



**ACTS - SMALL GROUP SERIES
LESSON 3**

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Bible: “The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:19-26 (NLT)

Bottom Line: Even when the church is persecuted, the Holy Spirit opens people’s hearts to say “yes” to Jesus, no matter where they’re from or what they’ve done. (This passage represents a shift in the Jerusalem Church to become multi-ethnic.)

LESSONS 1 and 2 SUMMARY

Two weeks ago, we started a series looking at the second letter Luke wrote to the office. His goal was clear just like in his first letter, the Gospel of Luke.

Luke wanted to give a detailed and accurate account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We learned that Christ gave a mission to the disciples.

Last week, we discussed in detail the arrival and work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We learned what the early church looks like and how the people who are in the church interacted with one another.

We saw what devotion to the teachings of Jesus, fellowship, communion, and prayer can do in the life of a believer. The people of God were empowered by the spirit of God and as a result, the church grew.

Luke showed what can happen when followers of Jesus live the way the Holy Spirit leads us to live. When we are led by the spirit people can find a new sense of identity, belonging, and purpose for their lives.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there any topic or concept that you would like to have clarified or discuss in greater detail from weeks one or two?
2. Early Christians were unified through Christ and willingly share what they had to help meet the needs of one another.

How do you think today's society and the ways of the world have influenced the body of Christ? Has this been a positive or a negative influence?

3. Identify some of the things that can divide and break bonds of unity within a church.

Lesson

This week's lesson picks up in Acts chapter 11.

Quite a few things have taken place in the chapters between the lessons of weeks 2 and 3.

We left Lesson 2 with the day of Pentecost and a look into the lives of believers in the early church.

What we find in the next several chapters are the detailed accounts of the work of the disciples as they carried out the mission given to them in Acts: 1-8.

- Acts 3 - Peter's temple sermon and persecution
- Acts 4 - Peter and John are arrested
- Acts 5 – The apostles face opposition
- Acts 6 - The selection of deacons
- Acts 7 - The stoning of Stephen
- Acts 8 and 9 - Kingdom growth in Judea & Samaria
- Acts 10 - Peter's encounter with Cornelius and the good news is shared with Gentiles

As we can see, the disciples took their instructions to heart and were busy at work spreading the gospel just as they were told to do.

Although they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, we see we learned that their task was not an easy one.

The church was constantly being added to as people heard the gospel and accepted the good news and salvation of Jesus; however, everyone did not want to see the gospel spread.

They didn't want everyone to receive the gospel. We find the beginning of chapter 11 with Peter defending ministry to Gentiles.

We learned in week two that a gentile is a person who is a non-Jew. Many did not think Gentiles should be able to receive salvation in the message of the gospel.

This is completely contrary to the teachings of Christ and why he came. Unfortunately, that type of mindset still exists today.

We still have groups of people who want to keep the gospel away from others.

That was not the mission that we were given that is not and does not reflect the heart of Christ.

Luke stated Christ's purpose in the gospel named after him: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" **Luke 19:10**.

If that was Christ's purpose for coming, it was also the disciples' purpose and our purpose today.

In the first 14 verses of chapter 11, we find Peter being met by opposition from fellow Jews who learned about his actions.

They were upset that he was associating with uncircumcised men. He not only was associating with them, but he actually ate a meal with them.

In verse 4 Peter begins to explain step-by-step what happened and what led him to share the gospel with the Gentiles in Caesarea.

Read Acts 11:15-18

15 "As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning.

16 Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17 And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?"

18 When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, "We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life."

Peter explains how the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles the same way it fell upon the disciples and first believers on the day of Pentecost. He recalled the words of the Lord when he was told he would be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

But it is in verse 17 that he does a biblical mic drop and silences the crowd. He says that if God gave the Gentiles the same gift that they had been given, then who was he to stand in God's way.

What a powerful statement!

If the body of Christ today would take on that same attitude.

It is not for us to decide who receives salvation; it is up to us to share the message and get out of God's way.

Noticed that Peter does not argue with the others; he only states what took place in the word of God.

The people would have remembered what happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell.

With Peter explaining to them how that same experience occurred to the Jews to the Gentiles, what argument could they have?

In verse 18, the people went from objecting to praising God. They acknowledged that God has given the opportunity of salvation to everyone.

Discussion Questions

1. Peter met opposition and found himself on the defense regarding his actions at Cornelius's house. Although this was what appears to be an intense situation, it appears that Peter remains calm.

Have you ever had to defend your actions to someone else? How are you able to keep your cool? If you were unable to keep your cool, what would you do differently if you could do it over again?

2. What was the reason the Jewish Christians were so upset with Peter?
3. Identify the similarities between the day of Pentecost and Acts chapter 2 and the events that took place in Caesarea described in verses 15-18.

Read Acts 11:19-26:

19 Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews.

20 However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus.

21 The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

22 When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

23 When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord.

24 Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul.

26 When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)

There are a few things to notice right away in verse 19.

First, the believers were scattered due to persecution after the stoning of Stephen.

Second, the reach of the gospel was expanding beyond Judea. The word of God was moving as noted in the four cities listed in the verse.

The third thing we see is if they preach the word of God but only to Jews. It was just in the verses before that they were praising God because the gospel has been given to the Gentiles.

However, here we see that everyone was not sold on the idea.

Although salvation was for everyone, everyone was not for sharing the gospel which led to salvation.

Thankfully, all believers were not of this mindset and some believers who went to Antioch continued to preach the gospel of Christ to Gentiles.

Verse 21 tells us that the power of the Lord was with them and because of that, many Gentiles repented and turn to the Lord.

The lesson here is that when the power of the Lord is with us, His mission will not be stopped even when faced with opposition.

Just like hot gossip today, word of mouth is often the fastest source for news.

Word got back to Jerusalem what was taking place in Antioch, and they sent out someone who could see what was happening.

Once there, Barnabas saw God's grace in action and was happy with what he saw. He was not discouraged because the church had grown, he was glad.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case in our church yesterday.

Often when new people come, people who have previously been there can become territorial and unwelcoming.

This is not how the early Christians lived in a community together. Those of the Christian faith during that time were faced with enough persecution and opposition, they did not need it from one another.

This may be one reason why Barnabas encouraged the believers at Antioch to stay true and devoted to the Lord. He knew they would need that can carry out the mission and stay strong with possible opposition to the gospel.

Around the world, Christians today are still being persecuted for sharing the gospel of Christ.

However, we see that despite their struggles, the Holy Spirit has the power to overcome opposition and the differences that the world uses to divide instead of uniting us.

In verses 24 through 26 we see the progression of the church at Antioch. Barnabas sits out to find Saul and brings him back to Antioch where they both stayed a full year sharing the gospel to many people.

Although we have used the term Christians throughout this series, it is not until we reach verse 26 that the term *Christian* is used for believers.

Before this time, the words *disciple*, *saint*, *witnesses*, *believers*, and many others were used to describe those who followed Christ. But now in Antioch, we see the word *Christians*.

Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 11 we learned that Christians were scattered due to the persecution and stoning of Steven. What does persecution look like today compared to 2000 years ago during Bible days?
2. How would you describe your church? Are there different types of people there or is your congregation only made up of people who are the same whether (this could be financial, race/ethnicity, age, etc.)
3. What can you do to actively share the gospel with everyone? Even those people who may be different from you. How can you encourage your church to do the same?