

Hello again everyone. Hope you are having a good week. Hope you can come to bible study and carry in dinner Wed. at 6pm. Have a super week and god bless us everyone.

Pastor Don

"Equal in the Eyes of God"

Acts 11:1-18

April 28, 2013

A defendant in a law suit asked his lawyer what he thought his chances of winning were. The lawyer said it is a close case. It could go either way. It was entirely up to the judge. What if I sent the judge a box of expensive cigars he asked? "Oh no you must not do that. This judge is a real stickler for the rules. That would bias him against you. He would defiantly rule for the plaintiff if you did that." Ok the man replied. The next day the defendant won his case. Boy am I glad you tipped me off about those cigars. Yes, me too replied the lawyer, if you'd have sent them we would have lost for sure. Oh I sent them alright; I just signed the plaintiff name to them.

An atheist was talking to his Christian friend. It not fair he said. You Christians have your holidays; Christmas and Easter. The Jews have Passover and Yom Kippur. It's just plain discrimination that we atheists don't have a holiday. To which his Christian friend replied "oh but you do have a holiday, April fool's day."

A Minneapolis man went to his pastor and said I'm quitting the church. Why asked the pastor. Well it's all your fault the man replied, I've been reading that book you gave me and it is all about St. Paul, not a word in it about Minneapolis.

Sister Mildred, the church gossip and self-appointed arbiter of the church's morals, kept sticking her nose in the other members' private lives. Church members were unappreciative of her activities, but feared her enough to maintain their silence. She made a mistake, however, when she accused George, a new member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his pickup truck parked in front of the town's only bar one afternoon. She commented to George and others that everyone seeing it there would know what he was doing. George, a man of few words, stared at her for a moment and just walked away. He didn't explain, defend, or deny; he said nothing.

Later that evening, George quietly parked his pickup in front of Mildred's house and walked home, leaving his truck parked there all night!

William James once said "Thinking is what a great many people think they are doing when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

At times, we all have some sort of prejudicial thoughts or feelings. We all prefer to be around people who are just like us. But being a Christian means that we sometimes have to leave our comfort zone. We have to be willing to go where ever God leads us and share the gospel with those who need to hear it. At other times we have to let people get close to us. In today's text, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem learn that God loves the Gentiles too. They see that the Gentile believers are equal to them in this new faith called Christianity. Do we accept all true believers? Do we love all true believers? Do we believe that everyone can be saved if they chose to accept Jesus? Are we willing to tell anybody about Jesus? Let's not keep the faith, let's pass it around. Let's share our knowledge of Jesus. You'd be surprised at who will listen. You'd be surprised at who needs to hear. Would you pray with me as we begin this morning's message? Pray.

[vs1] The Jewish believers in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. How did they hear this? How did the news travel so fast? There were no telephones, no telegraphs, and no cable news programs? News traveled by word of mouth, the same way the Good News of Jesus Christs travels. Are we spreading the Good News?

[2-3] when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem; he was met with contention, not congratulations. His fellow Jewish believers were mad at him because he visited and ate with Gentiles. A Gentile is any non Jew. Jewish people avoided them like they avoided lepers. By entering their homes and eating with them, Peter broke Jewish Law. They contented with him; this means they were very upset with Peter. This was not just a theological discussion, this was a heated debate. Some of the Jews felt that only Jews could be saved. Jesus was after all the Jewish Messiah. Others felt that Gentiles could be saved, but only if they first became a Jew and upheld all of their laws and rituals.

They seemed to have forgotten what God told Abraham way back in Genesis 12:3

"I will bless those that bless you; I will curse those that curse you; and in you all the families of the world shall be blessed." The Psalmist writes in Psalm 22:27 "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before YOU." In Isaiah 49:6 God says "Indeed it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth." Paul reminds us that Jesus is for the Gentiles also. Paul quotes Isaiah in Romans 15:12 when he says "There shall be a root of Jesse and he who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope."

They seemed to have forgotten that Jesus commissioned them to go into all the world and make disciples. All the world includes Gentiles. The last thing Jesus said to his disciples in Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." God used the Jews to teach the world about him. He gave them the law; he gave them the Messiah; He gives everyone who will believe, His grace. Do we believe this morning?

Proverbs 15:1 says "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

It takes 2 to argue, so Peter calmly explained to them what happened. [4] He starts at the appropriate place, the beginning. When we witness, do we start at the beginning? The beginning is that Jesus loves you and died for your sins. Do we tell people that? Peter tells them what happened. [5-10] Peter explained to them his vision of the sheet

coming down to him from heaven filled with all kinds of animals. And the voice saying arise Peter, kill and eat. He told them how he responded that it was unlawful to eat unclean animals. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 give us the definition of clean and unclean animals. Then Peter tells how the voice answered with these words; "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This vision and conversation is why it is alright today for Christians to eat basically what ever we want. It did away with the law restricting believer's diets. Notice Peter said he observed it intently and considered it. Do we pay close attention when God is talking to us? If we want to understand divine things and gain Godly wisdom, we must focus intently upon Him. What is our focus today?

How do we react when we see a fellow believer doing something that looks suspicious? Do we jump to conclusions? Do we accuse them of sinning? Do we tell everyone else what we saw? Or do we ask them what their motives were and give them a chance to explain themselves?

When we are the one asked our reasons for doing something, are we willing to give them? Clear communication is important; especially when we see something that confuses us. Peter's truthfulness cleared away any stumbling blocks that his visits to the Gentiles may have placed in a weaker believer's path. Believers need to work together to make sure we

don't put stumbling blocks in each others paths. Are we a stumbling block or a solid rock for our fellow believers?

[11-12] Peter found out immediately what this vision meant. No sooner was it gone than 3 men were at the door asking for him. The Spirit told him to go with them and not ask questions. God told him in this vision that what God has cleansed is cleansed. This would include Gentiles; to whose house he and 6 brethren were now headed. Why did Peter take 6 fellow believers? Simply for help or so they could be witnesses? No, 7 is the number of completeness and spiritual perfection. The number 7 is found over 700 times in the bible. God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days rested on the 7th, completing the 1st week of time. On the 7th day, the children of Israel marched around the city of Jericho 7 times, gave a shout when the trumpets blew and the walls of the city fell down flat. Gen.6:9 says "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations". This is the 7th time Noah's name is mentioned in scripture. The number 7 is important. Peter took 6 men for a reason.

When these 7 witnesses arrived at the house of Cornelius, they saw the hand of God had been at work there as well. [13-14] God sent an angel to Cornelius to tell him to send men to Joppa where they could find and fetch Peter to Caesarea. Peter would tell him what he needed to do. Cornelius was a Roman centurion, but he did believe in the one true living God of Israel. He obeyed God's message and sent for Peter. Peter obeyed God and went. He then further obeyed God by speaking the gospel to Cornelius. [15-18]

Peter told how Cornelius and his entire house were filled with the Holy Spirit just like the disciples were on the day of Pentecost. Peter said since this was obviously God's will, who am I that I could stop it? Upon hearing this tale of salvation and filling of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, the crowd grew silent for a moment, allowing Peter's words to sink in. Then they glorified God for His loving mercy, even to the Gentiles. They finally understood the mission Jesus gave them in Matthew 28:19 "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus came to the Jew first; the lost sheep of Israel and He called them. The Samaritans were half Jews. Acts 10:1-2 tell us that Cornelius was a "centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with his entire household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always."

The disciple's mission was to carry the gospel, the story of Jesus, throughout the whole world. They were to do it with out worrying about punishment or threats. They were not to worry about anything. Jesus promised to be with them even til the end of the age.

Jesus took his message to every group of people. He came to the Jew first, but he also spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. He healed

the Gentile woman's demon possessed daughter in Matthew 15 and the Roman soldier's servant in Luke 7.

Jesus said in John 3:16 for God so loved the world. The world is everyone. Jesus died for all, Jew & gentile alike. Today we are to carry on this message. Are we doing that?

Today Christians are still called to carry the gospel message to the ends of the earth. Are we willing, like Peter, to tell the gospel to anyone & everyone that God puts in our path? Or are we like the Jerusalem believers; do we have people we would not dream of sharing the gospel with? Do we celebrate & glorify God for each sinner that comes to repentance? Repentance means to be sorry for your sins and turn away from them. It means to change your mind; your way of thinking and acting. True repentance leads to eternal life.

Cornelius was a good man. He did 4 things every Christian needs to do; he was a man of prayer, he shared with those less fortunate than himself, he revered God and he actively sought Him. But good deeds, words and thoughts are not enough to get anyone into heaven; only the blood of Jesus can do that. What can take away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus; what can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Are we sharing the blood of Jesus with those who need it?

When we repent and become a believer, we join the family of God. The church is made up of believers with all sorts of backgrounds and histories; yet we are all one family. We have 1 Lord 1 faith 1 baptism [Eph.4:5] we must overcome all of our prejudices and bias if we are to truly love each other. Proverbs 10:12 "Hatred stirs up strife; but love covers all sins." Jesus tells us in John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Do we have love for one another? Do we have love for all believers? Do we welcome all believers?

Prejudice blinds us to the truth. A high school science teacher had his class over one night to study a planet and its moon through a telescope. The class was told where to look and what to look for. They first several students all said they saw it and it was quite a sight. Finally one student said he did not see anything. The teacher said adjust the focus. The student did but still could not see anything. Finally the teacher looked through the telescope. Then with a strange look upon his face he examined the telescope carefully and noticed that he had forgotten to take the lens cap off. The first few students saw in their minds what they were told they would see. That is what prejudice does; it tells us what to see. God tells us to see people's hearts. What are we focusing on when we look at our fellow Christians?

God can and will use anyone who believes in him and will obey Him. Faith & obedience are God's only requirements for becoming a Christian. He doesn't care what our name is, how much money we have, what talents we

possess, where we live or what we look like. All He cares about is do we love Him? Well, do we?

God has a purpose for everyone. He accepts everyone, do we? Are we like Peter?

Do we accept those whom God has declared to be clean; or are we like the Jerusalem believers & want to keep Jesus all to ourselves?

Do we rejoice when a sinner comes to repentance? Do we pray for lost souls? Are we willing to help young believers grow in their faith? Let us thank God that he does accept Gentiles. Let us thank God that he accepts us just as we are; sinners with out one plea except that His blood was shed for me. Hallelujah! Amen! Pray.