The Book of Acts Lesson 22

Acts 11:1-18

“Withstanding a New Beginning”

Introduction: Gross!, Eew!, Disgusting!, these are all words that people use when they are exposed to something they find unnatural or unfamiliar. One of the things that makes different cultures so awesome can also be the thing that makes them odd to us, food. We won’t go into detailed descriptions of what sorts of things most Americans find strange, but in different countries they eat animals that we would not, they eat parts of animals that we would not. This part of being exposed to other cultures can be difficult for some to handle. This is a difficulty similar to what we see in Acts 11. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines a taboo as-“ *… a vehement prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behavior is either too sacred or too accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake, under threat of supernatural punishment.”* This is what we see going on in the early church when believers there heard what Peter had done in the house of Cornelius.

1. Peter faced contention when he returned to Jerusalem.
   1. The Christians in Jerusalem were all of Jewish descent and did not fully understand what God had done.
      1. Gentiles were unclean in their eyes.
      2. To eat with a Gentile was to defile oneself. Some would have reacted by saying Gross!
   2. They were disappointed and outraged by what Peter had done.
      1. These feelings came from a desire to please God.
      2. They were following what they had done for their entire lives.

Transition: When we have matters that we don’t understand or question we go to the Bible. These believers in Jerusalem didn’t have the Bible because it hadn’t been written yet. Peter answers the tough questions.

1. The drastic change was irrefutable.
   1. Peter recounts the work of God among the Gentiles.
   2. God was calling the disciples to cross cultural boundaries.
      1. Since the time of Moses the Children of Israel knew that they were commanded to abstain from all sorts of things like bacon, lobster, and gentiles.
      2. They also had to observe quite a few holy days and make sacrifices.
      3. It was a good thing that these disciples wanted to honor the Lord.
         1. The children of Israel had a past marked by following other gods.
         2. God had even judged them before for their spiritual disobedience.
   3. The evidence that Peter uses was not based on his authority.
      1. This is because Peter was not the “vicar of Christ”;
         1. Peter did not have any special access to God.
         2. Peter did not have a deeper insight into the Scripture.
      2. Peter just followed God as he was led by the Holy Spirit.
      3. Peter’s authority went back to the Word of God. V. 16
         1. He remembered that Jesus told them that this would happen and recognized that God’s plan was in motion.
         2. When he saw that it was God’s work he did not argue because he realized his place in God’s work. All he could do was follow orders.

Transition: This break with tradition that God was working out in the early church is the reason that you and I have the gospel today. Those of us who are not of Jewish descent have much to rejoice abut in these verses of scripture. God was highlighting the nature of His work in people’s lives that He wanted to address the primary need of humanity.

1. The primary need that people have today is Christ.
   1. We all come from different cultures and backgrounds.
      1. These cultural differences can be wonderful:
         1. Food: Chinese, Mexican, Italian, desserts,
         2. Values: Integrity, honesty, family, personal responsibility, dedication, these and more are values that different cultures can emphasize differently.
      2. Sometimes cultural differences cause conflict.
         1. Some people look down on others because of what they look like or where they come from.
         2. Some only associate with those who are like them in an area that is important to them:
            1. Race
            2. Age
            3. Social status
            4. Level of education
            5. Career
   2. As Christians we should be directed in our interactions with people primarily based on the need that people have to be saved.
      1. Christ does not discriminate based on the things that people see. He doesn’t care what we are culturally familiar with.
      2. The need for Christ is global.
         1. In the back of the auditorium are letters from missionaries all over the world who are taking the gospel to cultures different from ours.
         2. The distribution of laborers is determined by the Lord of the harvest.
            1. He used Paul, who was very much a Jew, to reach many gentiles for Christ.
            2. There are Americans in Africa, and Filipinos in South America, even as it was at one time that there were Europeans in America, all for the purpose of taking the gospel to everyone everywhere.
            3. We can have a part in the work that is going on all over the world:

Prayer moves the hand of God, missionaries need our prayers.

We can give to the work of missions so that others can go and devote themselves to preaching the gospel.

You can be one of the ones who goes, just be willing to do whatever God calls you to do.

* 1. In your interactions with people, do not let cultural unfamiliarity keep you from sharing the gospel.
     + - 1. Hillcrest is not a “white” church, or a “military” church, or a church known primarily by any other demographic other than Christian.
         2. Hillcrest is a church that will accept anyone from anywhere because it is what God has done for us, and it is what He wants us to do for others.
         3. We should be willing to give the gospel to anyone, even if they look like someone who is involved in wicked practices.

Conclusion: Some people value culture more than they care about or think about the things of the Lord. As Christians we should never allow our pride in our country, job, or anything else be more important to us than God. We must remember to acknowledge God as the source of all the things that are good in our lives. We must also remember that when we see people who are different from us, this should not keep us from being a good witness for Christ. Hillcrest is committed to reaching all the lost in our community, and to helping others reach all the lost all over the world. The primary need that we all have is Christ. He is able to bring different people from all over and unite them for His purpose. Thank the Lord that He doesn’t exclude anyone from the opportunity to trust Christ by faith for salvation.