

“Confronted at Jerusalem”
(Acts 11:1-18)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw how the Lord began executing His plan to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 - a. Much of what we looked at last week will be reviewed in our chapter this morning.
 - b. But basically, the Lord gave Cornelius a vision to point him to Peter, and He gave Peter a vision to prepare him to receive Cornelius.
 - c. The result was that Peter went with the messengers to Cornelius.
 - d. When he arrived:
 - (i) He told them why he was breaking the Law that kept them apart in coming to them: God said He was now cleansing and receiving the Gentiles by faith, therefore he was no longer to consider them unclean.
 - (ii) He told them why he was preaching the Gospel to them: God is not One to show partiality: “In every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him”(Acts 10:35) – all who take hold of Jesus by faith are welcomed into His kingdom.
 - (iii) And then he preached the Gospel to them, with the result that Cornelius and those with him believed and were filled with the Spirit.
2. Now this is what Peter did, and what the six Jews with him saw. Up to this point, they are the only ones – besides the Lord – who truly knew what was happening.
 - a. The rest of the Jews were still of Peter’s previous mindset:
 - (i) That Gentiles are unclean.
 - (ii) That it’s unlawful to associate with, visit, or eat with a Gentile.
 - (iii) That if a Gentile is to be saved, he must become a Jew.
 - (iv) They have yet to be convinced otherwise.
 - b. This morning, we see the Lord convince them.

B. Preview.

1. We’ve seen what was necessary to change Peter’s mind: Now we’re going to see now the Lord uses the same things to change theirs.
 - a. First, we’ll see the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem call Peter to account for his behavior.
 - b. Second, we’ll consider Peter’s defense to the brethren for what he did.
 - c. Finally, we’ll see the Jewish brethren accept that this is the Lord’s work and glorify Him for it.

2. What we see is that even though Peter and the Jewish brethren begin by disagreeing, once Peter has the opportunity to show them the evidence that this is God's work, that this is His truth, they accept it and rejoice.
 - a. This reminds us that God doesn't always work in the way we expect Him to.
 - b. And this shows us how we always ought to stand ready to be corrected with the truth, with God's Word, even if He doesn't speak directly to us but through His Word, since it has His authority.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let's consider how the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem called Peter to account for his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 1. We see first how those in Jerusalem learned about what had happened, "Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God" (v. 1).
 - a. While Peter stayed in Caesarea to instruct these new converts, word began to spread about what had happened.
 - b. It was such a controversial matter, that soon all the apostles and brethren throughout Judea heard, including those at Jerusalem.
 - c. They really shouldn't have been surprised since Jesus told them they were to preach the Gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15), and that they were to disciple all the nations (Matt. 28:19), and that meant the Gentiles as well as the Jews.
 - d. On the other hand, we also realize their human frailty – they were surprised when Jesus rose from the dead, even though He had told them He was going to be raised several times in advance.
 - e. In this case, there was also their bias they had to overcome: The unclean Gentiles had received the Word and submitted to it?
 2. These Jewish brethren were offended that Peter had gone to them in the first place and preached the Gospel to them (vv. 2-3).
 - a. It's almost as if Peter had committed a crime, which, in their minds, he had.
 - (i) We've already seen what the Law said about going to the house of Gentiles and associating or eating with them (Acts 10:28).
 - (ii) Now they're calling Peter to account for doing this.
 - (iii) Notice the fact that his being an apostle didn't seem to matter:
 - (a) No one is above the Law.
 - (b) This also shows us that they certainly didn't view Peter as the supreme head of the church - Peter is called to account and must give a defense.
 - b. Those who preach the truth must sometimes fight for that truth, not only with their enemies, but often also with their friends.
 - (i) Sometimes they need to defend their actions, often their doctrines, even though what they've done or taught is right.
 - (ii) Edwards was called by the church of his day to defend the truth that the Lord's Supper should be given only to those who profess faith in Christ.

- (iii) Luther was called by the church to defend his belief that the church had corrupted the Gospel – that we are saved by grace through faith alone, and not faith plus our works.
- (iv) Thankfully, we'll see in the present case that the church accepted what Peter had to say.

B. Second, let's consider how Peter defended his actions to the brethren.

1. We'll want to notice here first, that all he had to do to convince them was to tell them what happened.
 - a. When the facts were laid before them, and they weighed them in the light of Scripture, they understood.
 - (i) Sadly, the same wasn't true for Edwards:
 - (a) The more he tried patiently to prove his point, the more his people hated him.
 - (b) Eventually they had him removed as their pastor.
 - (ii) The same also wasn't true for Luther:
 - (a) He also spent a great deal of effort trying to show the church of his day the truth of the Gospel.
 - (b) But they would not listen, branded him a heretic, declared him to be an outlaw and even wanted to put him to death.
 - (c) The problem in each of these cases was, for the most part, their audiences weren't converted.
 - b. But it's different for those with the Spirit – all they need to hear is God's truth and for the Spirit to bear witness to that truth, as we'll see in this case.
2. And so he gives them his reasons.
 - a. He explained the vision the Lord gave him that indicated the breaking down of the dietary/ceremonial laws that kept Jew and Gentile separate:
 - (i) Of the unclean animals, of the command to rise, kill and eat.
 - (ii) Of his unwillingness to do so, but of God's declaration, what He had cleansed he must no longer consider unclean.
 - (iii) Peter hadn't changed his mind on this matter for no reason – God showed him, confirming it three times.
 - (iv) And of course, even though God gave it to Peter, it was meant to instruct the whole church – including the men he was speaking with – even as the things given to the churches of those days are still meant to instruct us.
 - b. He told them he was commanded by the Spirit to go with these messengers:
 - (i) It must have been obvious to Peter and to the brethren that God meant this vision to prepare him to go with the messengers.
 - (ii) But there was also the Spirit's command that he should go with them without being concerned.

- c. Peter further points to the six that went with him, probably as witnesses to verify what had happened if he was later questioned, as he was now.
 - d. He then added Cornelius' vision:
 - (i) The angel had told Cornelius to send specifically for Peter, who had a message by which alone he might be saved.
 - (ii) Not only would it provide salvation for him, but also for his whole household, if they would also trust in the Lord and repent of their sins.
 - (iii) Both visions confirmed the fact that this was the Lord's doing.
 - (iv) This gives us three divine and six human testimonies so far.
 - e. The final divine testimony came when the Lord poured out of His Holy Spirit on these men.
 - (i) As Peter had begun to speak the Gospel – not immediately when he began, but after he had given them sufficient testimony – the Spirit was poured out, even as He had been poured out on them at the beginning: the laying on of hands by an apostle wasn't necessary (his presence was).
 - (ii) This was God's conclusive testimony that He had received them (Gal. 3:2).
 - (iii) When Peter had seen this, he remembered the words of Jesus, who said, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5).
 - (iv) Since Jesus was the only One who could give the Spirit, and He had given it to them, He was undoubtedly showing that He had received these Gentiles.
 - (v) And so when the question of their water baptism came up, they concluded if Jesus baptized them with His Spirit, how could they withhold water (v. 17)?
 - (vi) The Lord was receiving Gentiles now into the kingdom – a difficult thing for the Jewish mind to accept.
- C. Finally, we see how the Jewish brethren accepted that this was the Lord's work and glorified Him for it.
- 1. After hearing Peter's defense, the brethren reached their conclusion: "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life*'" (v. 18).
 - a. They had to accept what God showed them to be true, even if for some reason – which could only have been sin – they were inclined to believe differently. *God's truth must always trump our limited understanding.*
 - b. In this case, they had to accept that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs; they no longer had grounds to be biased against them.
 - c. Peter's answer had satisfied them – not because it was his opinion, but because it demonstrated God's truth.
 - d. The other important factor here is that they were willing to listen, and not just close their ears and stick to their original opinions.
 - (i) This should warn us against being too quick to pass judgment – before we've heard all the facts.

- (ii) We should believe the best as the evidence will allow us to, and we should be quick to hear that evidence: and if it's true, we should be ready to accept it and change our opinions.
 - (iii) We should also be careful that we don't become offended for being judged too quickly, as Peter might have been, but still be willing to give a defense for our beliefs or actions when we are called to.
 - (iv) Peter wasn't offended by their calling him to account. He realized that they had the right to ask him these questions and to hold him accountable.
 - (v) He also realized that this must have been as difficult for them as it was for him.
- e. They were so convinced, they not only stopped arguing with Peter, but began glorifying God – quite a change.
 - (i) They realized that God was more inclined to show mercy to the Gentiles than they had been.
 - (ii) And so they glorified God for His mercy.
 - (iii) They had nothing more to say against Peter, they knew this was God's work. He was bringing the Gentiles into His kingdom.
- 2. One last thing we should consider is how they state their conclusion: “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life” (v. 18).
 - a. God had granted them *repentance*:
 - (i) This was not merely a change of mind about who Jesus is, but a change of heart towards their sin.
 - (ii) They used to embrace it; but now they hated it and turned from all their disobedience to Christ alone.
 - b. But notice too, *God* had granted them repentance: This wasn't something they could do on their own, but something God had to do in them because by nature they are spiritually dead.
 - (i) God must grant repentance: Only He can take away a heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.
 - (ii) Notice that faith is implied in this as well: faith and repentance are so inseparable that Peter calls this gift *repentance* that leads to life.
 - (a) You can't have life without faith.
 - (b) But you also can't truly believe without repenting of your sins.
 - (iii) Faith and repentance are necessary for salvation, and God alone is able to give them.
 - (a) Do you have the grace of repentance? If not, you must ask the Lord who alone can give it to you.
 - (b) Are you aware of others who don't have it – who are dead in their trespasses and sins? You must ask God to show mercy to them.
 - (c) Salvation is sovereignly in His hands. Amen.