

RECONCILIATION – GOD'S NEW SOCIETY!
ACTS CH11:1-18

INTRODUCTION

“It was the **first of December 1951**, when **Rosa Parks (42 years African American)** was riding a bus back home in Alabama, US. Little did she know that day would change history.

At the time, law stated that buses have separate seats for White people and Black people. Bus drivers were given the power to assign seats, and while no passengers would be required to move or give up their seat, drivers had adopted the practice of requiring black riders to move whenever there were no white only seats left.

So, following standard practice, bus driver Blake noted that the front of the bus was filled with white passengers and there were two or three men standing, and thus moved the “colored” section sign behind Parks and demanded that four black people give up their seats in the middle section so that the white passengers could sit. Three of them complied. Parks moved, but toward the window seat; she did not get up to move to the newly repositioned colored section. Blake then said, “Why don’t you stand up?” Parks responded, “I don’t think I should have to stand up.” Blake called the police to arrest Parks.

Later when asked why she had decided not to vacate her bus seat, Parks said, “I would have to know for once and for all what rights I had as a human being and a citizen of Montgomery, Alabama. People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn’t true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

When Parks refused to give up her seat, a police officer arrested her. As the officer took her away, she recalled that she asked, “Why do you push us around?” The officer’s response as she remembered it was, “I don’t know, but the law’s the law, and you’re under arrest.” She later said, “I only knew that, as I was being arrested, that it was the very last time that I would ever ride in humiliation of this kind.”

Parks was charged with a violation of the City code. Three days later, a bus boycott was announced. The boycott organizers elected one young unknown church minister to coordinate their efforts; his name was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The rest is history, more than 40,000 black commuters walked to their schools and work, some over 20 miles, and this continued for 382 days: The black movement was born, partially because of one woman who knew when to say no to injustice. Rosa Parks was called the “Mother of the Modern-Day Civil Rights Movement”, she died in 2005 aged 92” (Cited through Google 2023 Human Gene).

THE CHURCH AND CRITICISM! V1-3

For Peter and all Jews there was an **impassable gulf** between Jew and Gentile, because of what they had previously been taught! For example, if a Jewish boy married a gentile girl, the Jewish family would have a **funeral**, in their minds **their son had died**, that's how bad it was between the Jews and Gentiles!

Old Testament Laws like Leviticus Ch11:1-47 + Deuteronomy Ch14:1-21 – Taught the Jews about what **was deemed to be unclean!** The clean and unclean provisions of the law, were all temporary of course! They were initially there designed to keep Israel as a holy and distinct people! **That is, until the time when both Jews and Gentiles could receive the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ alone!**

JESUS' blood on the cross brought peace, between the two, gentile and Jew and destroyed the barrier, the so called “dividing wall of hostility” taken from Ephesians chapter two. The Temple building (pg 2108 in ESV) itself was constructed on an elevated platform. Only the High Priest was allowed into the Most Holy Place, once a year on the Day of Atonement. Then there was an inner Court, for the Priests, then an outer Court for the Jewish men, then another Court for the Jewish

women, then there were 5 steps leading down to a high wall, and from that wall, there were another 14 steps which led down to another wall, and beyond this wall was the area for the gentiles! **If a gentile was caught anywhere inside those walls he would be killed! There were notices on this outside wall, warning gentiles not to enter or they would be killed!**

V3 highlights that the criticism levelled at Peter is, for entering the home (shelter) and having ate (food) with a gentile. Peter himself had already raised this issue Ch10:28, with the Gentiles! You see “holiness” or being “clean” was based on ritual cleanness based on Old Testament Law, but God showed Peter through the vision **Ch10:9-16, and v15** in particular that what He had made clean, no-one should call common! The Law given to Moses is fulfilled and replaced by Christ!

THE CHURCH AND CAESAREA'S CENTURION! V4-17

There are 19 Christian Speeches in Acts:

8 by Peter - Ch1:15-22; 2:14-41; 3:6-26; 4:8-22; 5:29-42; 10:34-48; 11:4-18; + 15:7-11.

1 by Stephen Ch7:2-53

1 by James Ch15:13-21

9 by Paul, **5 in sermons** Ch13:16-41; 14; 17; 20 + 28 + **4 in defence speeches** Ch22:1-21; 23:1-8; 24:10-21; 26:2-27

Peter is about to give his **7th speech**, John Stott talks about Peter needing “4 Divine Hammer Blows”, to deal with his prejudice, based on his understanding of Jewish Law, broken down in the following way:

1. v4-10 - Divine Vision
2. v11-12 - Divine Command
3. v13-14 - Divine Message
4. v15-17 - Divine Gift

Peter in his speech presents to the Church what happened from his perspective, and how through these “4 Divine Hammer Blows” his own prejudice is smashed to bits as he concludes in v17 “..... who was I that I could stand in God's way.” Peter had seen at first hand the grace of God in the fulfilment of the Old Testament Law by Jesus, who now replaces it by calling those who are unclean, to put their faith in Him, followed by repentance and baptism!

A Roman Legion consisted of 6000 fighting men with an overall Commander who was under the direct authority of the Emperor Caesar. In order to run the Legion efficiently, the Commander would appointed 60 other Commanders, known as “Centurions”, who commanded a 100 men each! As far as I can find “Centurion's” are mentioned **on 7 occasions in the New Testament, and every time they are mentioned, it is with honour!**

Matthew Ch8:5-13	This Centurion (appeals on behalf of another)
Matthew Ch27:54	At the cross (surely this is the Son of God)
Luke Ch7:2	This Centurion (appeals on behalf of another)
Luke Ch23	At the cross (surely this is the Son of God)
Acts Ch10:22	Cornelius (becomes a Christian)
Acts Ch22:26	The riot (rescues Paul)
Acts Ch23:17	The plot (rescues Paul)
Acts Ch24:23	Ordered by Felix (looks after Paul)
Acts Ch27	Paul's final journey (Cares for Paul)

How different are Saul and the Centurion? But what now binds them together?

THE CHURCH AND CHANGE! V18

Faith in Jesus, is where we sufficiently take to heart the presence, promises, power and love of Christ!

The Gospel can be summarised in different ways, sometimes “**faith**” alone is named as the one thing necessary for salvation (John Ch3:16; Acts Ch16:31; Romans Ch10:9; and Eph2:8-9). Other

times **“repentance”** alone is named (Luke Ch24:47; Acts Ch3:19; Acts Ch5:31; Acts Ch17:30; 2nd Cor Ch7:10). **And sometimes both are used (Acts Ch20:21).**

Genuine faith always involves repentance and genuine repentance always involves faith.

Whether Jesus calls people to “believe and be baptised” or “repent and believe” the inference in all cases is that Jesus calls people to put their faith in Him, His life, His death on the cross and His resurrection and ascension, and the “repentance and the water baptism” that then take place, are because of the faith that they have placed in Jesus.

There is much confusion about the meaning of the word “repentance” and what it actually means. The word repentance comes from the Greek word **“metanoia”** which means “a change of mind”. Literally what happens through God the Holy Spirit coming to reside within us, through repentance, causes us to have a “change of mind”. Literally the things that we would usually conform to, change. How? By the transformation of our minds, through God's Word and His Holy Spirit. The mind is central to change because it is through the renewing of our minds that we are transformed!

Therefore the goal for the Christian is not merely non-conformity to the world and its values, but also transformation of our minds by the Word of God! The Word of God is not just information, it leads to transformation of the mind!

F.F. Bruce states “Their criticism ceased and their worship began.” Why worship? God had granted repentance that leads to life! Not merely the possibility of repentance, but repentance itself!

APPLICATION

Peter needed to be reminded of this “change” in Galatians Ch2:11-14!

A New Mission – The barrier of hostility is now removed through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross!

Faith in Jesus, is where we sufficiently take to heart the presence, promises, power and love of Christ!