

PETER'S REPORT TO THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

Acts 11:1-18

When the leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God through the instrumentality of Peter in the house of Cornelius, many of them were extremely sad. This report greatly stirred the prejudices of the Jewish Christians.

I. The Serious Indictment Brought Against Peter.

1. The Occasion.

(1) The report that the Gentiles had received the Word of God. Verse 1.
So remarkable a phenomenon was not likely to remain unknown to the church leaders in Jerusalem. Nor is it readily conceivable that tidings so glorious should have given rise to dissatisfaction in any right-thinking person. Yet, there was dissatisfaction.

(2) The return of Peter. Verse 2a.

Peter came back to Jerusalem to explain what had taken place. He had gone out upon a tour of evangelization and visitation of the churches. So far as we are told, it was the only tour that he made by himself. God had dealt wondrously with and through him in the various places to which he had gone, so he returned with good tidings.

2. The Complainers. Verse 2b.

They were the strict Jewish believers. Many in Jerusalem were doubtless ready to receive Peter with a glad welcome, and were waiting with the greatest possible interest for the confirmation by his own lips of the wonderful tidings which had come to their ears. But evidently there were some who were inclined to give him a different kind of reception.

3. The Complaint. Verse 3.

They complained that he visited and ate with the uncircumcised. They were not especially offended because Peter had preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, or that he had baptized them and received them into the Church, but that he had done so without subjecting them to circumcision. However, they merely charged him with having violated their traditional custom by holding house and table fellowship with the Gentiles. To a Jew, it was bad enough that a member of his race should talk to a Gentile, but to sit down at the same table with him was something that was strictly taboo.

We readily lose patience with such people. God's servant had returned from a victorious campaign. He had been used of the Lord in healing the incurably sick, in raising the dead, and in opening the gates of salvation to the Gentile world. And the result had been such as should have set them to singing hallelujahs. But the only thing in these wonderful tidings on which their critical ears would fasten was the fact that Peter had dined and associated with the uncircumcised heathens. These complaining Jews had been trained for generations in this attitude of exclusiveness. In the course of years they had become overstrict in the construction of the law and its application. And so it came about that when we should have expected the whole heavens to become vocal with anthems of praise for a spreading and triumphant Christianity, our ears are saluted by the discordant notes of a carping criticism.

They believed they were standing for principle. They sincerely believed the Gospel was to be preached among all nations. But just as truly they believed that it was needful for all who accepted this Gospel to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. To them there was no entrance into the Church except

through Jewish gates.

II. Peter's Triumphant Vindication. 11:5-18.

1. The frankness with which it was given.
Peter was not unwilling to placate his criticizing brethren by relating all the circumstances of his visit to Caesarea. Appreciating their perplexity concerning what conflicted so strangely with their traditional beliefs, Peter began and expounded the matter in order to them. He rehearsed the events which had brought to them such disquietude.
2. The fullness with which it was given.
 - (1) The vision he had himself beheld in Joppa. 11:5-10.
 - (2) The arrival of Cornelius' messengers. 11:11.
 - (3) The inward whispering of the Spirit which had directed him to accompany the men from Caesarea. 11:12.
 - (4) The account Cornelius gave of the angel's appearance with instructions to send for Simon Peter. 11:13-14.
 - (5) The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household. 11:15.
 - (6) The impression the phenomenon had made upon himself. 11:16. He remembered that there was a difference between John's baptism with water and the Lord's baptism with the Holy Spirit.
 - (7) The process of reasoning he then followed. 11:17.
When he went into the house of Cornelius, the Gentile, Peter found himself in a close place. On the one hand was his prejudice backed by a long and sacred tradition; on the other hand was the inescapable and unanswerable will of God. If he had followed his own inclinations, he would not have gone, but he had no choice in the matter; he was literally overcome by the will of God.

God must work in spite of men. Some men fling themselves in the face of God, and seek to block His plans. God's work must be done in spite of such men. Some men oppose God because their prejudices color their understanding, and make them see things in the wrong light. Before God can use them, He must break down their prejudices. Some men oppose all the works of God, but they live their natural lives and pass away, and God's plans move on as if these men had never lived. Other men are ignorant opposers of God. They think they are doing the will of God, even when they are hindering His will. Paul thought he was doing the will of God when he was persecuting the Christians.

God honors men when he uses them. John the Baptist was just "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," but what an honor the Lord conferred on John in allowing him to be that voice. Paul often called himself a servant of Jesus Christ. He was glad to be a servant of the Lord. It was an honor for him to be a servant of the Lord. The Lord has a message for a lost soul; it is a message that means life or death. Who will bear it? The Lord honors the man who is willing to bear such a message. When Peter surrendered his will for the Lord's will he made a great bargain. He honored himself more than he honored the Lord.

Since God had bestowed on the Gentiles the same gift of the Holy Spirit as He had conferred on Jewish believers, it was manifest that God had received them. Therefore, Peter would not withstand God and withhold baptism from them. Here we are permitted to see three things:

- a. God's purpose--so striking.
- b. God's plan--so simple.
- c. God's power--so sufficient.

3. The success with which it was given. Verse 18.
Peter simply narrated the facts and declared that he had done all under Divine direction. A fact is a great argument, and that is far more than abuse ever is, although abuse is often resorted to by arguers. The argument of facts convinced them. They could not say anything. They held their peace. And they glorified God. They were truly glad that their enemies could be saved. They praised God that He had provided amply for the redemption of both Jews and Gentiles, making no distinction between them. It would have been sad indeed if they had finally decided to endure the idea of the Gentiles being their equal. No, they rejoiced over the matter, thus proving their magnanimity. At last they shared the divine prospective, and were happy about it.