Acts 11:1- 18: Week 23

Pull Up a Chair

Sometimes what looks like criticism is actually fear. When God leads us beyond what is familiar, we can either resist what He is doing or join Him in it.

Peter's story in Acts 11 reminds us that God confirms His direction through **His providence, His Spirit, His people and His Word**. As followers of Jesus, we are called to recognize where we may be resisting God and become people who extend the same grace we have received.

Icebreaker

Have you ever been resistant to something at first, only to realize later that it was exactly what you needed?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Acts 11:1-18

As you read, pay attention to the tension between Peter and the believers in Jerusalem. They initially criticize Peter for welcoming Gentiles, but by the end of the passage, their criticism turns into worship.

Acts 11 is essentially a replay of what happened in Acts 10. God is making it unmistakably clear that the gospel is for Gentiles too. They are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.

Peter returns to Jerusalem and is immediately criticized for entering the home of Gentiles and eating with them. Instead of becoming defensive, Peter tells the whole story of what God had done.

RESISTANCE

Peter's critics were not necessarily evil people. Pastor Kevin suggests they were scared people. They were afraid of what could happen if the church crossed boundaries and embraced people who had previously been considered outsiders. “Resistance isn't something that evil people do, it's something scared people do.”

Discuss

1. What are some fears that can cause people to resist change or resist people who are different from them?

2. Pastor Kevin described “insider resistance” as protecting what is familiar rather than extending grace to outsiders. Where do you see this tension in our culture, workplace, family or even the church?

3. What's the difference between having a “critical eye” and having a “critical spirit”?

“A critical eye leads with questions. A critical spirit leads with suspicion.”

4. Why do you think suspicion can sometimes feel safer than curiosity or understanding?

RECOGNIZING GOD'S DIRECTION

Peter doesn't respond to criticism with more criticism. He tells the story of what God had done.

As Peter explains the situation, he identifies several ways God confirmed what He was doing.

God confirms His will through:

His providence
God's timing, circumstances and open doors.

His Spirit
The Spirit gives direction and peace.

His people
Peter didn't go alone. He brought six other believers with him.

His Word
Peter remembered what Jesus had said and recognized that his experience aligned with Scripture.

Discuss

5. Which of these four ways, providence, Spirit, people or Word, do you most naturally look to when trying to discern what God is doing? Why?

6. Why is it important that Peter didn't rely solely on his personal experience?

7. What does Peter's decision to bring six other believers with him teach us about the importance of community and accountability?

Pastor Kevin makes an important distinction: “Just because I have God's peace doesn't mean I don't need God's people.”

8. Why can pride make it difficult for us to invite other people into our decision-making or spiritual discernment?

WHOSE WAY ARE YOU STANDING IN?

After hearing Peter's story, the believers have a choice. Acts 11:17 says:

> “So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?”

The people who began the story criticizing Peter end the story praising God. **Criticism becomes worship. Resistance becomes surrender.**

Discuss

9. What stands out to you about the question, “Who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?”

10. Is there an area of your life where you may be resisting something God has already made clear? What makes you hesitant?

11. Pastor Kevin asked, “Where have I become cynical and really I need to forgive, heal or surrender?” Which of those words most challenges you right now? Why?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

The message ultimately moves from insider resistance to extending grace. Pastor Kevin challenges us to honestly examine what is happening inside us:

- Where am I resisting what God wants to do?
- Where am I asking for more confirmation about something God has already made clear?
- Where has fear turned into criticism?
- Where do I need to forgive?
- Where do I need healing?

- Where do I need to surrender?

And underneath all of it is the gospel. We were once estranged from God, yet Jesus came to close the distance between a holy God and sinful people. We have received grace and forgiveness that we could never earn. “The people who have received that kind of grace and forgiveness should be the quickest to extend it.”

12. Who is someone you may need to extend more grace to right now?

13. What would it look like to “own your part and trust God with the rest” in a relationship that feels unresolved?

ONE NEXT STEP

Take a few minutes this week to prayerfully ask: **“Holy Spirit, where am I resisting You?”**

Then identify one specific step of obedience. That might mean:

- Initiating a difficult conversation
- Offering forgiveness
- Apologizing for your part
- Releasing control
- Welcoming someone you have kept at a distance
- Asking trusted people for wisdom
- Surrendering something you've been trying to control

Don't try to control the outcome. **Own your part and trust God with the rest.**

PRAY TOGETHER

Pray that God would:

- Reveal where fear has become resistance in our hearts.
- Give us discernment through His Spirit, His Word, His people and His providence.
- Help us extend the grace we have received.
- Give us courage to pursue reconciliation where He is leading us.
- Help us recognize where we are standing in His way instead of joining Him

Close by praying specifically for the relationships, people or situations members of the group identified during the discussion.