

Acts 11

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Tape #8100
Pastor Chuck Smith

Last week we were with Peter as he went by direction of the Spirit to the house of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was in the city of Caesarea, and how that as Peter was sharing with them the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit suddenly descended upon them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. There was speaking in tongues and evidences that the power of the Holy Spirit as He had come upon the Gentiles. When the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles, they immediately concluded that God was no respecter of persons and that Gentiles could actually be saved! Up until this time, the Jews felt that a Gentile could not be saved. They felt that to be saved, if you were a Gentile, you would first have to become a Jew. But now they realized that God is no respecter of persons and that all of those who call upon Him will be saved.

Now this is radical departure for the early church. This whole thing sort of began a little earlier when under persecution, Philip went to Samaria. He preached Christ unto them and the Samaritans received the gospel. Back in the first chapter, verse eight, Jesus said to His disciples, you are going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You will be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. So up until now we have seen their witness in Jerusalem. As persecution came they spread throughout Judea, preaching the Word, then Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ unto them. Many believed and were baptized. Now as we get into chapter eleven we are going to see how it is spreading. The beginning of the spread into all the world. Going beyond the Jewish borders. Coming, at the end of the chapter into the Gentile world. The beginning of it was of course, Peter going to Cornelius, chapter ten. But as we get into chapter eleven, Peter's going in to the house with Cornelius, is not a proper thing for a Jew to do according to their tradition. You have to recognize up to this point, Christianity was sort of a Jewish sect. It was a sect of Judaism and it was really just sort of kept within the confines of Judaism. But now a break has been made, directed by the Holy Spirit and to the Gentiles the gospel has been taken.

So ¹*Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.* ²*And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,* They called him on the carpet. They that are of the circumcision describes those who were of the traditional Jewish belief. That to be saved you had to become a Jew and that you did by the rite of baptism and circumcision and then the obedience to the Mosaic law. So they who held to this belief that you had to be a Jew to be saved, they called Peter in.

They accused him, ³*saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"* That was their charge. Now eating with a person in that culture was an extremely significant act. They considered eating with someone tantamount to becoming one with that person. That is why the Jew would never eat with a Gentile. You see if we are eating together, especially in that culture where you used your hands, and where you had just a common bowl of soup on the table. You had a common bowls of salads and sauces. And you had a common loaf of flat bread. The custom was just to pull off some of the bread and dip it in the sauces and in the soup and eat it. And you were using your hands. There was no rule of etiquette that you don't dip twice. And thus there is a real idea of sharing when you ate together—of germs and everything else. So in their minds, they saw it as becoming one with that other person because I'm eating from the same loaf that you eating and thus it's becoming a part of my body. It's going into my system. My body is assimilating it and it's becoming a part of my body. But it's also becoming a part of your body, that same loaf of bread. So in a mystical way we are being united as we eat together of the same bread. And they saw it that way. To them it was a very significant act to eat with someone. Remember they had accused Jesus (Matthew 9:10). They said, He eats with sinners and with publicans. I mean, that was unspeakable in their mind. To dare to become one with a sinner or a publican. So they said, you did eat with them. Now, Peter, if he were the first pope, wasn't infallible. And he is being called on the carpet. He is being called to answer for his actions.

And though he rightly defends what he did, as we move later in the book of Acts, actually in the book of Galatians, we will find that Peter came down to the church that was established at Antioch. And before certain of the Jews came to Jerusalem, he was eating with the Gentile believers in Antioch. But when these people came from Jerusalem, Peter separated himself and would only eat with the Jews. So Peter was having a difficult time even though he is called on the carpet for this. He himself is not really comfortable yet eating with Gentiles. And in his separating himself it created a division in Antioch. And so Paul had to withstand him to his face and rebuked him, before certain brethren came from Jerusalem he was eating with the Gentiles. Once they came he separated himself. It caused hard feelings. It caused division in the church in Antioch.

So you ate with them! ⁴*But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning,* Now in those days, writing was not the easiest thing in the world. You wrote on parchment. Thus you wanted to conserve your words because parchment was rather scarce. When Luke first wrote the Book of Acts, he wrote it on a parchment. The size of the Book of Acts would have taken a parchment of about thirty feet long. It would be rolled up. But if it got longer than that it would have gotten quite bulky. So they tried to keep them sort of limited. And thus for him to tell the same story twice because we read the story in chapter ten as it was actually happening, now he repeats it again and allows Peter to tell the whole story to the church in Jerusalem, which indicates that this is a very important juncture as far as the church is concerned. The church going to the Gentiles or the Gentiles receiving the grace of God. It is an extremely important juncture to the church, and thus Luke sees necessary to repeat the story for the importance of this particular experience of the door of opportunity to be saved being extended now to the Gentiles.

So Peter tells them of just how it happened, saying: ⁵*"I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision,* Now God often times spoke to men through visions (Abram, Jacob, Samuel, Elisha, Nathan, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Zechariah, Ananias, Paul).. God often times spoke to people through dreams visions (Abimalech, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, Pharaoh, Gideon) And it was often that dreams did have a spiritual significance. As a general rule dreams had to be interpreted. And so God would give to certain people the gift of interpreting dreams. Visions were much like a dream, only they were in a state of awakenedness rather than dreaming. You were awake but you were in sort of a trance. In this trance you were able to see into the spirit world. Now there is a spirit world. We are surrounded by it. We are in it. There is a spirit world around us that is just as real as our physical world. And a vision is a gift whereby a person can see into the spirit realm and see the things that are happening in the realm of the spirit around him. In the Old Testament we find that this gift of seeing into the spirit world was exercised many times by the prophets, especially that of Elisha, the prophet. But so many times Ezekiel would describe the vision that he had. That insight into the spirit world. The Book of the Revelation was a vision that was given to John. Now in the realm of the spirit there is no time. Time is a material, physical substance. It doesn't exist in the realm of the spirit, thus in seeing in the spirit world, you can see things that have not yet happened in the material world of time. John, he said was taken by the spirit unto the day of the Lord. That is as he described the battle of Armageddon and all. He was seeing it in the spirit, although it has not yet transpired, I believe it will soon be transpiring. So there you escape the time continuum when you come into the realm of the spirit. In the capacity of seeing spiritual things. It's in a vision. So he saw this vision. God spoke to him through a vision. The promise concerning the Holy Spirit, through Joel, in the last days, God said, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. God has often communicated to people by these methods.

So Peter describes, I was in a trance, and I saw a vision. And there was *an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me.* Here he is in prayer and he goes into this trance and he sees this big sheet, tied on the four corners, a rope letting it down from heaven. ⁶*When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.* (a real menagerie) ⁷*And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'* ⁸*But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.'* ⁹*But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'* ¹⁰*Now this was done*

three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²Then the Spirit told me to go. Peter is saying it was the Spirit that instructed me to go. He is defending the fact that he went and ate with them and brought the gospel. The Spirit told me to go, *with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.* So Peter took six Jews with him, suspicioning that God might be doing something and he would have to answer for it. And so he has his witness all set. ¹³And he told us (that is Cornelius) *how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'* ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. So the Lord was working on both ends, as I believe He always does. The Lord had worked on Cornelius' end. In a vision He told him to send to Joppa, to the house of Simon the tanner. There is a man whose surname is Simon. And he is to come and he is to share with you the way of the gospel.

Peter, in the meantime, the Lord was speaking to him. So that when the men came, and our master saw a vision and you know, you are supposed to come with us. The Lord had already dealt with Peter and he knew that he was to go. He worked on both ends. Pastor Chuck is always a little suspicious of those who come to him "with a message from the Lord." He's disappointed that the Lord lost his address. He always takes it under advisement.

Peter said when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, ¹⁶*Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'* So Peter is equating this experience of the Holy Spirit to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Separate from the baptism of water. And he sees it as, Jesus said, John baptizes with water but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit came upon those in the house of Cornelius, Peter was reminded of the words of Jesus as he saw them being baptized with the Holy Spirit!

So he said, ¹⁷*If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"* Now, you've called me in on the carpet. You are contending with me because I went to the Gentiles and everything, but look, the Holy Spirit directed me to go. While I was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on them and God did it! Who am I to withstand God? In other words, don't blame me for what God did! It was the direct work of God in bringing to the Gentiles, salvation and the Holy Spirit.

So ¹⁸*When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."* What can you say? So often when a person is doing something that I deem to be rather foolish and I seek to counsel them, so often they say but the Lord has shown me or the Lord led me, that sort of ends the whole thing. I mean what can you say? Now there are many times that I doubt that the Lord has spoken to them, but if they are convinced that God has directed them then there is not much you can do. You just have to hold your peace and wait for the thing to crash and then go pick up the pieces. So here is Peter. He is saying, look, God sent me. The Holy Spirit came upon them. Who am I? I can't resist God.

Now we enter into a new phase, ¹⁹*Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.* Notice that God used the persecution to spread the gospel. These people went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch preaching the gospel, but limiting their preaching to the Jews only. It was still in their minds a Jewish experience.

²⁰*But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.* So now there are those and they are from Cyprus and Cyrene. They are in Antioch and they are preaching to the Grecians, going now beyond the limits of just Jews only. They are beginning to share the gospel with the Gentiles, the Grecians. Now Antioch was a major city of the world at that time. In fact it was the third largest and most important city in the world. Rome was first. Alexandria was next and Antioch was the third most important city and largest city in the world at that time.

But Antioch was known as the Las Vegas of the world at that time. It was sin city. It was pleasure city. The pleasure never ceased, night and day. Nightclubs and all kinds of entertainment. The Greek temple of the goddess Daphne was outside the city in a laurel grove. Daphne according to the story was a beautiful young girl and the god, Apollo, fell in love with her. He began to pursue her. And he caught her in, actually she was saved by being turned into a laurel branch from the pursuit of Apollo. So her temple was in the midst of a laurel grove. And the priestesses of the temple were prostitutes. And thus in the grove there was the worship of Daphne by the prostitutes and so forth. It was a part of their licentious worship. To this city that was known for its licentiousness, known for its ribaldry, the gospel came. It is interesting that the Bible doesn't tell us the names of those who shared the gospel. Unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene shared the gospel with the Gentiles there in Antioch. But we don't know who they are! And I sort of like that. Here is a great work where now really for the first time, openly, the gospel is coming to the Gentiles. We've seen a slow movement. Philip to the Samaritans. Peter to the house of Cornelius. But now an open proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles by unnamed individuals in this pagan city of Antioch, but an extremely important city.

²¹*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.* It was a movement of God. A great number of people had come to the faith in Jesus and they turned to the Lord!

²²*Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.* Now Barnabas is first mentioned in chapter four where he sold his possession and put his money into the churches' treasury. He is later spoken of as when Paul the apostle was converted, the church in Jerusalem was sort of hesitant to receive him into fellowship. They weren't sure that he wasn't an undercover agent for the priests, but it was Barnabas that brought Paul in and told them how that God had used Paul in Damascus in sharing the truth and that the conversion was genuine. But when there was a lot of trouble stirring in Jerusalem and they decided to send Paul away, it was Barnabas that accompanied Paul to the city of Caesarea where Paul got a ship and went back to Tarsus. So this same Barnabas, not an apostle, but just a brother, a beautiful brother. Son of consolation or son of comfort, he is sent to see what is going on. An ideal man to send because he is a peacemaker. He is very open. We hear that a lot of Gentiles are believing in the Lord. Go see what is happening, Barnabas. A perfect man to send because he is really not limited to the strict Jewish thought. He's open to what God might be doing.

²³*When he came and had seen the grace of God, (He saw this wonderful work of God's grace in the people there) he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.* And thus exhorting or encouraging them now. Now we find that they were speaking of Jesus. They were preaching Jesus. And now here is Barnabas exhorting them to cleave unto the Lord.

²⁴*For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.* (A great move of God's Spirit and work of God in Antioch, this pagan city.) ²⁵*Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.* The Greek word is that of searching diligently. As Barnabas saw the work among the Gentiles. He realized that Paul would be an ideal person to come and minister there. Now it had been some seven years since he had seen Paul. When Paul first encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he did not immediately return to Jerusalem, but went out to the desert of Arabia. There for three years, he was taught of the Spirit. He then came to Jerusalem. He went back to Damascus and then came to Jerusalem and there was such a stir, that for just the sake of peace, they sent Paul away to Tarsus. He's been gone to Tarsus for seven years, which means that Paul really did not begin his ministry until ten years after his conversion. Now there are many who want to begin immediately their ministry as soon as they are converted. And that is good. Share what you have. But don't be disappointed if God puts you in the desert for a while to learn. If He just takes you to school for a time, training you, preparing you. Now Paul is ideally prepared for this ministry. Because he was born in the city of Tarsus, a city of strong Greek culture and his early experiences were into the Greek culture. But being of the tribe of Benjamin and having a father devoted to God and to the law, Paul was sent for schooling to Jerusalem. There he sat at the feet of Gamaliel and excelled in his studies. But he has a Grecian cultural background. A Hebrew education in the Scriptures. When he comes to Jesus Christ, the whole Old Testament comes alive. He can see where Christ is indeed the Messiah. And he can prove from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah. In the church

in Antioch they needed a man who was skilled in the Scriptures, but one who would understand the Grecian background. And so as Paul wrote, I was separated from my mother's womb under the Gospel. In other words, God had His hand on me from the beginning, my birthplace, my early life, my culture in the Greek, my study in the Hebrew Scriptures. He saw where God's hand was on him all the way along. So Barnabas knowing Paul, having met him and introduced him and sort of was the go between in bringing him into the church in Jerusalem, as he is there in Antioch, he thinks, wow! The ideal person for this is Paul. I need to find him. It's interesting how that so often as we go through we meet people. We become a little acquainted with their background and with them. Years later there will come an opening and I will think they will be the ideal one for that. It doesn't always happen immediately. Pastor Chuck has quite a card catalog up here of people and their talents and capacities. When a need arises, he goes, yes, that's perfect! That's the perfect one. Thus we've been able to facilitate for a lot of people a place in the ministry because you know their background. You know where they are coming from. Sometimes it's years later that you see a situation and yes, they are the ideal one!

So Barnabas, independent of the church in Jerusalem, there in Antioch thought, Paul would be the one. So he goes to Tarsus and he searches for him. ²⁶*And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.* They were speaking of the Lord. They were preaching Christ. Barnabas was exhorting them. Now for a year Paul and Barnabas are there teaching them. The various aspects of the ministry. Speaking of the Lord where ever you go. Preaching Jesus Christ! Proclaiming the gospel to people. Exhorting people to right living. And then teaching them in the ways of the Lord. The various ministries within the body. So a whole year they were there. It was a big church. It was a successful ministry there in Antioch. And there is where they first got the name Christians. It's a combination of Greek and Latin. It's a Greek-the *Christos*-with a Latin ending-*antios*. So Christianity, like Christ. It was a sort of, the people of Antioch were sort of great for giving names. There was a Roman emperor, can't' point his name out right now. He came to Antioch. He had a beard so they called him "the goat." Evidently he had a beard that sort of looked like a goat. The people in Antioch called him a goat. Here they are calling them Christians. It's a derisive kind of a name. But they liked it. They picked up on it and thus the name Christian has been something, sort of like, you know, the press started writing about them. They say "the Christians." They used to say the "Jesus freaks." Or the "Jesus people." It was meant to be sort of derisive, but the believer liked it. They picked up on it. Thus they accepted the name Christian, which indicated Christ like. And that name was given to them there in Antioch.

²⁷*And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.* So a further ministry. Prophets. See the diversity? Coming and speaking to the people. And there was this prophet who came from Jerusalem. Now prophets were sort of nomads. They went from place to place. In the early church there were these men who were prophets who go around from church to church exercising this gift. Their gift of prophecy could be foretelling or it could be forthtelling. It could be speaking forth the Word of God. He that prophesies speaks unto the church to edification, to exhortation and to comfort. So they would come. They would speak and they would speak words of exhortation comfort to the church. Now there were also false prophets going around. They were a plague in the early church. So in about 100 the early church wrote sort of a teaching of the apostles, known as the *Didache*, in which they gave certain rules for a person who would come in declaring himself to be a prophet. How that they would be able to discern, basically, if he were a true prophet or not. I think that the guidelines that they set down are very good. If he came in and took an offering, he is a false prophet! If he stayed more than one day and didn't go to work, he was a false prophet. If he ordered in the name of the Lord that a meal should be prepared for the poor or if he was using the church for a source of money, he was a false prophet. They were to feed him. They were to shelter him for a night. But then he was to move on or else he would be branded as a false prophet.

And in those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸*Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up* Now we are going to be meeting Agabus later on in the Book of Acts, so file that name. We will get back to Agabus a little later on. But this prophet stood up *and showed by the Spirit* (This is where prophecy is foretelling the future) *that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also*

happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. (This did come to pass in the reign of Claudius Caesar.) ²⁹*Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.*

³⁰*This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.* So Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem with an offering from the church in Antioch to help the brethren in Jerusalem. It is interesting that this early and of course it is now about twelve years from the inception of the church, that financial problems have already begun to arise as the result of their experiment in communal living. Where everyone sold their possessions and brought the money in. That can be sort of a Ponzi type of scheme. You have to keep getting new investors or things are going to get bad. And they got bad in Jerusalem. It's a thing where it was probably motivated more by just emotion and excitement than by the Spirit of God. There is no place where it said that God ordered them to sell their possessions and form a common purse. That was something that was done spontaneously. Many times things get sort of started in the church sort of spontaneously. One person does it and everybody says, ooooh, aah, did you see that? Do you know what they did? I wish they would ooh and aah over me, so you follow. And it gets to be something that everybody who wants the oohs and the ahs, they follow too. But it wasn't the case where everybody was ordered. You remember the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who sold but held back a part of the possessions. But they gave the pretense of giving all of it. A hypocrisy here. And Peter said, while you had it was it not yours? In other words, did anybody ask you to sell it? The answer obviously is no. When you sold it where you required to bring in everything? The answer is obviously no, they didn't have to do that. Their sin was not in holding back. Their sin was in the pretense of giving everything when secretly they were holding back or it was hypocrisy, the curse of the church. So already the church is in financial straits in Jerusalem. Paul again later on in the Book of Acts will be going to all the Gentile churches to collect an offering for the poor brethren in Jerusalem. So here we find Paul returning to Jerusalem.

Now it is interesting as you see the progression of things, how that each subsequent event was sort of tied to an earlier thing. God, and thus you see the pattern, is weaving the whole thing together. The Holy Spirit is directing fully the activity of the church as things are interlinked. The persecution of the death of Stephen and subsequent persecution caused the spread of the gospel. Men going as far as Antioch, Cyprus and Phoenicia. This is all tied to Stephen. Paul's conversion. He's there watching Stephen. He's listening to Stephen. And then he watches him as he is stoned. And he hears his prayer. It begins to work in his mind and his conscience. And on the road to Damascus, the Lord stops Paul and says how it's been hard for you to kick against the goads. Paul then coming to Jerusalem. Barnabas sort of taking Paul in and front running for him, bringing him to the apostles. Knowing Paul, understanding Paul's background, accompanying Paul to Caesarea as he heads back to Tarsus. He knows of Paul and he knows of his capacity. You see, it's all tied together. God is working the whole thing together and each event is tied to something of the past. Pastor Chuck says it's awfully interesting when you get to his age, if you make it that far, it's awfully interesting to be able to look back and you can see how God was intertwining events and circumstances all the way along. Things that he didn't understand at the time. Things that he was even at certain times rebelling against because he didn't understand them. But now as you look back you can see, yes, God brought to pass this relationship. He had me there in order that he might put me here, in order...so you can see how the whole thing is linked together. So that song, "All the way my Savior leads me, what have I to ask beside." And then you can see where God's hand was all the way along. And thus you see it here in the Book of Acts how that each event relates to another. And how that God uses a wide variety of ministries, speaking about the Lord. Preaching the Lord. Exhorting, teaching, prophesying. A wide variety of ministry. But there is one body, one church, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, who is above all, through all and over all (Ephesians 4:4-6). And it's wonderful to see how God works through the various ways in building up his body, the church. And so here we have a part. And we are thrilled to have this part in the work of God's Holy Spirit, seeing the hand of God still at work. And each event being related to some event of the past. His hand at work, all the way.

Father, we give thanks to You for the work of Your Holy Spirit in and among Your people. And how, Lord, You have guided and directed the activities of the church from the beginning. And how we can look

and we can see, Lord, how You put things together. A contact here and experience there. And how Lord, Your timing and Your work has been so beautiful. And we've had the privilege of the opportunity of watching You work in these days. Lord continue Your work. May we ever, Lord, be open to You and to the leading of Your Holy Spirit, that You might build Your church even as You promised. Lord, guide us. Direct us. We acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord and He is the head over His body, the church. And so Lord, we are here, to serve You. To listen to You. To receive our instructions and our orders from You, that You will guide and direct, Lord, every phase and every activity of the church to Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.