

***I MEAN, WHO ARE WE?!*****Acts 11**

**Intro:** The plate on the front of my truck reads PASTOR PAPA. I purchased it a few years ago when front license plates were no longer required in Ohio, and I was also reveling in being Papa. I still revel in being Papa, however, I'm just not nearly as cool as I used to be in the eyes of my grandchildren, so I think that the days of that sentimental plate are probably numbered.

Something that has happened with the fact that plate is there, prominently displayed, on the front of my truck, is that I need to walk the straight and narrow. I can't tailgate. If the car in front of me can read PASTOR PAPA on the front of my truck, even though it's reverse in their rearview mirror, then I'm too close. That's not a good witness for Jesus. Also, I can't park recklessly in a parking lot and take up two spaces, that's selfish, and people will look at that front plate and see PASTOR PAPA and think what kind of preacher is that? There are other ways that my PASTOR PAPA plate keeps me honest, like where I might hang out. I means there are certain parking lots where I don't want my truck to be seen with its PASTOR PAPA plate on the front of it. Yes, it helps me to walk the straight and narrow.

I mean, after all, who am I? Well, I am the proud grandpa of two awesome kids. But more than that, that first word, indicates that I am the shepherd of a group of believers who call me Pastor. And being a pastor, means, or at least it's supposed to mean, that I am a servant of the Living God and a follower of the Risen Christ, God the Son. It's who I am. It's why I need to represent him well.

My talk today, as you can tell by the title, essentially asks the question "Who are we?" And I mean by that, who are we serving? We are Christ followers. We have a witness. So when we have a question about what we should do, that old bracelet that we used to see that asked the question WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? gives an answer. After all, who are we? We are the followers of Jesus Christ.

Acts 11 not only numerically follows Acts 10, (Duh!), but the story of Peter's interaction with Cornelius and his friends continues as the reports of the mission unfold. And the question that the Church was asking, in so many words, was, who are we? And we see lots of answers.

Now, as I said in my email on Friday, once again, I'm not going to have the text on the wall, though I will read it in chunks. I hope you have your Bible or smart phone to follow along, but if not, savor the words as I read. First. . . Look at verse 1: *Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.* Acts 11:1 ESV Notice how . . .

**Word gets out**

- The news of the salvation of the Gentiles in Cornelius's circle spread like wildfire. It was big news. And it was good news! But as the word got out about what should have been a time of great joy, instead it was disturbing to the servants of the risen Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. Listen, *So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."* Acts 11:2-3 ESV
- Yes, these were the same people who were supposed to take the good news into all the world, TO ALL PEOPLE. But, as it goes for some people, they were locked into old ways of thinking, so, for them, it wasn't good news.
- Last week I said several times that Peter was a slow learner, but it was obvious here that he was not the only one who struggled with the issue of sharing Jesus with people who didn't follow Jewish law. They were incredulous at the thought that Peter actually went into a Gentile home which was a major No-No, but then HE ATE WITH THEM TOO! It was a problem for them because even if Gentile prepared food that would have been otherwise okay for a Jew to eat, it was no doubt prepared under unclean conditions, and therefore unclean. S, they were slow learners too. They need to learn to ask themselves the question, Who are we anyway? We are supposed to be witnesses. Peter, who had just come to the realization himself broke it down for them.
- In effect he's saying. . .

**Okay, let me explain this to you slowly**

- Listen as I read the next section (Read Acts 11:4-18)

- Peter shared his experience with them. It's the third time we have heard about the vision or dream he had of the sheet, like a movie screen, being dropped out of heaven with every kind of animal on it –clean and unclean. Two times in Acts 10 when it first happened to Peter and then as he related it to Cornelius and now as he's reporting it to the believers in Jerusalem. Next, he shares how Cornelius sent for him, along with the response of the Gentiles as they eagerly received Christ as their Savior and how the Holy Spirit fell on them. Now they were brothers and sisters in Christ!
- Next he added the memory of what Jesus had said on the day that he had returned to his Heavenly Father – *John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.* Acts 1:5. That was when the critics thought better of their thinking – after all, they'd been there too when Jesus had said that to the gathered disciples on the mountain he had ascended from. The memory further revealed a promise immediately following it: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" Acts 1:8. That's right!!!! EVERYONE IS SUPPOSED TO HEAR ABOUT JESUS!!!
- As the formerly critical apostles suddenly remembered they had an AHA! Moment. Well, actually, they were dumbfounded. It says that they fell silent because Peter's words were spot-on. God gives the same salvation and Spirit to all who seek him when believe in him and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about time folks! I mean, after all, who are we? We're the followers of Jesus Christ and his witnesses.
- Next we have the expansion of the Church as it headed into the uttermost parts of the earth and it begins in. . .

### **The cosmopolitan Church in Antioch**

- Antioch was a crossroads of commerce and culture and it was a “happnin’ place” This meant there were a lot of seekers with open hearts.
- Listen, *Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.* Acts 11:19-21
- The church went from being slow learners to excited witnesses of the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- In Acts 8 we saw that, after the death of Stephen, the first martyr of the Church, the believers were dispersed from Jerusalem to various points around the region. Some of them had ended up in Antioch which had been, from its earliest days, (it was founded about three hundred years before) a center for Jewish and God-fearing people. In fact, in Acts 6 when it is recorded that the first deacons were chosen, one was Nicholas, who is described as a Jewish proselyte from Antioch (Acts 6:5). Antioch was a gathering place for Jewish people from all over the empire and it was also ripe for revival.
- The Church in Antioch was built on this foundation of the godly people already there. So, once again, we hear those exciting words . . . *a great number who believed turned to the Lord.* Acts 11:21b. It was a powerful time to be alive! People were becoming Christ followers because the followers of Jesus Christ were actually doing what they were called to do, BEING WITNESSES.
- But Jerusalem had to see for themselves so they decided to have . . .

### **A fact-finding mission**

- Listen, (Read Acts 11:22:26a)
- They sent the best of the best to be their fact finder. It was Barnabas again, who's very nickname was Son of Encouragement. What he found was the facts were wonderful to behold and that reinforcements were needed. So many people were coming to faith, that more evangelists were needed for the region around Antioch so he went and retrieved his friend Saul. And another first occurred . . .

### **They were called Christians**

- A couple weeks ago we saw how the word “saints” was used for the first time for Christ Followers in Acts 9 Then, just a few verses that, again in Acts 9, Christ Followers were referred to as “the Church” – which means Called out Ones” for the first time. Here, in Antioch they are referred to as Christians, which means the people of Christ, for the first time. It was a Greek term rather than a Hebrew term. The Hebrew word,

“Messiah” means, “Anointed One”. The Greek word for the same is “Christ”. So to be called Christians means simply “The people of Christ”. They were what we refer to ourselves as, Christ Followers. After all I mean who are we? We are Christians—the people of Christ.

- Finally, we see here, as the people of Christ found out exactly who they are, they realize . . .

**Difficult times reveal who your family is**

- Listen to the remaining verses (Read Acts 11:27-30)
- Antioch was an long journey on foot from Jerusalem and traveling by ship may have actually been faster. Despite the distance, the believers were united by their faith in Christ. The Jerusalem Church was historically poverty-stricken, with numerous references to their need throughout the New Testament. The people in Antioch heard of a great need caused by a horrific famine in the region, so they sent help. Christ Followers help one another. I mean, who are we? We are helpers to one another and to our neighbors.

**Conclusion:** Who are we? We are witnesses.

Who are we? Brothers and sisters to people we don't even know.

Who are we? Generous because we remember the words of Jesus when he said

*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.* Luke 22:48

I mean, who ARE we? We are the followers of Jesus Christ. Amen