

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Acts 11:1-18

^{11:1} Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³ saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" ⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' ¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" ¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Commentary

The irony of this story is that today Christianity is a Gentile religion. The excluded minority has become the dominant majority. The early church ultimately concluded (at the council of Jerusalem, Acts 15) that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised as Jews to become Christian, even though they needed to observe the moral laws. The scripture is exaggerating here a bit about the prohibitions on interactions with Gentiles. On a practical level, Galilee was essentially a Gentile territory. As Jews had been exiled and fled persecution throughout the Greco-Roman world, no doubt they had extensive contact with the Gentiles. But the point was

still dramatic—a new day was dawning in which Jews and Gentiles would become one in a common faith and mission!

Reflection

As a faithful Jew, Peter assumed he should not associate with people considered “unclean,” “impure,” or “uncircumcised.” What insight does this story give us?

Revelation 21:1-6

^{21:1} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Commentary

Most of Revelation is concerned with John’s vision of God’s plan for judgment of the earth. However, in Chapter 21, the vision turns to what will happen after God’s judgment. John is shown “a new heaven and a new earth.” The vision would not have been amazing to first-century Christians, for it echoes the final chapters of Isaiah, and they generally believed this would happen soon, perhaps even in their lifetime. The New Testament is full of images of a godly commonwealth. Jesus ushered it in, but it is not yet complete. It is the “already-here, not-yet-fully come” new earth of God. When God dwells with the people in the new earth, sadness, pain, injustice and death will cease. The thirsty (needy) will drink (benefit) from the water (grace-filled sustenance) of life. Peace, justice, and love will reign.

Reflection

Revelation predicts massive destruction and death before God’s new earth arrives for the faithful. What have you been taught in your life of faith and learning about how God may bring this new era into being?

John 13:31-35

^{13:31} When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me;

and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Commentary

During a final meal with his followers, Jesus instructed them about the meaning of being disciples. He washed their feet, symbolically embodying what it means to be in relationship with Him and modeling the life of servanthood. He instructed them directly: they are to imitate Him in communal service. In the Gospel of John, this is the only explicit commandment that Jesus gave—and He gave it not to the multitudes, but to his followers. The commandment was not a surprise. Jewish Christians would recognize in the Torah the divine injunction to love in community. What was new was that Jesus rooted it in His incarnation. Jesus' love for His disciples was not a denial of His life for their sake, but an expression of the fullness of His relationship and love for them. Jesus remained committed to His values and beliefs and followed his vocation where it led Him.

Reflection

Rather than "giving up" His life on the cross, Jesus "gave away" His life out of the fullness of His love and commitment. What do you make of this distinction?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 148

^{148:1} Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

² **Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!**

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ **Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

⁶ **He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

⁸ **fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!**

- ⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
- ¹⁰ **Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!**
- ¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
- ¹² **Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**
- ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
- ¹⁴ **He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**