of verse 18 then they realized saying then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life we see that God has given these

Gentiles the privilege of repenting from their sins and receiving eternal life so they accepted a new paradigm a paradigm is simply a way of looking at things it's a framework through which we see a

plan working so they now saw that God had accepted the Gentiles they couldn't fight with God they couldn't argue with God and then lastly they stopped complaining and started praising God's new plan they glorified God so what we see is a potential problem within the church traditionalists who were offended by what Peter did he explains himself he explains God's plan and at the mark of a healthy church they said we get it now and they glorified God and they were willing to accept that God wanted to do something special in the lives of these

Gentiles I am so thankful that God chose to work with Gentiles I am so thankful that God chose to reach out beyond his chosen people now his chosen people are still part of God's plan if you're following anything that's going on in Israel now this is not part of the message but this is kind of a little aside woe be unto any of us if we choose to turn our backs on God's people woe be unto us if we choose to turn our backs on Israel because all we have to do is look at the Old Testament and see what happened to any country that opposed Israel people so that was free I just wanted to give you a warning whatever our country chooses to do please don't turn your back on God's people don't turn your back on Israel because they are still God's people

[37 : 14] God still has a plan and as we see in the book of the Revelation God is still going to complete his plan with his people but I'm so thankful that he has grafted us in so this morning if you don't know Jesus as your Savior maybe you're watching you're listening or maybe you're here this morning and you would say pastor I'm just not sure I'm just not sure that I've I've really understood like Cornelius and his family understood you know I just don't know that I'm right with God this morning I want to offer you through the promise of the word of God God says Jesus said he will accept all those who come to him every single one it matters not what you've done it matters not your past because God revealed his unconditional love for us when

Jesus Christ willingly gave up his life on the cross for you and for me and the third day he rose again proving that God was satisfied with that payment so they glorified God they celebrated the work of God in saving these Gentiles they changed their perspective about the Gentiles see a work of grace in the hearts of people will always change their outlook about others when we see God doing something it can change our perspective when we when we sense and when we see and when we experience God's grace in our life God gets all the glory it's not us God gets the glory just like we sang this morning about the miraculous things that happen God should get the glory not us see we need to thank God for working in his church whether it's in this church or it's in the church down the street because we are on the same team we may not agree on everything but know this if they believe that

Jesus is the son of God Jesus died on the cross in our place and that salvation is available by grace through faith alone we're going to spend eternity with him in heaven and Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane God help my people help your people be unified so what do we learn from this experience of these Jewish believers and I'll close with this acknowledge God's will and submit to it regardless of its popularity let's pray father this morning we are so thankful for the truth of your word we're so thankful that you accept us we're thankful that you have instituted your new plan accepting those outside of the children of Israel father we pray that you may do a mighty work in our hearts in our lives we pray heavenly father that we may be able to individually grow in our faith in Christ that we may be able to help one another grow and disciple one another that we may be able to grow closer to one another that we may be able to encourage and spur one another to good works and father as well may you help us to reach out to those around us for the gospel of Jesus Christ we thank you for what you're going to do we thank you for what you've already done we pray in Jesus name amen US we we we we we we we we Thank you.

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