

## **ACTS 11:1-18**

### **The Keys to the Kingdom**

How many of you remember Axe body spray? First introduced in France in 1983, Axe hit the market in the United States in 2002.

It was advertised as a body spray that was available in one of three fragrances, Amber, Musk and Spice- each with all the subtly of an atomic bomb.

The primary target group was teenage boys who for all appearances seemed to believe applying the body spray was equivalent to bathing and so would forgo the former in favor filling their bedrooms with the fog these cans could create.

As to potency, to be in the vicinity of one of these Axe encumbered youths was not dissimilar to being in the presence of a highly agitated wild skunk.

The primary difference being that the skunk would eventually run off while the youth would remain encased in its bedroom while the cloud of chemical cover scent and unwashed teenage boy filled the house.

It was unmistakable. The winds of change were everywhere.

In similar manner, the work of the Holy Spirit in Judea was apparent to anyone paying attention.

**In Jerusalem-** The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth had been center stage and the testimony of the disciples of this man who declared Him to be the Christ had persisted.

- Many of the Jews in Jerusalem had come to believe the testimony of these men. Had proclaimed Jesus as Lord by faith. Had repented of their sins. And had received the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**In Samaria-** Phillip had taken the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ into the region and through him signs and wonders had been worked in the name of Jesus.

- Many in the region of Samaria came to believe and proclaim the name of Jesus as Lord by faith. Had repented of their sins. And had received the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**And now, in Caesarea-** Peter had gone into the home of Cornelius the Centurion and shared the gospel of Jesus and Christ with him and a household of Gentiles.

- And they had believed in the name of Jesus as Lord by faith. Had repented of their sins. And had received the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

## **The church was dynamically growing through the power of the Holy Spirit!**

Today in our churches we pray for a “**revival**” – to see the church awakened, rekindled, and to see new believers coming to Christ by faith.

What we see in scripture is that this happens through the proclaiming of God’s word and commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

As for those who were in the church in those days-

### **ACTS 11:1-3**

**1**Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2**And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, **3**saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

- There were still many who had not grasped the Mystery of the Gospel as it applied to the Gentiles

As we discussed last week – **from a Jewish perspective** – The Jews were the people of God, and the Gentiles were everyone else.

- God had selected the Nation of Israel as His people
- God had given His law to the Jews
- God had spoke through the prophets to the Jews
- God had secured His people in the land He promised for them
- God had foretold of the Messiah, Deliverer and King He would send for His people.

So, when word spread that Gentiles were somehow now involved in this work of the Holy Spirit – there were some who questioned these things ... and Peter’s actions.

Peter himself had to learn the mystery that alongside the Jews, the Gentiles were now FELLOW heirs, members, and partakers of the gospel.

And so, Peter provided a **two-fold** response to the questioning.

**THE FIRST** is in recounting the vision God had given him regarding the sheet with as selection of foods previously restricted and things previously unclean.

### **ACTS 11:4-10**

**But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,**

**“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the**

sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'

"But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

The revelation of this had to have been met with skeptics but some given the long association with the Law and the Jewish people!

But few would be bold enough to speak against Peter! Especially when the revelation of these things is attributed directly from the Lord!

When we proclaim the remarkable friends, we should do the same. Declaring those things not from the wisdom of man – but as a thing declared and revealed from God.

**Peter's SECOND RESPONSE** is in recounting the Spirit's work in summoning him to the house of Cornelius.

#### **ACTS 11:11-12**

"And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.

Again, Peter's purpose here is to demonstrate that his actions, and the responses, were not "OF PETER" but "FROM THE LORD."

Peter could say,

- It was not "I" who declared the Gentiles clean, BUT THE LORD.
- It was not I who sought out the meeting with Gentiles – But I was **sent**, BY THE LORD.

The point being that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Body of Christ was the plan, will and work of God – not man.

Peter emphasizes his testimony by indicating the six brother's that had come with him who were witnesses not only to the Lord's work in Joppa but in Caesarea as well.

Peter then went on to recount the testimony of Cornelius as he had related to Peter how the Lord had led him to seek out Peter.

#### **ACTS 11:13-15**

***"And he (Cornelius) reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; <sup>14</sup>and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'* "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.**

See, Peter declares, that the Lord was working at the same time through both me and Cornilius to bring the gospel to this Gentile household.

Cornelius was seeking the Lord – God has declared that those seek Him with all their heart WILL find Him – and so God sent to this household a follower of Christ to speak to them the words that would save them – THE GOSPEL.

### **ACTS 11:16-17**

***"And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'***

***"Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"***

I love this point hammered home for those who doubted, or were incredulous that the Gentiles were FELLOW heirs, members, and partakers of the gospel.

"After believing, they received the same gift as we."

YOU, God's people Israel, known as the Jews, HEARD the words of the GOSPEL and you BELIEVED, and you were FILLED with the Holy Spirit, and you PROCLAIMED the excellencies of God.

And the same God has done for THEM!

***who was I that I could stand in God's way?"***

### **ACTS 11:18**

***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."***

God had made known to Peter the **Keys to the Kingdom** – and these he had faithfully used to unlock the door of salvation to the Jew, the Samaritan and the Gentiles alike.

**One** people, by faith in believing **one** message, that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all and there is forgiveness, salvation and eternal life through **none other**.

### **KEYS TO THE KINGDOM**

I would like to take this opportunity to connect for you this pivotal time of the church and some instruction the Lord Jesus had given to Peter during His ministry on earth.

In **Matthew 16** Jesus was addressing the confusion some had as to His identity and who the people thought He was.

His disciples responded in Vs 14 *"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."*

Jesus then asked, *"But who do you say that I am?"*

It is Peter who replied confidently and without hesitation, *"Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

### **Matthew 16:17-19**

<sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to him, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> I also say to you that you are Peter, and **upon this rock** I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

*<sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

Much ink has been cast discussing the application of this passage.

**From some of the earliest writings in the church, it was evident that the Apostle Peter was seen as a forerunner in the development of the church.**

### **AND SO HE WAS!**

But from at least the **Fifth Century** on there where Christian leaders in the Church of Rome declaring that Peter was the **first and foremost leader** of the church, with unparalleled human authority as granted by Christ Himself, based on the Matthew 16 passage.

**Thus, Peter alone was seen by the Church of Rome as one who could speak with the authority to interpret God's word and give it application to the church as though from the Lord Himself.**

**590 A.D.** saw the consolidation of land, and power, in matters of religion, military and political might under the authority of Gregory I- This became historically the first of what we would recognize as the **Apostolic Succession of Papal Authority**, and the Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of a "Pope," known as the "Bishop of Rome."

By this time the Roman Catholic Church had imbedded in their doctrines that **Peter, was the FIRST POPE, the foundation of the church**, holding the

Keys to the Kingdom, and the authority to bind and loosen in heaven and on earth.

Not only this, but the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church continued to evolve such that all elected Popes became the **apostolic successors** of Peter **having the same authority that Peter had commanded.**

**It wasn't until 1517** that Martin Luther made public protest to the theological positions of the Roman Catholic Church declaring they were not biblically supported.

Thus, began **The Reformation** and the **Protestant Church** movement.

While a much larger conversation to demonstrate the reasons why the Reformed Church protested these beliefs can be made, Let me summarize by saying this –

Let's take a closer look at Matthew 16.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declares, "You are Peter" (Greek-petros= a stone), "and upon this rock" (Greek-petra= large rock/bedrock) "I will build my church."

**There is a play on words here that indicates Peter was but a part of the greater work that God was doing.**

Yes, God working through Peter made him foundational **IN** the foundation of the church, but he himself is **NOT** the foundation.

The **TRUE** Church is **NOT built** on Peter, nor is Peter the head of the Body!

The **TRUE** Church **IS built** on JESUS, and He is the head of the Body of Christ!

**Speaking of Christ Jesus as the head- Colossians 1:18** "And **HE** (*Christ Jesus*) is the head of the body, the church. **HE** is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything **HE** might be **preeminent.**"

**Speaking of Christ Jesus as the "Petros" the large rock, bedrock, cornerstone and foundation of the church-**

**Isaiah 28:16** "Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, **a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;** whoever believes will not be shaken""

**1 Corinthians 3:11** "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ.**"

Was Peter **a part** of the work of the building-up of the church? Absolutely!

You and I are standing on the foundation laid long ago as we continue to build up the church today and, in every age, until the Lord comes to collect His bride!

**Ephesians 2:19-20** Therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,

### **God's people Israel stumbled over Jesus as the cornerstone of salvation**

**This rejection of Christ was a repeated theme** found in Psalm 118:22, Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, John 1:11, Acts 4:11, Romans 9:32,

And in the context of the conversation Jesus was having with Peter, ties directly to that truth regarding salvation, which is in **CHRIST JESUS ALONE**, presented by **GRACE ALONE** and realized through **FAITH ALONE!**

Thus, Jesus declares to Peter, and to us **the truth** as Peter declares, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" That this understanding is essential for the church built on Jesus Christ to exist and to be built up!

### **Friends, it is the declaration of that truth that is essential for salvation!**

And of that truth, and of this church and of Christ Jesus, the Gates of Hell shall not stand!

Jesus goes on In **Matthew 16:19** to declare "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*"

**Keys in scripture** - **symbolize authority, power and access** –

**The keys that Peter possessed are the same keys you and I possess –**

**The truth of the word of God** and of the answer to the question Jesus poses still today – Who do you say that I am?

**And it is each person's answer to this question that binds and loses.**

**Matthew 10:32-33** "*Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."*

**John 3:18** “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son”

In Acts 10 and 11 we have seen this truth realized to the Jews, the Samaritans, and now the Gentiles

### **The Keys to the Kingdom applied to the Jews**

It was fitting for the Gospel to come to the Jews first.

The Nation of Israel was the first nation that God called into covenant relationship.

This order was modeled by Jesus as He went into the synagogue and the temple to teach.

This order was imitated by the Apostles as they went out to teach.

The Apostle Paul writes, **Romans 1:16**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

In Acts 2, we read of the Holy Spirit resting on the Jewish believers, those who had heard the gospel and believe on the person and the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. It was called the “Day of Pentecost”

**Acts 2:1-4** *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.*

The disciples poured out onto the street proclaiming the excellencies of God. And though there was a mixed crowd gathered there in streets, Peter, emboldened by the Holy Spirit spoke out, addressing specifically his “Fellow Israelites”, or “Men of Israel.”

Peter clearly proclaimed the arrogance of their past, the way of their future, and Jesus as their Christ.



**The Jews heard the truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth. They heard the truth of the gospel. And those with ears to hear, cried out, "Brothers, what are we to do?"**

The answer to the question was then as it is today, *"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

### **The Keys to the Kingdom applied to the Samaritans**

The Samaritans occupied the territory in Judea that had formerly belonged to the tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Those lands were north of Jerusalem, South of Galilee, and ran from the Jordan River to the coastline.

Samaria had been the capital of the country during the time of the divided kingdom. (2 Kings) When the northern tribes were conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity, the King Assyria moved people from foreign nations into that land.

They had at first worshipped the gods of their foreign lands, but in those days, lions were still indigenous to the lands and these newcomers to Samaria were continually troubled by them.

Believing it was because they angered the God of those lands, they sought help from the king of Assyria.

**2 Kings 17:26-28** *So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have taken into exile and settled in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the God of the land; so He has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them because they do not know the custom of the God of the land."*

*<sup>27</sup>Then the king of Assyria issued commands, saying, "Take one of the priests there whom you led into exile, and have him go and live there; and have him teach them the custom of the God of the land." <sup>28</sup>So one of the priests whom they had led into exile from Samaria came and lived in Bethel, and taught them how they were to fear the Lord.*

Over the generations that followed, the newcomers to the land intermarried with the Jews who had remained, and those who returned after the exile.

But what became of that culture was a quilt work of Judaism, based on the Law of Moses, and the idolatrous customs of the pagans who had come into the land.

Because of the inter-marriages and idolatry, Samaritans were generally despised by the Jews, even though they were cultural relatives.

**Like the Gentiles, the Samaritans were a people shunned by the Jews. That they would be fellow heirs of the promise was a shock as well.**

In **Acts 8**, we read about the dispersion of the church from Jerusalem due to the aggressive and brutal persecution brought about by the Pharisee Saul of Tarsis.

We read that many had fled into Samaria and how Philip, a disciple of the Lord and deacon of the church had gone there to proclaim Christ to the Samaritans.

**Acts 8:6-8** *The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. <sup>7</sup>For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed, and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup>So there was much rejoicing in that city.*

Even so, none there had yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 8:14-17** *Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup>who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup>For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup>Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.*

**In Acts 8, we read about Peter using the Keys of the Kingdom to “Unlock” the way to salvation to the Samaritans.**

**The Samaritans heard the truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth. They heard the truth of the gospel. And those with ears to hear, responded, coming forward for the laying on of hands and going to the waters of baptism.**

Acts 1:8

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

**The Keys to the Kingdom applied to the Gentiles**

It is in all Judea and the ends of the earth that the Gospel comes to the Gentiles, that is, all those who are not Jews.

With the revelation and receipt of the Gospel by the Gentile nations, we see God’s ultimate plan for salvation to bring **ALL PEOPLE** who would call on the name of the Lord into one NEW people group-

## **The Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, the Church. (Ecclesia)**

It had long ago been established that God created and called the people Israel to be His people. *(Even the Samaritans who were essentially wayward Jews)*

**Leviticus 26:12** I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people

**But it long been foretold of the day the Gentiles would also call on the name of the Lord and be counted among the sheep of His pasture!**

The Jews prided themselves on the many passages referring them as the sheep of the Lord's pasture.

It was difficult for them when Jesus confirmed the message of the prophets and His plans for the Gentiles!

**John 10:16** "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be **one flock** and **one shepherd**"

But this teaching was nothing new!

**Isaiah 42:1** 'Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the **"nations"** (all nations)

**Hosea 2:23** And I will sow her as My own in the land, and I will have compassion on 'No Compassion.' **I will say to those called 'Not My People,' 'You are My people,' and they will say, 'You are my God.'"**

Peter had to have this mystery clearly declared to him by the Lord.

**Acts 10:15** Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

Peter needed to see for himself the realization of God's commitment to **all mankind** – to **all those** who would call on the name of the Lord – and be saved from His judgment to come!

And now, having observed these Gentiles, Cornelius and his household, receiving the Holy Spirit due to their faith Peter had declared-

**Acts 10:34-35** "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.

It is the beautiful application of the truth the Lord has declared-

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

*(Longsuffering)*

**Galatians 3:28** "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; **for all of you are one in Christ Jesus**"

**I only wish you and I would stop and reflect for just a moment on the power of the keys you and I hold!**

This, **the Word of God**, IS TRUTH

Jesus declared, **John 17:16-21** "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

– it is here in **the truth** that we find-

- **God the Father's** AUTHORITY,
- **The Holy Spirit's** POWER,
- And ACCESS to forgiveness and eternal life through **Christ Jesus**.

**These keys can be found nowhere else.**

And this work of sharing the gospel has been handed down throughout the generations of the church. **To you and me. To this church.**

Like Peter, **YOU and I**, and all those who believe in faith and have received the gift of salvation and the indwelling of Holy Spirit hold the Keys to the Kingdom.

**WITH THEM** – sins are forgiven – and there is no longer any condemnation for those who believe!

**BY THEM** – the judgements of God are declared, and He has said, the wage of sin is death.

The truth in the word, as found in **Galatians 6:8**- *The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; **but** the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

- Truly by these **KEYS** – by the **TRUTHS**, things are loosed and bound in heaven and on earth.

**Either to eternal contempt and separation from the goodness of God forever in the Lake of Fire.**

**Or to eternal life in the presence of the Lord and His blessings forever.**

Church – HERE ARE THE KEYS (*The truth of the Gospel*) What will you do with them?

**Let us pray**