

Acts Chapter 11.v. 1-30.**Theme:** The Grace of God to the Gentiles Defended.**Your Identity in Jesus Christ – follow up from last sermon in Acts.**

Before we begin our studies in Acts Chapter 11, I would like to mention briefly something that I promised at the end of my last sermon on Acts. I said that our **identity in Jesus Christ** was much more important than our identity in our nationality. Although we still retain our identity on a human level, our spiritual identity is much more important. If you are Japanese and you become a Christian, you are still Japanese, but you have a new identity. This is the same whatever country you were born into.

I have picked out 10 Bible verses that highlight your identity in Christ.

(there are many more)

The devil will attack your identity in Christ, so therefore it is good to read these verses often.

They are all quoted in the New Living Translation to make it easier for non- native speakers of English.

1. 2 Corinthians Chapter 5: v. 17.

¹⁷This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

2. Romans 8: v. 1.

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

3. 1 John 3: v.1-2.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. ² Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

4. John 15: v.15.

¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

5. John 15: v.16.

¹⁶ You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

6. Romans 8: v.15.

¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."

7. John 8: v.34-36.

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. ³⁵ A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.

8. Hebrews 4: v.16.

¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

9. 1 Corinthians 2: v.16.

¹⁶ For,

"Who can know the Lord's thoughts?

Who knows enough to teach him?"

But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

10. Matthew 28: v.20.

²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Your identity in Jesus Christ should make you motivated to live your life for Jesus Christ and to obey his words in the Bible. It should also help you to be encouraged in the present with your eyes fixed upon your eternity.

Acts Chapter 11.v. 1-30.

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, ³ saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”

⁴ But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. 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. 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. ¹¹ At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ And he told us 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, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 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.’ 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?”

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.”

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. 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. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and 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. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with 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.

²⁵ Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 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.

²⁷ And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days 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.

Introduction

On the 14th October we covered Acts Chapter 10.

We learnt the historical account of how God included the Gentiles in His New Covenant. Initially it appeared to the Jewish believers that the New Covenant was just for them. However, sometime after the

day of Pentecost, God made it clear that the Samaritans, who were half Jews were also part of God's plan to be included in His New Covenant.

Finally the inclusion of the Gentiles made God's plan complete.

Now there were no people groups who were outside of God's New Covenant plan of Grace.

The Gospel message was for all peoples everywhere in the world.

There was just one problem and we encounter it in Acts Chapter 11.

The problem was **resistance to change** by Jewish believers, and not recognising God's plan that the New Covenant was for all peoples.

We can have **some sympathy for the Jewish believers because we are all people who don't like change.**

In fact when I was a salesman nearly 40 years ago, I went on one of the best sales training courses that I ever attended. I learnt lots of sales techniques and ways of selling products.

I always remember that the sales trainer said, **"Our products are the best on the market. However, if you encounter somebody who has a strong resistance to change, then move on quickly and don't waste your time."**

Although for a short period, I was one of the top salesmen in the company, I never managed to persuade people to buy my products if they had a **strong resistance to change.**

All of us like things to stay the same. We like routine and order in our lives.

We must remember that the Jewish people from the time of Abraham had a **history of nearly 1,800 years up to this point in their history.**

They had followed **the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant,** and God had honoured His promises to bless them, if they obeyed His laws.

God had also promised to punish them if they disobeyed His Laws. (**Deut. Chapter 28**)

With all of this history, it is no wonder that **some Jewish people were not very embracing of the Gentiles being included into God's New Covenant.**

In Acts 11: v. 1-18 we see how resistance to change was overcome through Peter's **testimony,** the working of the **Holy Spirit,** and remembering the **words of Jesus.**

Hopefully when we come to make application for ourselves, we might learn how we can be open to change, **if it is God's will, clearly directed through His word.**

In order to understand the situation fully, I have divided the text into three sections.

Firstly, the opposition by the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

Secondly the testimony of Peter, and **thirdly** the acceptance of the Gentiles by the whole Jewish Community in Jerusalem.

1. The opposition of the Jerusalem believers. -11: v. 1-3.

I have done some research into the original Greek translation of v. 1-3 and I am convinced that at this time in the early history of the Church that all the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea **were opposed to accepting the Gentile Christians into the Church.**

However their main concern was that **Peter had disobeyed the Jewish laws concerning food that was unclean.**

This act by Peter would have made him **ceremonially unclean.**

The Jewish laws commanded them not to eat certain foods.

In order to do this, he never had a meal in the home of a Gentile person.

The Jewish Food Laws are contained in Leviticus Chapter 11.

At the time these were strictly observed.

There are various suggestions as to why God required the Jews to observe these Laws.

The two most credible are health and discipline.

If we have a healthy body, it helps us to focus well on **learning and serving.**

If we have discipline in place in our lives, it helps us to be a disciplined follower of God.

The Jewish people fully respected God's Food Laws, and I am sure they were better for it.

The Jewish leaders of the early Christian Church were **right to challenge Peter about his disobedience to the Jewish Food Laws.**

However Peter was allowed to explain fully **his reasons for entering the home of a Gentile.**

2. Peter's testimony and explanation. – 11: v. 4-16.

In v. 4-15 Peter explains fully the story behind his involvement with the Gentiles.

We have already covered this story but it is good to be reminded of the important facts.

- a) **Peter had a vision from God.** In that vision Peter saw a large sheet being let down from Heaven. In that sheet were four footed animals, wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the air. Peter heard a voice from Heaven say,
 “ Rise Peter, kill and eat”
- b) **Peter refused to kill and eat these animals.** He said to God that he had observed the Jewish Food Laws and was not about to break God’s rules.
- c) **God spoke again from Heaven.** The voice said, **“What God has cleansed, you must not call common.”**
- d) **The lowering of the sheet with the animals was done three times.**
This made it 100% clear that God was confirming his instructions.
- e) **The Holy Spirit told Peter to go to the house of a God-fearing Gentile.**
- f) **When Peter arrived at the Gentile’s Home, the owner, Cornelius, told Peter about an Angel who had visited him and told him that someone was going to come to his home with a message from God.**
- g) **As Peter was speaking to the gathered group, the Holy Spirit fell upon them.**
Peter also told them that it was the same experience that they had all had at Pentecost. In other words it was authentic. God actually confirmed it in the way that He had done at the beginning.

After Peter had recounted the story he added something very important.

He said in v. 16 that he **remembered something that Jesus had taught him earlier.**

John 14: v. 25-26 in the N.K.J.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Most of the direct teaching from Jesus about the work of the Holy Spirit is contained in

John 16: v.5-15.

John 16: v.5-15. (in the N.K.J.)

⁵ “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.

However the particular reference that Peter makes comes from John Chapter 1: v.33. To put it into context **I will quote v. 29-34 on John Chapter 1 in the N.K.J.**

John Chapter 1: v.29-34

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ³¹ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”

³² And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

It is clear from the context of these verses that Jesus both sent the Holy Spirit to continue His work and that the evidence of that work involves the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Today we are not going to have the same experience as the Jews did at Pentecost and the Samaritans had in Samaria, or the Gentiles at the beginning.

In fact we can't because all of the experiences were different.

The Holy Spirit came at different times in each situation.

However what we MUST HAVE, is the evidence of the "**work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.**"

John 16: v. 8-11 in the N.L.T.

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. ⁹ The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. ¹⁰ Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. ¹¹ Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

One of the signs of the second coming of Jesus is "Deception". (Matt. 24: v.4)

However there is one deception that is impossible.

You can't live a holy life without the Holy Spirit, living inside you, and having full control of your life.

This is why Jesus taught that you can tell the false teachers by their life-style.

(Matthew 7: v.15-20)

In v. 17 Peter acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Gentiles and declares it to be an authentic work of God.

There must have been evidence of true repentance which came from a conviction of their sin.

3. The acceptance of the Gentiles into God's New Covenant of Grace. – v.18.

I like the first half of v. 18. "**When they heard these things, they became silent..**"

Silence can sometimes appear to be unproductive, but in actual fact it is very productive.

It gives time for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of people.

When you are silent, and everybody else is silent, you are left by yourself with your own thoughts.

We don't know how long there was silence between Peter's explanation and the Gentiles glorifying God, but there was certainly enough time for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts, and confirm the witness of Peter.

Certainly Peter, one of the main Apostles, was convinced of the work of the Holy Spirit.

But now the rest of the Jewish Community needed to be convinced.

They had the word of God, they had the testimony of Peter, and now they needed the personal conviction from their heart.

After the silence they were all convinced and glorified God saying;

"Then God has also granted to the Gentiles, repentance to life."

Notice that they used the words, "**repentance to life**".

Acts 2: v. 38 in N.K.J.

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 3: v.19 in N.K.J.

¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Acts 8: v.22. in N.K.J.

²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Repentance is not something that originates in a person's heart on his own initiative.

Repentance is a gift from God.

If there is no repentance from sin, then there is no evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Fortunately the Jewish believers in Jerusalem recognised the work of the Holy Spirit.

4. Antioch becomes a teaching centre with Saul and Barnabas. v. 22-26.

We are informed in v. 19-21 that the believers who had been scattered after the persecution that followed Stephen's death travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. They preached God's word, only to the Jews. However some preached to the Gentiles in Antioch. As a result a large number of Gentiles believed.

The Church at Jerusalem got to hear about all these Gentiles who were converted so they sent Barnabas to help with the teaching. Saul was also called to help in this ministry in order to teach them the things of God.

These two men were in Antioch for a whole year.

It was during this time that the believers were first called "Christians".

This was also the first **"International Church"**.

We are also told in v.27-28 that a prophet called Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Holy Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman World.

(Historically this was fulfilled during the reign of Emperor Claudius)

As a result of this prophecy money was collected from the believers in Antioch and Barnabas and Saul took the money to Jerusalem.

Application from Chapter 11.

1. We are probably all guilty of a "resistance to change" in our mind set.

We are much more comfortable operating in our "comfort zone".

Most Christians are comfortable with a "fellowship" mind set.

When the Holy Spirit prompts us to reach lost people, and we have never done it before, we will probably be reluctant to do it.

However the passage teaches us that God wants to use us in different ways to communicate the Gospel to different people.

Sunday is a great day in the life of O.I.C. and I thank God for it.

However it is mainly about receiving Bible teaching, worshipping God in Praise and having fellowship with other believers.

There is not much time to go out into Osaka to reach Japanese people with the Gospel message.

It was encouraging that some people stepped out of their comfort zone to come to Hanazono Rugby stadium to give out tracts and talk to Japanese people about Jesus. (Show some slides here of the outreach)

However we do need to impact the local community with the Gospel message.

The only thing that has been done over the last 5 years to impact the local community is a small children's English class, once a month on a Saturday.

This has done very well, and the two Summer Missions that attracted many children were due largely to the contacts of the children and their friends and relations.

We now need an English teacher. Who is going to step out of their comfort zone once a month and help this club to continue?

If the Holy Spirit is not calling you to reach children and their parents through this club, **then where is the Holy Spirit leading you to share your faith?**

This is a question only you can answer.

One thing is certain and that is that **"God has a heart for lost people."**

The question that we need to answer is – "Do we have a heart for God's work?"

2. From very early in Church history, Christians felt concerned to support other Christians in need.

It is always a good thing to support God's people who have desperate needs.

I know that our next Fund for the Needy is concerning people in Japan, but perhaps the one after that should be to believers in Muslim Countries who are in desperate need for food, clothing and basic needs.

There are two big missions. One called Barnabas Fund and the other is called Open Doors.

Here are their Mission Statements.

Mission Statement of Open Doors: Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide; We are an organization aimed at strengthening persecuted believers worldwide through community development, Bible & literature distribution, leadership training & education and ministries of prayer and advocacy.

The **mission** of the **Barnabas Aid** is to support Christians where they are in a minority and suffer discrimination, oppression and persecution as a consequence of their faith.

Perhaps when we have our next Fund for the Needy that we might consider one of these two missions. They do a great work world-wide amongst needy Christians.

3. The final application is to embrace people who become Christians, who are not like us!

We are an international Church and naturally we embrace people from all over the world. However within these races come sub-groups of people who are often divided by education and sometimes wealth.

As Christians we must not be prejudiced against people who have a different culture, background, upbringing or even past history before they became Christians.

Our identity is in Christ, and not in our culture.

All Christians are part of one big family whose faith is in Jesus.

May God help us to love all members of God's family, young, old, rich or poor, happy or depressed, difficult or easy, challenging or loveable.