

Getting Out of Your Comfort Zone

Acts 11:1-18

I. Not everyone is open to getting out of their comfort zone; 11:1-3.

¹ The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

The news of Peter's radical behavior, staying and eating in a Gentile house at Caesarea, reached Jerusalem before he did. Peter's actions aroused alarm at Jerusalem. When Peter arrived, he was immediately taken to task by those who were of the circumcision group. These were Jewish believers who were passionate for the law and insisted that there should be no social interaction between circumcised and uncircumcised. They felt that any Gentile who became a Christian would have to convert to Judaism, which included circumcision.

If this belief had remained, there never would have been an effective Gentile mission. Most Gentiles had real problems with the more external aspects of the Jewish law, such as circumcision and the food laws. Such factors had kept many Gentiles like Cornelius, who believed in the God of the Jews, from becoming full converts.

It is interesting that the circumcision group raised a question about Peter's eating and fellowshiping with the Gentiles rather than about their being baptized. Peter himself had been convinced of God's inclusion of the Gentiles. Now his fellow Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem needed convincing. They were being pushed out of their comfort zones to where God was working.

God doesn't work on our time frame or in ways that makes life easier and more comfortable. His timing often seems too soon and too much for some. The things that God is doing in reaching all people often go against our comfort, preferences, and core beliefs.

II. We must not oppose God's working outside of our comfort zone; 11:4-17.

⁴ Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw

something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'⁸ "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'⁹ "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. ¹¹ "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'¹⁵ "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

Peter's best defense of his conduct was retelling of his experience. The six members of the Christian community in Joppa, who had accompanied Peter to Caesarea, had come with him to Jerusalem. He points out that an angel informed Cornelius that the words which he would hear from Peter were words which would bring salvation to himself and his household.

As Peter concluded, he tells them that the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and everyone there as he began to speak. He clarified that the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning—that is, as at Pentecost. Peter recalled Jesus' promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Just as this promise had been fulfilled among Jews at Pentecost, now it was being fulfilled among Gentiles. This was indeed a Gentile Pentecost. With so much evidence of God's work, Peter dared not oppose what God was doing.

The story of God working in transforming lives through Jesus is still being written. God works in His ways and His time. Like Peter, we don't want to ever oppose God because of wrong core beliefs, culture, preferences or because it is not comfortable.

III. Many will rejoice with God working outside of our comfort zones; 11:18.

¹⁸ *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."*

God had given His blessing on the Gentiles also. Through His Spirit He gave them forgiveness, acceptance, a change of mind, and the assurance of eternal life, which was a matter for wonder and praise. Their objections ceased and their praise began.

For the moment, the circumcision party is silenced. They will emerge again in chapter 15 when they see large numbers of Gentiles coming into the church. They join in the praise now, but as they see the wider implications of this step, they will rise up again in protest.

Even some of the first believers could not accept God working in a way contrary to what was comfortable for them. In doing so they opposed God, claiming to be defending the truth.

Choose to praise God for reaching out to all people and doing it in ways not comfortable to us. When you get out of your comfort zone and communicate the gospel, you too can praise God for what He is doing today.