**Brown Community Group**

**Discussion Guide**

Go Therefore: Acts 11:1-30-May 9,2021

Last week in Acts Chapter 10 we witnessed God’s salvation being opened to the Gentiles. Even though Jesus had foretold this in Acts 1:8 before his departure, it still required God to change Peter’s heart on the matter. Now in Chapter 11 we witness the reaction of the church in Jerusalem and how Peter addressed it. Towards the end of this chapter, we see God taking Jewish and Gentile believers and unifying them into one body of Christians in Antioch.

I love how the Matthew Henry Commentary introduces Acts 11. He begins with referencing Cornelius whom we studied in Acts 10 last week.

*The preaching of the gospel to Cornelius was a thing which we poor sinners of the Gentiles have reason to reflect upon with a great deal of joy and thankfulness; for it was the bringing of light to us who sat in darkness. Now it being so great a surprize to the believing as well as the unbelieving Jews, it is worthwhile to enquire how it was received, and what comments were made upon it. And here we find Intelligence was presently brought of it to the church in Jerusalem, and thereabouts; for Cesarea was not so far from Jerusalem but that they might presently hear of it. Some for good-will, and some for ill-will, would spread the report of it; so that before he himself had returned to Jerusalem the apostles and the brethren there and in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God, that is, the gospel of Christ, which is not only a word of God, but the word of God; for it is the summary and centre of all divine revelation.*

**Peter tells his story to the church in Jerusalem**

1. **Acts 11:1-18 (ESV)**

**1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3“You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” 4But Peter began and explained it to them in order: 5“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. 6Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ 8But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ 10This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ 15As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” 18When they heard these things, they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”**

When reading verses 11: 5-15 you might think you are in the movie

“Ground Hog Day” where each day is a repeat of the previous day. In Verses 5-15, Luke inspired by the Holy Spirit essentially repeats verbatim the account given in Acts Ch 10. Repetition in the Bible typically is used to emphasize or place importance on a point.

**Questions**

1. What might God be emphasizing to us in verses 5-15?
2. What is a Gentile? How did the Jews view Gentiles? Why? Can you think of any texts or stories in the Bible that paint a picture of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles?
3. Who was the circumcision party? At this point in church history what challenges might have arisen for a devout Jew in the transition of devotion to the Old Covenant to devotion to Christ?
4. What are some examples of how criticism rears its head in the church today?
5. How did Peter respond to the criticism? Would you say he approached it meekly? Is there any sign of pride on his part?
6. Are there lessons we can learn from this example regarding how we should respond to criticism?
7. In Acts so far, we have seen the Holy Spirit work powerfully and in mass at Pentecost, in Samaria, and now with Gentiles? In all three cases, Peter was there to witness. What was God communicating through the Spirit’s movement in these cases? How does it complement the thematic verse of Acts 1:8?
8. Are there any personal prejudices, traditions, or notions that God may be working on in your life?
9. In verse 16 Peter recalls the words of Jesus and applies them into his new strange experience with the Gentiles. What does that communicate to us about the importance of evaluating our experiences through the truth of God’s written word?
10. How did the brothers in Jerusalem respond to Peter’s account in verse 18? What does that teach us about the importance of personal humility and unity in Christ in our church?
11. **Acts 11:19-30 The Church in Antioch  
    19Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists[ also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. 27Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.**

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria, estimated population of a half million. It was also considered a corrupt city even by Rome’s standards. It was the chief city of Syria. Luke and Theophilus (person to whom Luke wrote Acts) were from Antioch. God chose this city to establish a thriving church.

1. What are some things that this reveals to us about God? How should it affect our attitude about where we go to proclaim the Good News of Jesus?

When the church of Jerusalem heard about the work that God was doing in Antioch, they sent one of their treasured brothers to the new believers. From earlier in Acts, we know that Barnabas was an encourager, generous with his resources, and an advocate for the rejected. I love the character of Barnabus. He was a natural for the Jerusalem church to send to Antioch. Barnabus was from Cyprus and Cyrene. There were others from Cyprus and Cyrene who had already spoke to the Hellenist and preached the Lord to them.

1. Barnabus was known as an encourager. Who do you know that is an encourager? Who from HHBC might be identified as an encourager? Are you an encourager?
2. What does the church’s willingness to send such a man as Barnabus teach us?
3. How did Barnabas respond and what were his actions when he arrived? What can we learn and apply from his example?

As we learn from other passages in the New Testament, quite a bit of time had passed since Saul’s conversion. He had ultimately returned to his hometown of Tarsus.

Now Barnabas seeks him out to tell him of the great opportunity in Antioch. If you will remember Barnabus introduced Saul to the disciples of Jerusalem when they were hesitant to work with Saul. Barnabus wanted Paul to come to Antioch probably because he knew Paul was a better communicator than Barnabus. Barnabus was willing to be eclipsed by Saul as a teacher and serve at the newly formed church in Antioch which includes both Jew and Gentile believers. Today we should rejoice if others have larger capacities and opportunities to do better than we can.

1. How did this play into God’s ultimate plan for Paul? What might this teach us about waiting on and trusting in God’s timing and plan?
2. How long did Paul and Barnabus stay in Antioch?

In verse 26 we see that Christ followers are now beginning to be recognized as Christians and not just a sect of Judaism. What might have been a derogatory term by some resulted in a title that we own proudly today. It also subtly points out that the church was evolving from solely a Jewish body of believers to a diverse body of believers.

1. What does that tell us about how a healthy church should look today? What does that remind us of the Global body of Christ?
2. What happens in verses 27-29? As we know from earlier passages at this point Christians in Judea were under persecution which likely included financial ramifications. What do the actions by the church in Antioch teach us and how can we apply them today?

**Application to our lives**

* 1. Be intentional to be an encourager. You never know what a difference you can make on someone’s life.
  2. Tell your story. Often when we are asked to share our testimony, we may freeze up. Your testimony is simply your story about what God has done and is doing your life. Peter told his story to the church in Jerusalem of what God had done in his life.

**Challenge:** Pray that God will give you the words and then write your testimony down in 100 words. You will probably need several revisions and changes because 100 words are not a lot. You can then share your story of often, even if a person only has a few minutes.

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I love to tell the story of unseen things above,

Of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love;

I love to tell the story Because I know ‘tis true;

It satisfies my longing, as nothing else can do.

chorus

I love to tell the story,

‘Twill be my theme in glory

To tell the old, old, story of Jesus and his love.