

29b ACTS

Let's pick up our study now in Acts chapter 11, beginning in verse 25. Remember now, there's a change coming and there's a natural inertia that everyone has, whether it is a, if you've ever been in a large church and they change pastors, if you're in a country and you change presidents, if you're in a company and you change organization or change bosses, or almost any kind of a change, we just have a lot of built-in inertia and it's really difficult. And you can imagine all of these centuries of Jewish history, all of a sudden, here comes the Lord Jesus, here's the cross, here's Pentecost, here's a whole new thing happening and God is easing him through this transition time.

Now he didn't just drop the Gentiles on them in the first week after Pentecost, did he? He let months and even years go by so that they would have a period of adjustment, a period of growth. God typically does this with us as well. He doesn't hit us with everything at once, he gives us opportunities to adjust and to grow and to firm up and strengthen before we move on to more advanced tests.

And the Jerusalem church, the Judean church, has had time. They have had opportunity to learn. You always think of the Ananias and Sapphira episode, you think of the early missionary endeavors and God was conditioning them with the evangelism of proselytes and as things are spreading further afield and the ministry to the Samaritans, this is loosing them up, giving them some flexibility.

Well, we can't go on hating the Samaritans, we can't go on being suspicious of the proselytes. God is obviously treating them just like he treats us. And so then it's just the next logical step that it would go to the Gentiles.

Well, think about this though. The suspicion with which this happening with Peter is treated and the assumption that Peter has done something wrong and he has to come in and justify himself, we want to be careful about prejudging a group or a denomination or a church or believers that have a different background or a different experience from our own. Keep in mind that all of us come from somewhere.

None of us got saved and started out in the holy church of heaven, right at the center of God's will, understanding everything, leaving golden footsteps in the sand all the way. We come through various paths. Some of us had no previous experience in the church, others grew up in church but maybe it was in a denomination.

Some of us were Methodists, some of us were Baptists, some of us were Catholics, some of us were various other stripes and checks and solids and plaids and paisleys and no telling what all coming in. Well, you think about where we are now, appreciating the study of the word of God and trying to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior. If someone had tackled us a few years ago or many years ago and said, well, you're just not doing it right, you don't understand things right, and it started judging and carrying

on and getting a high altitude nose over us, then what would that have done to our motivation? What would that have done to our encouragement? I appreciate the fact that people put up with me when I was ignorant in a lot of different areas and we need to show grace and patience and sort of assume the best about people who have any sort of pretensions of being believers in Christ or people who are considering becoming a believer in Christ.

Do you really want to be some kind of an exclusivist and a click-maker and a, well, these people are in and these people are out and boo on you, you speak in tongues so God can't be anywhere near you? I will tell you that it is a dangerous thing to classify people and then exclude them from the realm of God's work because all of us are a work in progress and many people are in the process of getting blessings from God now before they ever really wake up and smell the coffee. Many of us were blessed by God and sustained by God and preserved by God before we ever really got with the program. Now do you think it would have been easier for us to come to understanding and come to faith if someone had been looking down their long nose at us saying, you know, you're really messed up.

God is never going to get anywhere near you because look what you're doing, look how you're acting, look at your history, look at your credentials here. This doesn't do anybody any good, does it? Does the Bible say, hello there believers, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to you to judge and to classify and to sort out all the people? I believe it says all authority in heaven and earth has been given to the Lord Jesus. So we can let him sort people out and we ought to try to think the best.

Let someone prove themselves untrustworthy, let someone prove themselves unfaithful, let someone prove themselves to be someone that needs a distance or a separation. Don't start with a separation and expect them to get holy enough to cross it. But you can see this attitude, it's in sipping in the Jerusalem church.

Notice the distinction that they are drawing. Why are they suspicious? It's all about circumcision versus uncircumcision, isn't it? We're circumcised and they're not. We've got a credential that they don't have and you've got to clear a pretty high bar before we're going to think that you're okay because you just don't have what we have.

There are Americans who think this. There are white people who think this. There are people, various different, you know, college graduates and non-college graduates or in the service you have people divided on both sides of the service academies.

In the army, there are officers that went through the college program, you know, looking at the West Pointers and the West Pointers, looking at the people that went to ROTC and they divide up. Well, you know, these West Pointers got all corrupted and ingrown and there's something the matter with them. They're insane.

And on the other side, you have the West Pointers saying, you unprofessional part-timers, you didn't get a real education. Well, it is unproductive. It doesn't do anybody any good.

Let someone prove themselves. You can come from almost any background and if you've got the right stuff, you will prevail. You will advance.

You will improve and be at the top of your game. Background and training are nice if you can get them, but they are not determinative. In the same way, in the Christian realm, we should be very careful to not do what this Jerusalem church is doing.

They start out pre-judging. That's that diacrino. They've already judged through.

They've looked through before Peter ever gets there, before they hear the case. They've already made a judgment and the first words out of their mouth are not, hello Peter, long time no see. How are you doing? Did you have a good trip? What do they say? What's their very first word? What is this we hear about you? You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them, exclamation mark.

Can't believe it. They didn't even say, well Peter, tell us about the trip. They've already found him guilty.

This is a very useful tool in the arsenal of Satan to divide believers, to create schisms. We don't want to get involved in that. The Lord will work with whatever is functional.

There are charismatic churches where believers are growing. There are legalistic, straight-laced, conservative, don't sing any hymn that wasn't written after 1700 churches, where God is at work. God is at work in the Catholic church.

God is at work in the weirdest places you can imagine. Don't decide that you know where God is at work and where he's not. This is a big part of the problem with the experiencing God crowd, as they say, well you've got to find where God is at work.

God is at work everywhere. That doesn't narrow anything down. Look around and see where God is at work.

He's at work all over the place. And in particular for us, he's at work in us. And that's a real good place to start.

This doesn't create a problem yet. Peter is able to give them sufficient evidence and they say grudgingly, well, okay, I guess God has opened it up to the Gentiles. I mean, there's really no argument they can make.

But just wait. So after they hear this, God has granted to the Gentiles repentance with a view toward life. And there is the recognition that this is a different kind of repentance than that which was in view when John the Baptist was preaching, or even when the Lord

Jesus was preaching.

This was remission of sins. This was restoration to fellowship with God. This one here is, in fact, salvation.

Now, they hear that the Greekified Jews, often Cyprus and Cyrene and Antioch, are receiving the Lord Jesus. They figure, we need to follow up. It's not enough to just get them saved.

They need something to go on after that. They're just getting this by word of mouth and they're believing in the Lord Jesus. But then what? There's no apostles out there.

There's no teaching, preaching, ministry whatsoever. So what do they do? They send Barnabas. He goes out and encourages them with purpose of heart to continue with the Lord.

Now, how does Barnabas encourage? Is he just a cheerleader? Rah-rah? Sis-boom-bah? Is he just having a pep rally? How does he encourage them? What is the source of encouragement for believers? It is the truth of God's word. It is promises and principles and doctrine. Somebody talking a good fight and somebody pumping you up on a wave of emotion is not encouragement.

You cannot persevere. You cannot maintain purpose of heart on the air bubble created in a pep rally environment. Barnabas goes and teaches them.

How do we know this? He is a man full of the Holy Spirit. He is a man full of faith. What do people who are full of the Holy Spirit and full of the faith do? They minister.

God the Holy Spirit takes to the things of Christ, leads into all truth. If he is full of faith, that means he knows the word of God. And this is what he is doing.

He is preaching, he is teaching the word of God. A great many people are added to the Lord. Then verse 25, Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

This makes sense to us because we know that Saul kept getting run out of town everywhere he went. He got run out of Damascus when he tried to preach there, came to Jerusalem, got run out of Jerusalem, so he finally went home. And he is back in Tarsus, he is relatively safe there.

And so Barnabas is going to look for him. And when he has 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.

This is the beginning of the great Paul-Barnabas team. They have a year to forge this ministry relationship in Antioch. Why are they first called Christians in Antioch? Because you have the two greatest teachers at work in that town.

And if you baptize someone into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are going to know, they are going to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ. It is going to be all about Christ. They are not called Barnabians, they are not called Saulites or Paulites, are they? Saul and Barnabas do not promote themselves, they teach Christ.

So much so that the people who hear their teaching and follow it and maintain that purpose of heart, continuing with the Lord, are called ones of Christ. Ones belonging to Christ, characterized by Christ, knowledge of Christ. Would not it be a wonderful thing to have that as a part of one's reputation? When someone thinks of you, they say, boy, there is someone who really loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is someone who really lives their life in the light of Christ. Called Christians in Antioch. Why did Barnabas go to Tarsus to seek Saul? He went over there to Antioch and Cyprus and Cyrene and realized that this was a field ripe for the harvest.

What do I mean by that? What did Jesus mean by that when he pointed it out to his disciples? Not that this is a place where many people can get saved. The harvest, remember, is righteousness. The harvest is always righteousness by faith.

Any time in the New Testament in particular where you see the grain being brought into the barn, separating the wheat from the chaff, fruit on the vine, God will prune the vine so that it bears more fruit. What is that? That is not people coming to salvation. That is the fruit of your life and the fruit of my life.

So, let's think about our day. We have a seven day week going on. Many of us work.

Many of us work around the house or we take care of children or we engage in various activities. How does this make a difference to us? What kind of fruit can we bear in our life? This is the great thing about understanding the teaching of the Word of God because many people get discouraged because they say, well, I'm a housewife or I'm a mother to young children or I'm at work all the time. I can't evangelize.

I can't go out to the fields, wait for harvest and go out and bring them in. There's a song, bring them in, bring them in. It's all about going and bringing them in.

Well, a lot of us don't have time to bring them in. We're busy trying to not get kicked out of our house and have enough groceries and just make sure that everything kind of meshes financially or logistically within our household. People say, my lads, how am I supposed to go bring them in? Well, it's a wrong-headed view.

It's a misunderstanding. You and I bear fruit. You and I produce grain.

We reap the harvest that is out there by faith. You can do anything by faith. You can fold laundry by faith.

You can drive your car by faith. You can operate in your business or your job by faith. You can raise your kids in faith.

You can have your conversations in faith. You can clean your house in faith. You can mow your lawn in faith.

Everything we do. See, this actually raises the bar. It's too easy to limit Christian responsibility to evangelism or to church attendance and say, well, as long as I go to church on Sunday and hand out a couple of tracts or try to talk to somebody once every couple of weeks about Christ, I'm a good Christian.

You're letting yourself off the hook. Daily, hour-by-hour responsibility for operating in faith is a much more challenging task. And the modern church and a lot of the teaching that you get in books and denominational pulpits and TBN and the rest of it lets people off the hook.

Well, I can pretty much do what I want most of the time. Once in a while I need to check in at church or I need to check in and do a few good works to kind of, and that sort of blows the air back into my hollow Christian life. Minute-by-minute, day-by-day, each conversation, the Bible says every thought captive for Christ.

Every thought captive for Christ. You think about the number of thoughts you have in a day and the different things we think about. Every one of them needs to be jailed.

Every one of them needs to be brought in and controlled in the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, that's a very ripe field for harvest. It's there just waiting.

If we can live our day, wouldn't it be great if we could just take one day in the week, get up in the morning and live that entire day, every thought captive for Christ. Every conversation glorifying Christ. It doesn't have to be about anything religious, it doesn't have to quote verses, but the things that we say reflect integrity, the things that we talk about, the opinions that we express, the offers of help and assistance or advice or counsel or whatever we speak is something that the Lord looks down and says, well done, good and faithful servant.

Good job handling that retort by this person who's in the grip of sin. Good job not getting defensive. Good job not getting riled, not letting your temper get out of control, not getting depressed, not getting discouraged, keeping your attitude focused on God.

Just to live one perfect day, wouldn't that be great? Well, that's our goal. We may never hit it, but it's a worthy goal to strive for. To have as a purpose, you may not be able to glean every head of grain.

You know, the reason I like the picture that the Lord gives us is that anytime you go to harvest a field, there's always some waste. When you think about the tractors or you

think about the gleaners, whether you do it by hand or do it by machinery, you inevitably lose some of the harvest. You don't get every single grain.

Just the act of going through the field, you knock some down, you lose it, it falls into the soil. You can't get it all. And we can't get it all either.

We can't do every perfect thing right. But we can try to maximize the harvest out of our field. Get as much as we can, waste as little as possible.

It's inevitable. We shouldn't be discouraged that we trample some of the grain. I was thinking about this watching the crop circle tests.

You know, they were trying to see, can we reproduce these crop circles? I'm thinking about the farmer that's got these people trampling down all of his grain. These guys with their fancy spiral designs and all that. I'm calculating, how many acres of grain were sacrificed? How many non-harvestable heads of grain got expended so they could go practice crop circles? Well, this is our goal and we can do it.

It's not a matter of who can you evangelize. It's a matter of how many thoughts can you take captive for Christ. This is what Paul and Barnabas are preaching in Antioch.

And when people latch onto this, they're called Christians. Because they're Christ-like. Christ emanates.

They don't have to say it. They don't have to fly a flag. They don't have to put a fish on their bumper.

They just exude the glory of Christ. Because that's their focus. That's their emphasis.

That's their goal. And they unconsciously almost bear witness. So Barnabas recognizes that there is nobody that is going to be able to communicate to these people like Saul.

He's already met him, if you remember. And so he brings him back and says, Look, here's a place where they're not going to kick you out of town. Here's a place where they're going to appreciate what you have to say.

And so they minister for a full year in Antioch. Then in verse 27, And these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Now, this deserves a whole lesson unto itself.

What does it mean, prophets? Haven't heard of a prophet since the days of John the Baptist. He was the last great prophet of the Old Testament. Then you had Jesus.

Then you had the crucifixion. Then you had Pentecost. Now, we have prophets.

Well, are these Old Testament prophets or New Testament? How do people know they're a prophet? It just comes out of the blue. In these days prophets came from Jerusalem to

Antioch. 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.

Well, if he stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, this informs us of what kind of prophets they are. This is the New Testament gift of prophecy. We know it from other passages.

Remember Ephesians? He gave some apostles and some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. Now, apostles and prophets are temporary gifts. After the first generation, you run out of apostles.

And after the first generation, you run out of prophets. We still have evangelists. We still have pastors and teachers.

Why have prophets? Well, you can approach this in two different ways. First of all, the answer is the same as, why have signed gifts? It is one of the signed gifts to manifest the fact that the Spirit is active and present. Also, to fill in the gap that is present because there is no New Testament canon of Scripture yet.

How are people going to get the information that they need? Jesus said you need to be able to discern the times. Well, if you don't have any Scripture for the New Testament age, how are you going to exercise discernment? You can't. So God fills in this need by giving this temporary gift of prophet.

Now, Agabus is going to show up again down the road in Acts 21, warning the apostle Paul about some things. But here, he is informing the population there that there is going to be a great famine throughout all the world. This is the Roman world.

We don't know what was going on in Australia or Canada or anything, Japan. This is the world of Rome. An empire-wide famine.

It happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. So the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

So, these disciples are in Antioch and evidently the famine is particularly severe in the region of Judea. There is a famine throughout the whole area, but they are a real sore spot. So these look down upon second-class citizens, the Greekified Jews and the Gentile Christians there in Antioch, appreciate the source of their ministry and the source of their information back there in Jerusalem.

And so, as a result of the preaching and teaching that they have received over that year plus from Saul and Barnabas, they send relief back to the Jerusalem church, those brethren dwelling in Judea. They send it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Now this is really a great act of ministry, a great act of love.

Sending it to people they've never met, people that potentially would have looked down their nose at them in other circumstances, but sight unseen, and even though they are themselves in the grip of this famine, they send it back. Well, this gets us to verse 12. About that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. This is the first casualty amongst the apostles. It's in the early days of the church.

But James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, it's interesting that they bracket this whole apostolic age. James is the first to go and John is the last. You have James dying right here, and John won't die until after he writes Revelation, circa 90 plus A.D., 96 A.D., most people think.

So, look at verse 3 though. Because Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Here is a schism.

It pleased the Jews. Which Jews are these? These are the unbelieving, those who adhere to the law and the Pharisees and the old system and think that Christianity is a sect and an aberration. And so, once again, you find these rejecters of Christ on the side of the Romans and the Roman government with the power of execution, with the power of death.

So, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. It was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. What do we know about the Days of Unleavened Bread? This is an anniversary of something, isn't it? What comes right after Passover? The Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This is sort of the anniversary of the crucifixion of Christ. And so, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he seized Peter also. When he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

And, of course, Passover is used here in the general sense of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The whole combination feast is just labeled Passover. But, obviously, if it's in the Days of Unleavened Bread, technically this is after Passover, because that's what kicks off the whole eight-day feast period.

Peter, therefore, was kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. When Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers, and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by, and a light shone in the prison, and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, Arise quickly.

And his chains fell off his hands. The thing that's often pointed out here, and I think it's

valid, is even though this is the night before he's about to be brought before Herod and given the death penalty, Peter is so soundly asleep that the angel has to kick him to wake him up. It's not like he's on tenor hooks, nervous and afraid for his life.

Peter is evidently snoring like a chainsaw, and the angel appears, bright light, and Peter's just sleeping blissfully away. The angel has to basically poke him awake, has to kick him and say, Hey, has to strike him on the side to wake him up. So, no worries.

Arise quickly. And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, Gird yourself and tie on your sandals.

So he did. And he said to him, Put on your garment and follow me. Gird yourself, tie on your sandals, put on your garment.

So Peter's basically, you know, he's sleeping in the little toga that they wore under their outer garment. He's taken off his sandals, took off his outer garment, and taken off his sash, his belt. And so he's got to put all of this stuff back on.

And the whole time he's doing this, the guards are unconscious. And so Peter just bends down, he ties his sandals, puts on his garments. But there's a picture here.

You remember the Full Armor of God passage in Ephesians chapter 6? Before you can advance, before you can travel, you've got to be girded. And many times we find ourselves advancing into battle, into difficulty. And we haven't really gotten all of our gear on yet.

And you can imagine, I mean, do you ever see a battle charge reenacted for gods and generals or the Battle of Gettysburg or any of this? And as everybody is charging up the hill there at Gettysburg, they're still busy putting on their helmet and strapping on their cartridge belt and frantically ramming the rod down their weapon. I mean, you're supposed to have all of this done before you charge into battle, right? Well, there's a picture here. The angel says, get your stuff on.

Get yourself together. Arrange yourself. Organize yourself.

Then we will go. What this tells us is, we have a responsibility. We talked earlier about how do I make this happen? It's fine to see it in the Bible, but I'm here.

I've got a wholly different life. I'm in a different culture. I'm in a different country.

I'm at a different time. So you talk about all this bearing of fruit and all that. What are you really saying? Well, here's one thing.

We have to gird ourselves. We are commanded, in the Word of God, Ephesians 6 is one place, to put on the armor of God. And you do this before you walk into battle.

You don't get into the crisis and say, where did I put that helmet? I've got a sword around here somewhere. Boy, my feet sure hurt. I wonder if I need to put on my sandals.

Boy, I've got my breastplate. It's under something around here someplace. It's too late.

We need to have it on ahead of time. And you know how it is. When we study things out of the Word of God and they're incorporated into our fund of knowledge, we very soon get tested on it.

God says, now that you have that, get it ready. Have it on the front burner here because there will be a quiz. So I fully expect that we, having looked at these passages and seen the content of the preaching of Peter and the content of the preaching of Barnabas and the content of the preaching of Saul of Tarsus in Antioch, having seen this example of Peter who is resting in the Lord.

He's not afraid of danger anymore. He's not worried about death. This is the Peter who was so fidgety and told all the lies in front of the campfire because he was worried about death.

Remember? A little girl asked him a question. Are you one of them? I think I saw you. You sound like a Galilean.

And he's cursing and denying and sweating bullets and running away. This same Peter now, faced with death from Herod, not from a little maiden in the courtyard, but from Herod himself, is literally sleeping like a log. He's come a long way.

But the angel still says, look, gird yourself. Why does it give us these details? Why didn't it just say he left? Because there's significance in it. You have to put your stuff on before you do anything.

Even in the midst of deliverance, you still have to put your stuff on. We have to remember that we have a breastplate of righteousness. We have to remember that we have a shield of faith.

We have to remember that our feet should be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Helmet of salvation. Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

That stuff needs to be in our arsenal. We don't grab a cardboard helmet. We don't grab a paper sword.

We don't put on felt slippers. This is the equipment of the world. And people in the world inevitably fail.

They are inevitably defeated because they don't have the power of God. They don't have the Spirit of God. They don't have the provision.

They don't have the promise. They don't have the power of God at their disposal. We do.

And so we don't arm ourselves with the flimsy, inadequate, and completely defeatable weapons that the world uses. What the world tries to use on Peter falls away. The chains fell off his hands.

Put on your garment and follow me. He went out and followed him and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. It just seemed unreal.

But he still obeyed, didn't he? When they were past the first and the second guard post, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, third layer of protection, which opened to them of its own accord. He didn't know the gates had their own accord. It just swung open.

This is another one I want to see on the reruns. And they went out and went down one street and immediately the angel departed from them. The angel got him a block away and then vanished.

Well, this is where we're going to leave Peter this week. And we'll see what happens when he finally realizes that he's really actually out. The point of application for us is it doesn't matter how dismal or how certain any particular fate may seem.

God is greater than anything that faces us. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. Jesus said, in this world you shall have tribulation, but cheer up, I have overcome the world.

So whatever tribulation comes is already overcome by the Lord Jesus. It is all a matter of seizing it by faith. We reap the harvest of righteousness by faith.

You've got 16 chapters in Romans that hammer away, hammer away, hammer away at the need for us to walk daily, hourly, minute by minute, in faith. Live a normal life, but live it in faith. This is how we persevere.

This is how we qualify for inheritance. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for giving us the opportunity to inherit.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to grow in grace and to reap that harvest of righteousness that has been sowed and planted and cultivated by others. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make these truths real to us. Remind us of our opportunities and of our responsibilities, our calling, and the purpose for which you saved us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.