

August 29, 2021 by Steve Brandon



# Do Not Stand in God's Way

## Acts 11:1-18

1. The News Spreads (verse 1).
2. The Criticism Comes (verses 2-3).
3. Peter Explains (verses 4-17).
4. God is Glorified (verse 18).

If you were here last Sunday, you experienced something very unique at Rock Valley Bible Church. I did not preach the sermon that I had prepared to preach. Instead, I preached a sermon that I prepared in about 30 minutes before the service began.

The only other time that I have ever done something like this was maybe 10 years ago when we had a worship service run long. As I remember at the service, we presented our financial situation as a church. We also spent a good portion of our time praying. As the service went long, I didn't want to push everyone by preaching the long sermon that I had prepared. So I spoke about adoption and our adoption fund at church. It was a natural response to what we had presented to the congregation. I spoke for about 20 minutes. I spoke off of a sheet of paper that I wrote during the service. Why did I do that? As the service progressed, I remember being provoked in my heart to change my plans and speak on adoption.

I did practically the same thing last Sunday. But it wasn't during the service that I thought about changing my plans. It was during prayer meeting. We read Psalm 20 in the meeting. Verse 7 reads, ...

### Psalm 20:7

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

And began praying over the text. It struck me how applicable this was to the Christians in Afghanistan, with all that's going on with the evacuation at the Kabul airport. Further, I was struck with how the Psalm is a call to pray for those in distress. For instance, in verse 1, we read, ...

### Psalm 20:1

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!

And so, I preached a sermon entitled, "We trust in the Name of the Lord Our God: Pray for Afghanistan"

During prayer meeting, I really fought it. It's not the easiest thing to stand and speak on a topic that you are unprepared. It is easiest to speak what I have prepared. Further, I want to be clear when I speak. I don't want to waste your time and by rambling on and on. And without notes, that is a danger. And yet, as I wrestled, I really felt that it was the Lord stirring in my heart to preach such a message as I did last week. It was definitely out of my comfort zone.

Now, as most all of you know, I'm not the charismatic sort of person that says, "God told me this" or "God told me that." (Such statements are often used to manipulate others. Because, who can argue against you, once you claim divine authority for your actions). But, I was so stirred in my heart last week to combine Psalm 20 of prayer meeting with the horrific events going on in Afghanistan, that we might be led to pray for them at this most difficult time. And in some measure, not to preach the message would be going against the Lord's stirring in my heart. And "who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17).

Well, this morning, as we come to our text (Acts 11:1-18). we find Peter giving explanation for doing something that was out of his comfort zone as well. The Lord called him to go and stay with some Gentiles and preach the gospel to them.

Now, if you understand the culture of the New Testament you would understand how far out this was. For in the days of the New Testament, the Jews had little dealings with the Gentiles. They were viewed as an unclean people. who's touch would defile you. John 4:9 says it well, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." You could equally say, "Jews have no dealings with Gentiles." Yet, Peter was being asked to go to the home of a Roman Centurion. Not only was this man a Gentile, But he was also a military commander over the very people that were oppressing the Jews.

This wasn't something that Peter wanted to do. This wasn't something that Peter looked forward to in anticipation. No, the only way that he was ever going to do this was through the working of the hand of God. And, in fact, that's what we find. We find the hand of God working in Peter's life to go to Caesarea, a Gentile city. into the home of Cornelius, a Gentile man. and preach the gospel to he and his family. And these Gentiles believed! And the Holy Spirit fell upon them! And they were baptized and welcomed into the church.

Peter was under such conviction that this was the right thing to do, that he told those who questioned him, "Who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17). It is from this verse that I get the title of my message this morning: "Don't Stand in God's Way." And this is where I want to draw your mind this morning to application.

Are there opportunities in your life where the Lord is prompting you to speak with others, particularly to tell them of Jesus, but, because it is out of your comfort zone, you haven't talked with them. you haven't shared the gospel with them. It's just easier to be silent.

I can stand here this morning with 100% confidence that is God's will in your life to tell others of Jesus. This is the main point of the book of Acts: "Be My Witnesses." Jesus is calling all of us to speak with others about Christ. This is how God builds his kingdom! We open our mouths and tell others about Jesus, and God does his work!

This is what we have seen throughout the book of Acts. We have seen the apostles open their mouths, telling others of the life and death and burial and resurrection and ascension and exaltation of Jesus. And as a result, the Lord built his church. Peter opened his mouth on the day of Pentecost, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36) and thousands came to faith." And though the apostles were rebuked and told "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18), they did. And though the apostles were flogged for preaching in the name of Jesus, they continued to do so. and the church continued to grow. "The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem" (Acts 6:7).

Stephen was so bold as to tell others of Jesus, that it cost him his life! as he was stoned to death in Jerusalem (Acts 7). The ensuing persecution pushed people out of Jerusalem, where they continued to open their mouths and tell others about Jesus. In fact, this is what the book of Acts is about. It's a record of the believers in the early church being witnesses of Jesus, and the Lord was building his church. And when we keep silent, we may very well be standing in God's way in his plan to build his church. So, "Don't Stand in God's Way." Open your mouth and tell others of Jesus. This is what Peter did. And God used him to build his church.

So, let's read our text:

#### Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began and explained it to them in order: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' 0 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

The first event we see in our text is found in verse 1, ...

### **1. The News Spreads (verse 1).**

This is found in verse 1.

#### Acts 11:1

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

I would say, "The News Spreads Quickly," but that's all relative. In our day of instant access and live feeds, the news spread slowly. But in their day, it spread quickly.

Here's the testimony of what happened as Peter began preaching:

#### Acts 10:45-46

The believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Those in Caesarea experienced God that day! They experienced the Holy Spirit coming! They witnessed the speaking in tongues! They observed the Gentiles extolling God! And they were amazed!

And whenever you are amazed at something, you cannot help but speak with others of the things that you have seen and heard. Whether that's some great athletic performance in the Olympics. Or whether it's a fire in the house next door. Or whether it's a new piece of technology. Or whether it's people in Afghanistan hanging onto the side of military plane, desperate to get out of the country. Whenever you are amazed at something, you will speak. you will tell others.

This is how to be a great witness for Jesus. Simply be amazed the grace that has come to you in Christ. That once you were lost, but now you were found. That once you were blind, but now you see. That God saved a wretch like me. When you are amazed at this, you will talk.

And that's what happened here. Those who had come with Peter could not help but speak with others of the things that they had seen and heard. The Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles! Once you heard of the Holy Spirit coming upon the Gentiles, and the speaking in tongues and Gentiles glorifying God! (Acts 10:46), you would speak. News of such grand events spread quickly.

This news would have begun in Joppa when Peter and his friends returned home. It would have been the buzz around the city. But soon, those who traveled in and out for business would have heard of it as well. With such grand events, they would have brought the news back to their hometowns. And soon, it spread throughout all Judea.

I'm sure that the reactions were mixed. Some were confused, how could it be that the Holy Spirit would even come to the Gentiles? They weren't the chosen people. Others, who understood the heart of God and the mission of God to the world, would rejoice at such events. Others would be angry, The Gentiles were scum! They had no right to the gospel. That was for the Jews.

In verses 2 and 3, we see several who weren't so happy at what was taking place. They criticized Peter. This is my second point.

## **2. The Criticism Comes (verses 2-3).**

### Acts 11:2-3

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

You can almost hear the tone of their criticism in their voices. "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them??!!" In effect, they were saying, "This is wrong! We, as kosher Jews, don't defile ourselves in this way. Peter, you should know that! Why would you do such a thing? It's unlawful. It's wrong. You are now unclean and displeasing to God."

The best comparison for us to understand what was going on here is the segregation that took place in our nation in the south after the Civil War. Yes, the Black people were set free. But by the Plessy vs. Ferguson case in 1896, the Supreme Court of our land established the principle of "separate but equal," which provided the legal basis for segregation.

So, you would have white neighborhoods and colored neighborhoods. You had white drinking fountains and colored drinking fountains. You had white bathrooms and colored bathrooms. You had white seats on the bus and colored seats on the bus. all under the law. Like Jews and Gentiles of the first century, white people and colored people just didn't mix.

Well, the animosity between the races came to a head on December 1st, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama when Rosa Parks, who sat in the colored section of the bus in the back, refused to stand when a white man demanded that she stand and make room for him. She was arrested, locked in the jail, booked for her crime, and fined. The arrest of Rosa Parks is merely an indication of the racial tension that existed in our country in the 1950's. and we still face some of that today. The racial tensions in our nation today are clearly evident for all to see. May the Lord heal our divisions.

Now, in Peter's day, segregation was in full-force. You had two factors going on here. First of all, you had the Jewish centrality of the Old Testament. Where God had his "chosen people" the Jews. And God instructed them to keep separate from the Gentiles. Don't mix with them. Don't inter-marry with them. Such separation was ingrained into the heart and soul of every Jew. Now, to be sure, Gentiles could come into the Jewish community. But only so far, And only on the terms of the Jews. This was clear in the temple. The outer courtyard was for the Gentiles. They could only go so far. They could not enter the inner courtyard as the Jews could do.

The second factor was the Roman occupation of the land of Israel. The Jews hated the Romans. They had the military rule over them, and they called the shots. they made the rules. The Jews were forced to pay taxes to the Romans, who would use this money to rule over the Jews. That's why Peter was criticized! "Why did you go to those people?"

Notice who was saying this. It was those of "the circumcision party." These were Jews who held strictly to the Old Testament. They believed that you must be circumcised to be saved. after all, circumcision was the entrance into the covenant in the Old Testament. it must be the entrance into the covenant in the New Testament. (We will see more of this in Acts 15 and the Jerusalem counsel.)

Regardless, they were not happy that Peter had brought the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter, if you will, was placed on trial. His defense comes in verses 4-17. I'm calling this, ...

## **3. Peter Explains (verses 4-17).**

### Acts 11:4-17

But Peter began and explained it to them in order: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' 0 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

This is actually the third time that we have heard this story. The first time came in the first half of Acts 10, when the events actually took place. The second time came in the second half of Acts 10, when Peter and Cornelius share their stories. And now, we hear it the third time, when Peter explains why he did what he did.

I point that out, simply to say that it's important. Whenever something is repeated often in the Bible, it means that it's important. And in the course of the book of Acts, these events are hugely important. In fact, they are in many ways, the turning point of the book of Acts. Because, after these events, the gospel begins to penetrate into Gentile lands.

In chapters 13 and 14 will come the first missionary journey, where Paul and Barnabas head out, across the sea to spread the gospel. not only to Jews, but also to the Gentiles! And Gentile churches are started for the first time. In Acts 15 and following, the entire book tells us of how the gospel spread, mostly to Gentiles! And it all started with these events in the life of Peter, which we read about in chapter 10, which Peter and Cornelius talk about as they share their stories. which now, Peter explains to those who criticized him.

In verses 4-17, Peter tells of his vision, of the sheet coming down with unclean animals on it. of how Peter refused to eat. But the voice said, "What God has made clean, do not call common" (verse 9). Then some men came from Caesarea. They had come because of a vision as well. And under the direction of the Spirit of God, Peter goes (verse 12). Peter and Cornelius link up. They share their stories. Then, Peter preaches to the Gentiles. While Peter was merely beginning his sermon (verse 15), the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, just like what took place on the day of Pentecost.

Do you remember what that was like? A mighty rushing winds (Acts 2:2). Divided tongues as of fire (Acts 2:3). Languages, not known by the speaker, are spoken plainly for other native speakers to understand. Romans, who spoke only Latin, began speaking fluent Hebrew, which they had never studied before. This was in fulfillment of Jesus' words, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and how many days from now" (Acts 1:4). This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost! This was fulfilled at Caesarea in the house of Cornelius!

The working of God was obvious to all! Peter's conclusion is appropriate:

Acts 11:17

If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Everything that the Jews experienced on the day of Pentecost, was experienced by the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius! The Lord was clearly opening up the way for the Gentiles to be saved through faith. And, as Peter says, "Who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Peter said that it was a clear movement of God! And Peter was not going to get in the way.

Peter already tried standing in God's way. Remember when Jesus first revealed that Matthew 16:21 he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter didn't much like the plan of God. And so Matthew 16:22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." That was standing in God's way! And Jesus immediately corrected him. Matthew 16:23 "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men."

Here in Acts 11, we see Peter learning his lesson. He was not going to stand in God's way. He was not going to place upon the Gentiles any undue burden. He was going to embrace them as fellow believers. The only thing he required of them was baptism. He first asked those he was with, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who receive the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47) And with no objection, "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48). He didn't require circumcision. He didn't require law-keeping. He accepted their faith as genuine and saving.

The good news is this: Those who were critical accepted his explanation.

Acts 11:18

When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

This is my last point this morning.

#### **4. God is Glorified (verse 18).**

Ultimately, isn't this what we are seeking? We are seeking God's glory. It may not be what you want. It may not be exactly the way you want it. It may go against all of your cultural customs. It may even go against your theology at the time. as it did those of the circumcision party. But when God's work is clear, we must glorify God for it.

I rejoice that these men were silent and accepted the ways of God. I rejoice how they discerned God's will. They said, "To the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." This is great theology: God grants repentance

Do you realize that your entire salvation depends upon the grace of God? God gives faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our faith comes from God!

God also gives repentance (as seen in Acts 11:18). This same truth is also expressed in 2 Timothy 2:24-25, where Paul instructs his protege in the faith, Timothy. He writes, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). This is how a pastor should respond to opposition against him. He should be patient and kind and gentle, because he knows that winning the argument isn't enough. It will only be enough if God grants repentance.

Further, God gives salvation. Paul wrote this to Titus, explaining our salvation: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4-5). Our salvation is all of God! We don't earn it or deserve it in anyway. It comes as a gift to us from God.

But it all comes when we open our mouths and tell other people. This is God's way. Let's not stand in God's way.

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I want to close by illustrating this by considering the story of Esther. She became queen of Persia at a difficult time in the life of the Jews. A high official in the government, named Haman, had coerced the king that on the 13th day of the 12th month, all Jews were to be killed and all of their property taken. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, heard about this. He sent a message to her saying, ...

Esther 4:13-14

Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Mordecai was confident of the Lord's protection of the people of Israel. He knew that the Lord would prevent them from being wiped out. Mordecai's only question was whether Esther would be the means that God would use to save them. If Esther didn't speak up, Mordecai knew that it would come through another means. Then, he reminds her of her strategic position as the queen. It may be that God raised her up for this very purpose of being the means of salvation for the Jews.

This is the reality of how God builds his church. We do not have to fear the Lord failing to build his church. He will. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. However, we are called to speak with others, and tell them of Jesus, that the word may spread. If we are silent. God will build his church in his way, without us.

Esther realized that she must speak with the king. But she also knew of the dangers she would face if she would speak up. She sent a message to Mordecai:

Esther 4:16-17

"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther wasn't going to stand in God's way. She was willing to speak, realizing that she might die. So, she pleaded with Mordecai to spread the word, so that others could fast. Presumably, this also included praying for her and for her safety as she would go and speak with the king. Finally, she resolved, "If I perish, I perish."

So I would encourage you, especially as you think about the theme of Acts, "Be My Witnesses," that you be like Esther. You may have some fears in speaking with others about Jesus. But what is the worst that will happen to you if you speak up? Perhaps you will be ridiculed? Perhaps you will lose a friendship? But you will not be killed for telling others of Jesus.

Will you speak with others and be a witness for Jesus?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 29, 2021 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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