

Explaining a Work of God

by David Guzik

Peter's explanation of the event in Acts 10 and 11 shows that God is doing something new and significant, and that we should let God set the agenda for our lives and seek to be instruments in his great plan.

Duration: 39:20

Scripture: Mark 1:8

Topics: "Repentance Unto Life", "Gods Acceptance"

Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of repentance and God's acceptance of both Jews and Gentiles through the story in Acts chapter 11. It highlights the significance of God granting repentance unto life, urging believers to humbly repent and turn towards Jesus. The message emphasizes the need for aligning our lives with God's agenda, seeking repentance as a continual process for both non-believers and believers.

Transcript

Well, good morning, everybody. Oh, it's very nice to be back. Thank you for your prayers last week, of course.

Inge Will and I were in Sweden for a conference that we've done every year for the last 13 years or so to encourage believers in Scandinavia. And so there we were, about 120 of us gathered together from Denmark and Norway and Finland and, of course, Sweden. And it was just a super time for those people.

But at the same time, I just don't like being away, and I'm so happy to be back. So are you ready? Get your Bibles out. Turn your Bibles on, whatever way you're looking at it.

And open it up to Acts chapter 11. Father, we pray for a blessing upon our time in the Word together now. We're grateful for what you let us do here and that you've given us the freedom in this country and in this community to meet together without fear and to proclaim your Word and to learn from it and to worship you and to pray for one another.

Lord, we're just grateful for that. So now, Lord, come and bless your Word to us this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. You know, we've been following the story through the book of Acts how God took this relatively small group of disciples.

At the very beginning, it was 120 of them gathered together before the day of Pentecost there in Jerusalem in the upper room. God took this relatively small group of disciples and through them launched a movement that has been the world-dominating movement in the last 2,000 years. I mean, it's really amazing when you think about it.

And that charting of the story through the book of Acts has brought us to a very important transition point in Acts chapters 10 and 11. And the basic transition is moving from a movement that was basically a sub-category of Judaism, at least in the perception of other people, to being something that would embrace both Jew and Gentile, the glorious gospel of Jesus. You see, at the end of Acts chapter 10, one could say that a great work of God was done.

God clearly showed that the door was open for Gentiles to come to faith in Jesus, the Messiah, and that they could come to Jesus as Gentiles. They didn't have to first become Jews. They didn't have to first come under the law of Moses and all the ceremonial obligations and all the ritual obligations that were connected with the law of Moses.

So at the end of Acts chapter 10, we see that Peter was preaching a sermon that was interrupted by a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't a big group of people. There may be 20 people.

We don't know exactly how many people were gathered together at Cornelius' household. 15? 20 people? It says that it was those in his household and a few friends. But there was a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them.

We also saw that there was special phenomenon upon those Gentiles gathered together there at Cornelius' house. The Gentiles spontaneously spoke unto God with languages they had never spoke before, and they praised him in those languages. And we also saw at the end of Acts chapter 10 that these same Gentiles were baptized into Jesus Christ in the same family of God that Peter and all the other Jewish followers of Jesus, the Messiah, were gathered into.

As a matter of fact, I love how I put it. We saw it at the end of Acts chapter 10 last time, how Peter commanded them to be baptized. He said, you're doing it.

You're just getting baptized. That's all there is to it. So the issue of Gentiles coming into the church, into the community of the follower of Jesus, of Gentiles coming in as Gentiles, that was settled in the mind of Peter.

God gave him a spectacular vision or a dream where he understood it. God confirmed it through all kinds of circumstances. And he could see it right in front of his eyes that this is what God was doing.

It was settled in Peter's heart, but you know Peter wasn't the only one in the church, right? There were a lot of other apostles back in Jerusalem. There was a whole big, strong, and I don't mean this in a negative way, but entrenched community of the followers of Jesus back in Jerusalem. They had to process it also, and that's what we're going to find right here in these first 18 verses of Acts chapter 11.

Let's take a look at verse 1. Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them. Did you notice it there in verse 1? You see, when the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God, they heard about it.

Something that amazing that happened in Caesarea, where Peter the apostle preached to a bunch of Gentiles, and before they could ever get circumcised, before they could ever clean their cupboards out from the unkosher food, God poured his Holy Spirit out upon them, right? God said, I'm going to take these Gentiles who believe in Jesus Messiah, and I'm going to bless them as they are still Gentiles, and give them a direct connection to Jesus Christ, not a connection that goes through Moses. That's something that great couldn't be hidden. And they hid, hidden, hidden.

Sometimes I just make up words as I preach. If you're an English teacher, don't be horrified. Hidden is not a word.

Hidden is a word, though, and it couldn't be hidden. They all understood that, no, you can never, you can never stop that kind of work. And many of the Jewish Christians who were there in Jerusalem, well, they were taken aback by this.

Notice verse 2 calls them those of the circumcision. And basically what this meant was these were Christians, make no mistake about it, friends, they were Christians. But they were Christians from a Jewish background who took the ceremonial law of Moses very seriously.

These were Jewish Christians who still definitely kept kosher. Who still observed many of the same Jewish rituals, not all of them. I don't think they still made sacrifices for atonement at the temple.

They understood all that had been fulfilled in Jesus. But many of the Jewish rituals, many of the kosher dietary things, they still held on to. It was, as it says in verse 2, those of the circumcision.

Now I want you to notice something. As we read there in verses 1, 2, and 3, there was no evident objection to the idea that Gentiles would receive the word of God. Maybe that bothered them, maybe it didn't.

But that wasn't really on the minds of those who objected. This is what's on their mind. Look at verse 3. You went in to uncircumcise men and ate with them.

The charge against Peter was very simple. You, Peter, you're supposed to be a faithful Jewish man. You're supposed to be, if I could use the phrase, a good Jewish boy.

And you associated with Gentiles and you ate with them. And this offended these Christian Jews and so they contended, that's the word used in verse 2, they contended with Peter. And what was it about again? Look, verse 3 says, and they ate with them.

Remember, in that biblical culture, sharing a meal together with somebody was a special sign of fellowship. It was considered to be a significant compromise by these Jewish Christians. Peter, what are you doing? You're taking the law of Moses and you're ripping it up.

You know, we don't do those things. We don't associate with Gentiles in that way because they don't keep the law of Moses. I believe that the reaction of these Christian Jews shows how significant the change was that was intended in Acts chapter 10.

The change said to the Gentiles, hey, you don't have to become Jews first and put yourself under the law of Moses first. You can repent and believe and come to Jesus directly. That's what it said to the Gentiles.

But you know, it also said something to the Jewish Christians. To the Jewish followers of Jesus, it said this. Receive your Gentile brothers and sisters as full members of the family of God.

They are not inferior to you in any way. Do you see, friends, that it could have been, at the very beginning here, very much a second class system in the body of Christ, right? You could have had the real believers. Those were the ones who still remained with the Jewish customs and traditions.

And then you could have had, well, sort of the off-scourings. The Gentiles who came in, and yes, they were saved, but you know, since they didn't keep a kosher diet, and since they didn't keep those other things, you can't really, really believe they were walking with God. And this was the challenge they were faced with.

You see, the objections of those of the circumcision were of the second point, not the first. They complained to Peter, you ate with Gentiles. You're not supposed to do that.

And we can see that the reaction of these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, you can see why it was so wise of Peter to take witnesses with him when he went. And so now he's going to describe what happened. Look, verses 4 through 15, Peter's going to explain this.

Can I just tell you something right here? This is the third time this story is in the book of Acts. It was twice in Acts chapter 10, and now it's in Acts chapter 11. Can I tell you, God is not into needless repetition.

If God repeats something, it's because it's important. And if he says it a third time, it's because it's extra important. So let's pay attention here.

As Peter recounts this story for a third time, verse 4, but Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying, you know, I should probably just stop right there before we get into it. Isn't this wonderful of Peter? I don't mean to offend anybody with this statement, but it just occurs to me. Peter didn't say, hey, I don't explain nothing to you guys.

I'm the Pope, and you just do what I say. Peter could have said something like that, right? I'm the apostle. I don't have to explain anything to you.

But he didn't say that. Peter recognized something. He said, listen, God was doing something, but where God is really moving among his people, there's going to be, and I don't mean this in a strange way.

I hope you understand just the phrasing. There's going to be a buy-in from the people of God. The people of God are going to see it and understand it.

Maybe there'll be a few scattered individuals who don't really understand it, and don't really agree with it, but the man in the body of Christ, they're going to say, God's doing something here. And Peter found it worth his time to explain it to him. This account, this very obvious condensation of what was in Acts chapter 10, shows that Peter just didn't pull the trump card of his apostolic authority.

No, instead he very carefully explained it to him. As a matter of fact, some commentators, like James Montgomery Boyce, say that the Greek makes this particularly clear, that it indicates that Peter began at the beginning and explained everything precisely. Boyce says that it's a very strong word there, precisely as it happened.

So again, let's go back to that verse 4. It says, But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying, 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. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But I said, Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God has cleansed you must not call common. Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up into heaven.

At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and as we entered the man's house, 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, who will tell you the words by which you and all your household will be saved.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us at the beginning. So as Peter is carefully explaining what happened to the rest of the disciples there in Jerusalem, in Judea, he's getting to the main point of it. Sure, he goes into how the great sheet fell down from heaven, how he saw the animals on it, but the main point of it was found in verse 9, what God has cleansed you must not call common.

Now at first, Peter thought that God was talking about food with all of this, that this was sort of a recipe thing. Okay, Peter, now you can enjoy non-kosher food. You can eat the lobster.

You can eat the pork chop. It's all open to you now. No.

Peter began to understand from verse 9 that what God has cleansed you must not call common, that was actually speaking about people. Acts chapter 10, verse 28 makes it very plain where Peter says, God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. You could almost say this, that there's a sense in which the sheet that God showed to Peter, that it represents the church and it was going to have kosher and unkosher, Jew and Gentile upon it all together in the same group.

And then to reinforce it all, verse 15 is the real payoff. It says that the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us at the beginning. That conclusion was very important.

It showed that God's stamp of approval was on this work towards the Gentiles. Peter's point to these Christian Jews, again those of the circumcision, was clear. They couldn't withhold their acceptance when God had given his, right? I mean, don't you think that's fair enough? If God accepts somebody, shouldn't you? If God says Gentiles are accepted into the Christian community, shouldn't you Jewish believers say yes? It should be the same way with us.

Now, notice this starting at verse 16. Peter's going to seal the argument with this important word, verse 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.

If therefore God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they became silent and they glorified God saying, then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life. Friends, I've got to really make you

focus in right now on verse 16, where Peter says something important. He says, then I remembered the word of the Lord.

Now that is so important. Do you understand, my friends, what a big change, what sort of an earthquake this was in the thinking of the Jewish Christians? They lived their whole life thinking that if somebody wanted to be approved by God, they had to keep the Jewish dietary regulations. They had to keep these aspects of the ceremonial law.

And now Peter's coming along and saying, no, that's not so important for the Gentiles. They can come in without having to observe those things. Now such an earth-shaking shift in thinking has got to be backed up by scripture, right? You can't just come along and say, no, we should change everything here because I have a warm feeling in my heart that we should do it.

Or how about this? We should do it because, well, I'm a prophet and we should say we should do it. No, not even that. Nor if somebody were to say, I'm an apostle and we should do it.

No, what it came back to for Peter was he was able to look back to the word of the Lord. Then I remembered the word of the Lord. All Peter said before this was important, but it had to be confirmed by the word of God.

It wasn't enough for Peter to have a spiritual experience that said, God wants me to do this. He had to find it in the Bible itself. And what he remembered was something that Jesus himself had said.

It's recorded in Mark chapter 1, verse 8. John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. That was the word of Jesus. And if God gave the Gentiles the same gift of the Holy Spirit that he gave the apostles, then they should all back up and pay attention.

Friends, I think that that's a very important word for us to remember. Then I remembered the word of the Lord. How much trouble, less trouble I should say, how much less trouble we would get to in our life if we would just remember the word of the Lord.

What a better guide you'd have to measure things in your life. People come up with this spiritual experience or that spiritual experience or this wind or that wind or this direction or the other direction if you would just remember the word of the Lord. If you just remember that God does things according to his word and his word is true and you should know his word and you should measure things by his word.

God's given you a wonderful measuring stick right here and you can just come back to it. You don't have to worry, you don't have to fret. You see people making this spiritual claim, that spiritual claim, to the word of the Lord.

Now they had the word of the Lord in two ways. They had the word that Jesus said as it's recorded in Mark chapter 1 verse 8 but they also had the Old Testament promises that the Gentiles would come to the Lord through the Messiah and those passages are filled throughout the Old Testament. That God's intention was always to reach beyond the Jewish people and to reach out to a Gentile world that so desperately needed the light of the Messiah.

And so remembering the word of the Lord, they were able to put it into proper scriptural perspective and then verse 17 it says 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 should withstand God? If God was going to reach out to the Gentiles

who was Peter that he could stand against God? You know I love Peter's heart here and I think we should adopt as well. Peter maybe I should say the old Peter the Peter we so often find in the gospels he was the kind of guy who would make his plans and suggest them to Jesus right? Now Peter is of the mentality I want to see what God is doing and get in line with that. How would he know what God was doing? Well he'd know it by prayer he'd know it by circumstances he'd know it by the evidence of the spirit he would especially know it by remembering the word of the Lord but when he discerned that God was moving in a certain way he would get behind it.

Friends what a change in mentality that is. I could say that there's basically two different kinds of people right? There's the kind of people that make their own plans and ask God to bless them and then there's other people who let sort of God set the agenda for their life and they seek to let God move and after enough time trying to make Jesus do what he thought was important now he's letting Jesus set the agenda. Friends I want you to be in that category of people that say God you set the agenda for my life.

Some people think of God as an actor in their life. You're writing the script you're setting the drama you're directing the play and God is your actor and for some of you congratulations he's your leading man in your play right? He's really important to you and he has the best role and you give him the best lines and that's really swell but you know what can I suggest a different mentality to you? Why don't you become an actor in God's play? Why don't you let God set the agenda?

Why don't you let him write the script and become an instrument in his great plan instead of the other way around? Peter was learning this and Peter and all these other realized that it doesn't really matter if other people fit in with us what matters is if they've been accepted by God and he could say that about the Gentiles they've been accepted by God therefore we are all of one family. Now I can just imagine Peter before these people who contended with him what were you doing meeting with these Gentiles?

Peter made all his explanation he poured out his guts on the floor and then the whole place became silent look at verse 18 it says they became silent I don't want to get stereotypical here but I'm just going to make a reflection on typical Jewish culture here if you have a bunch of Jewish people arguing when they become silent something's happening there right?

Right I mean it's like whoa verse 18 says it they became silent those Jewish believers in Jerusalem it says those of the circumcision from verse 2 they all reacted with a stunned silence the wheels were turning inside their head everything was being rearranged about the place of the ceremonial law of Moses about kosher diet about keeping the Sabbath about a hundred other regulations and customs that they had observed before that and now they understood that God was rearranging all that look at what it says in verse 18 it says they glorified God you see they understood God you're doing something I never expected you to do I never expected you to open up the doors wide to the Gentiles the way that you're doing right now but I see that you're doing it and I glorify you for it it's a very

powerful passage it shows us here that the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were soft enough to be guided and corrected by God it is a glorious thing when God's people will allow their prejudices and their traditions to be overcome by God's word and God's work they say okay I'm not going to hold on to my traditions I'm not going to hold on to my prejudices when I see you at work God I'll let go of them and I'm going to grab onto you instead their objections were answered and they gave glory to God and you might even say this look at it in verse 18 you could say that they were happy about it it says that they glorified God saying God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life they didn't walk away from this

confrontation they didn't come in and with a sour heart and a

bitter spirit they left the room and said okay God whatever you're going to do great no I give great compliment to these Jewish Christians right they were willing to have their minds changed they were changed because of the weight of what God was doing and the weight of what God's word said and they walked away and it took a long time until all the objections of those of the circumcision were answered we're going to come back to this whole issue in Acts chapter 15 that will be several weeks away but we'll get to it eventually and when we get to it you'll see that the objections still simmered underneath the surface until they were answered finally at Acts chapter 15 now we right now are in some of the most exciting sections of the book of Acts I mean it's absolutely thrilling you're going

to see the center of God's work make a transition a transition from Jerusalem to well let's just say to another place that we'll read about next week but I can't leave this text without seeing something really wonderful in verse 18 notice what they said I'm going to read the whole verse to you again glorified God saying then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life I think that's a wonderful phrase God has granted to the Gentiles repentance to life you see they could tell that God was at work among those Gentiles because in some way repentance to life was evident I think that's a wonderful phrase repentance to life now think about it first of all think of what it means it means that God's work in the Gentiles was a work of repentance in some way those Gentiles repented and

it was evident now you have to think about it those people gathered together with Cornelius those were people who were good people Cornelius was a good man if you remember what the biblical text says about him he was a man who prayed he was a man who sought God he prayed to the work of God he was a man who supported God's work I mean he was a good man what did Cornelius have to repent of well I don't know all that he had to repent of but I have to tell you one thing is he had to repent of not trusting Jesus as his savior whatever he was doing before he didn't know about Jesus so he had to turn away from what he had trusted before and say Jesus I'm going to make the deliberate effort the deliberate choice to put my trust in you what you did for me on the cross that's what Peter preached to

them right when Peter preached to the crowd gathered together there at Cornelius' house he told them about Jesus' work on the cross he told them about Jesus resurrected and he let them know this that you put your trust in Jesus and you will be saved well Cornelius had to do that as well as the other ones friends they had to demonstrate repentance number one but number two notice this they also recognize that God grants repentance isn't that funny how they use that phrase there in verse 18 God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life have you ever thought of that before that God has to give somebody the ability to repent that's a very powerful idea because it's powerful because in one way it's counterintuitive there are some of you here this morning and I don't say this because

I have any special knowledge I'll just say it because there's this many people gathered here there's some of you here this morning you really need to repent you do now you cannot do the repenting you need to do unless God helps you to do it now when I say that some of you say ok great well if God wants me to repent then let him make me repent no but God's not going to make you repent in some way that I can't exactly describe it's God's work in you but according to your perception it feels like it's something that you choose to do so choose to repent I have no problem saying that you can't repent without God working in you and looking at you square in the eye and saying you got to repent you right now choose to do it just do it just repent just turn from your sins I know you can't repent

perfectly until you get to heaven and then you're never going to do anything perfectly now I know that you may not be able to conjure up tears that people think are associated with repentance I'm not telling you to cry I'm not telling you to do it perfectly I'm not telling you to cry I'm just saying to say I'm going to turn my back on the life I've lived before on the sin that I've held on to and cherished and I'm going to turn my back on it and I'm going to turn my face towards Jesus and I'm going to do exactly what he wants me to do I'm telling you to repent and by the way I'm not only saying that to those of you who have not yet made a decision to be a follower of Jesus Christ I'm saying that to every person here repentance is a word for the church as well is it not? you know my

favorite illustration you've heard me use this before I'm sure because I say it a lot because I like it in the seven letters that Jesus dictated to the churches in the book of Revelation in five of the seven he tells them to repent two of them he doesn't so I just take it as a general prescription that five out of every seven Christians need to repent of something or another so look around you the people who are on your row we'll just start counting them out now listen repentance is a word for believers as well we need to constantly be turning away from the sins we hold on to away from the sins that get in our way and we need to say no Lord I'm turning towards you so repentance is a thing granted by God whether or not it feels like that to you at the moment you choose to repent but you

can never even make that choice unless God grants it to you but listen understanding that God grants us repentance gives us an urgency to repent listen I can envision in my mind right now that you're walking with somebody and you feel like you should repent you really do well I don't know if you're a follower of Jesus or not maybe it's your day to repent and to give your life to Jesus Christ or maybe you're somebody that you do walk with the Lord but there's just some area of stubborn sin that right now the Lord is just nailing you on and he's calling you to repent right now about it now you're thinking ooh I really should repent maybe I should maybe I'll come up to somebody talk to them on the prayer team afterwards yes I should but you're sort of resisting it you know that struggle that

goes on inside and then this thought comes into your mind see don't do it today you can always do it later right am I the only one who ever hears this voice don't do it today you can always do it later listen the fact that repentance is a gift from God you can't always do it later right because honestly you can't repent at any time you want to you can only do it when God gives you the gift of repentance and if you're feeling that gift stirred up inside of you right now now's the day to do it don't presume on the ability to repent tomorrow take it today and one more thing to notice did you see that great phrase that Jesus used in verse 18 it says that God granted the Gentiles repentance what? to life that's what repentance is hello it's not repentance to death it's not repentance to

boredom it's not repentance to misery it's repentance to life and that's exactly the gift that God offers you and I today repentance to life there are people they're not ashamed to sin but for some reason they're ashamed to repent isn't that perverse in human nature well friends repentance is a glorious gift that God holds out in front of you right here today you can repent and it's repentance unto life you think your life is doing pretty good right now and perhaps it is by every outward measure but it's not and so I want to give you guys an invitation right now I'm just going to give you an opportunity in a quiet moment before God right now to do a little business before your Savior and to repent before him say God I will I'll change my mind I'll change my heart about the things that

I've been wrong about you got me God I'll do it your way can we do that just now for a few silent moments in prayer let's start a prayer and then after just a few silent moments I'll pray and continue to speak let's

pray together right now just for a few silent moments Father in heaven I pray that you would move upon us now and that you would grant Lord us here this morning repentance unto life I trust Lord Jesus that your Holy Spirit is speaking to people on a very individual level and so do that now Lord persuade us Lord to repent unto you Father I want to pray in particular here this morning for those who've never come to Jesus asking for the forgiveness of their sins they've never said the words to Jesus that they surrender their life to him that they want him to be the Lord of their

lives Jesus won't you move upon them now and persuade them to do that say Jesus I'm as broken or crazy as scattered as my life may be I give it to you I repent of my sins and I put my trust in you and who you are and what you did for me on the cross if that's you and you've never done that or you've done it and you've fallen so far away from that point of decision that you feel like you need to do it again won't you tell the Lord so right now just speak to him those words Father move upon those hearts move upon those lives bring your goodness bring your grace people are reverently praying and their heads are bowed their eyes are closed I just want to know this if you've surrendered your life to Jesus this morning either for the first time in a way that's been a significant rededication

for you could you just raise your hand so I can pray for you bless you I know there's people here this morning that you have there's nothing to be ashamed of Lord only worth glorifying God about so who here this morning you've done that again I just want to just want to pray for you God bless you and you bless you sir bless you thank you God bless you Father move upon those lives Lord I pray for those who need to make a seal of their repentance perhaps even a confession of their sin that you'd move upon them when the prayer team comes forward that they'd respond to that we'll just draw our hearts now to worship you to give you the praise that you so richly deserve we do it now Lord in Jesus name let's worship the Lord together

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