

WEDNESDAY 20 July 2022 “Revolutionary” (Acts 11:1-18)

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

I'm sure you have had the experience of trying to explain yourself to people who have misunderstood what you have said or done or perhaps something inaccurate which was said about you, right? I have a feeling the apostle Peter found himself in that situation often!

As we continue walking with Peter in the months and years following Jesus' return to heaven, we find the account in the Bible book of Acts, and we've come to chapter 11. You'll recall that we had experienced in Acts 10 one of the most dramatic events in all history! *Gentiles in the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius, were given the Gospel of Jesus by Jewish apostle Peter.* That in itself was a miracle for Jewish men, under no circumstances, would find themselves in the home of a Gentile Roman soldier, unless forced at the point of a sword to be there! *But even more spectacular was what happened when Peter explained Jesus and His Gospel to these Gentiles...* they trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and the Holy Spirit of God came upon them as He had come upon Jews in Jerusalem and Samaritans in Samaria! *That my friends was radical and changed the story of Christianity for all time, as we saw yesterday.*

Peter had stayed in Caesarea for several days, at the invitation of Cornelius and these Gentiles, and I presume his days were filled with telling these Gentiles his story of his many months with Jesus and teaching them the things Jesus had taught him! Evidently Peter returned back to Jerusalem to rejoin the rest of the apostles and the "Jesus movement" in that great city. Peter knew his brother Andrew, his friends James and John very well, and he had come to know the rest of them including Philip and Matthew quite well. *I presume Peter gave a great deal of thought to how he was going to explain what he had experienced in Caesarea.* I wonder if Peter wondered if word of the unthinkable in Caesarea had already spread to Jerusalem and how distorted the story was by the time the other apostles heard about it? *What would Peter face upon his arrival in Jerusalem?*

Acts 11 begins with this: ***"The apostles and believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So, when Peter arrived in Jerusalem the Jewish Jesus followers criticized him saying, 'you went into the house of uncircumcised men [Gentiles] and ate with them!'"*** (Acts 11:1-3) I think Dr. Luke, the author of Acts, was being gentle by giving us just one sentence of what must have been an avalanche of accusations and criticism against Peter by these Jewish believers in Jesus. In 2022 we simply cannot fully comprehend how big of a problem it was for Jewish Christians that Peter the apostle had, in their minds, broken the most fundamental distinctive of God's chosen people the Hebrews, when he knowingly spent time with pagan Gentiles, eating meals with them, sleeping in their homes!

It was beyond unthinkable. I'm sure they concluded that if it was true, Peter had lost his mind and disqualified himself from being a leader in the Jesus movement, it was that serious of an offense!

I don't think Peter was surprised and he'd had plenty of time on that long walk from Caesarea to think about his defense. The record says: **"Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story..."** (Acts 11:4) And Luke uses 13 verses to give us, in detail, how Peter retold the story of his vision in Joppa; the unexpected invitation from three men who'd come from Cornelius; his trip to Caesarea; and his presentation of the Gospel to Cornelius and his household of Gentiles. *Peter made sure he was very clear that he had done all this in obedience to very clear instructions from the Holy Spirit of God.* Evidently, standing at Peter's side as witnesses, were the Jewish Jesus followers from Joppa who had accompanied him to Caesarea, for Peter said: **"The Holy Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them to Caesarea. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's [Cornelius] house."** (Acts 11:12)

Look at the crowd now staring at these six men, *whom I presume they do not know.* Some of them may have been from Lydda and gone with Peter to Joppa, others of them were probably from Joppa, and all six of them had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Caesarea at Cornelius' invitation. I find it interesting these men went with Peter to Jerusalem. *It causes me to wonder if Peter invited them to come with him so they could give eyewitness verification to Peter's account of what God had done in Caesarea among the Gentiles in Cornelius' house?* Have you ever been in that situation my friends, where you needed someone to act as an eyewitness or a character witness as you tried to explain the truth of an event or something you said that was totally misunderstood?

As Peter drew his explanation to a close, he finished with this: **"So, if God gave them [Gentiles] the same gift [the Holy Spirit] which He gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"** (Acts 11:17) Oh my, **'stand in God's way'!** That's a powerful statement, isn't it? *Can you think of any examples in history where someone tried to 'stand in God's way' and what God did about that?* How about the Egyptian Pharaoh who refused to release the Hebrew slaves despite plague after powerful plague from God? Remember what happened to Egypt and the Pharaohs' army? (Exodus 8-14) Or what about the 10 Hebrew spies who went in with Joshua and Caleb to explore the land God had promised to His people and was ready to lead them across the Jordan river to possess? But these 10 spies said **"NO, we can't accomplish this!"** And then all the people rose up in rebellion against God and God's purpose? 40 years of wandering in the desert gave them ample time to think about the price of **'standing in God's way'!** (Numbers 13,14) Or most recently, for these people standing with Peter on this day, how about the very real story of what happened to the Pharisee Saul who was trying to destroy this "Jesus movement" in Jerusalem, until he had his blinding encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus?! (Acts 9)

Now look at the crowd... stunned by all Peter has said, looking closely at Peter and the six Jewish Jesus followers standing beside him, and thinking deeply about that powerful statement of Peter: ***"So, if God gave them [Gentiles] the same gift [the Holy Spirit] which He gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"***

My 'walking with Jesus' friends all around the world, could I ask you to look at your city, your nation... who are those who are **"standing in God's way"** by their words and actions? Our great God is patient, isn't He? Remember Peter himself wrote: ***"The LORD is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, HE is patient, not wanting anyone to PERISH, but everyone to come to repentance."*** (2 Peter 3:9) That my friends, explains WHY God does not slam down the hammer of judgment on all the evil and wickedness that you and I see all around us, wherever we live in the world. *It's God's Mercy & Grace as God gives human beings time to come to their senses, see the error of their ways and turn to Jesus and repent... or Perish!* You remember what **"perish"** means don't you? It means forever, eternal separation from God, in a place of eternal torment!

Once again, the Holy Spirit moved through a powerful message from Peter in a strategic moment, as had happened several times before as recorded in Acts 2; Acts 4; over at Caesarea; in Corenius' house; and again here. The record says: ***"When the crowd heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then even to the Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life!"*** (Acts 11:18) This my friends was staggering! *The light of God's truth was dispelling generations of prideful darkness of assumption that God was NOT interested in Gentiles.* This great truth dispelled the wrong conclusion that Jesus had NOT died for Gentiles.

Now suddenly, Jewish Jesus followers were understanding that Samaritan Jesus followers and Gentiles Jesus followers were just as authentic in their redeemed relationship with God as Jewish Jesus followers were. And more... that all three groups of people were adopted into God's family and therefore they should view each other as "brothers and sisters in Christ"!!

This was revolutionary and was shaking Jerusalem to its foundation! So, let's pause right here and just watch the spiritual earthquake as minds embrace truth and hearts open to receive Gentiles as friends rather than enemies!! As we watch it, I invite us all to look out across the horizon of our world, repeating Peter's statement: ***"The LORD is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, HE is patient, not wanting anyone to PERISH, but everyone to come to repentance."*** (2 Peter 3:9) I wonder what the Holy Spirit is speaking into your mind and heart right now, my friends?

Today's Scripture is Acts 11:1-18.