“God’s Plan For Outreach”

Revelation 1:10-20

April 1, 2017

Please open your Bible with me to the eleventh chapter of the Book of Acts.

Has it ever occurred to you that God’s ways are better than man’s ways? One of the wonderful and amazing things about God is this. When He shows us how He works, we should pay close attention. And why? Because *how* He does what He decides to do is a whole lot better than our ways.

Here’s the way God is. Isaiah 55:8 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Acts 11 shows us exactly that. His thoughts are not ours. His ways aren’t ours. And His thoughts and His ways are higher than ours.

Acts 11 is also this. “The Gospel reaches non-Jews.” Let me show you what I mean. Look with me at Acts 11:19 *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. (20)* *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.*

*(21) And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. (22) Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*

*(23)* *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. (24) For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”*

I’ve titled today’s sermon “God’s Plan For Outreach.” Shall we pray?

I hope that, over the past few months you’ve read through the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts. Now, having read it, you know that the Gospel of God has been, primarily, a Jewish Gospel. No doubt, Gentiles have been saved. They’ve been baptized and they’ve been added to the Church.

But, when you come to Acts 11, something new happens. That something new is that the Gospel goes from being Judaism to Gentilism; from reaching mainly Jewish families to reaching Gentile families. So, what we find in Acts 11 is the LORD’s plan for outreach.

Now, just for clarification, the center of the Bible, for thousands of years, going all the way back to Abraham, is Israel. Ninety percent of the OT is Jewish. All the prophets are Jews. And yes, God *did* send some of His prophets to Gentile nations. But the core of OT Bible history is God at work in and through the Jews.

As a matter of fact, Who is the God of the OT? He’s the God of Israel. Now, sometimes you’ll hear Him say that He is the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac and Jacob. But, most often, God refers to Himself as the God of Israel.

Let’s go back to the day when Moses presented God to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Here’s Exodus 5:1 *“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith* ***the Lord God of Israel****, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”*

Exodus 24:10 *“And they saw* ***the God of Israel****: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.”*

And on through Exodus you find time after time that the Creator of the universe is the God of Israel. Exodus 32:27 *“And he said unto them, Thus saith* ***the Lord God of Israel*** *…”*

Exodus 34:23 *“Thrice in the year shall all your men-children appear before* ***the Lord God, the God of Israel****.”*

Numbers 16:9: Joshua 7:13; Joshua 7:19-20 (and all the way through the Book of Joshua; He’s “the God of Israel.” And throughout the entire book of Judges; and Ruth and I and II Samuel; and all the way through the Books of the Kings).

The LORD has many names or titles. But when we see Him in His relationship to the Jews, it’s almost always “the God of Israel.”

Here’s a word from the greatest King of Israel, King Solomon. He’s praying on the day the Temple was completed. It’s the day of Temple dedication. I Kings 8:22 *“And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:*

*(23) And he said,****Lord God of Israel****, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:*

*(24) Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.*

*(25) Therefore now,****Lord God of Israel****, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me.*

*(26) And now,* ***O God of Israel****, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father….”*

And all the way through the two books of Chronicles, He’s seen as the God of Israel; and into the Book of Ezra.

Then you’ll find the very same thing in the Psalms time after time. Psalm 41:13 *“Blessed be* ***the Lord God of Israel*** *from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.”*

Psalm 68:8 *“The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God,* ***the God of Israel****.”*

And, lest you think that there this means Israel had one God and the Gentiles had another God, look with me at Isaiah 37:16 *“O Lord of hosts,* ***God of Israel****, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.”*

Folks, the only God, the true and living God is the God of Israel. There is no other God, but the God of Israel. All through the Book of the Isaiah, He’s seen as the God of Israel; and Jeremiah; and Ezekiel; all the way through to the Book of Malachi; He’s the God of Israel.

So, your entire OT is rooted in the Only True God. And how is He seen? He’s the God of Israel. So, even to this very moment, God is Who He has always been, the God of Israel. And when Christ Jesus, the Son of God, entered into the world, He came here as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, and then his earthly father, Joseph.

And what happens when we come to the NT? Is the LORD only the God of the Jews now that Christ has come? Here’s Romans 3:29 *“Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:…”*

So, yes, the Gospel goes to the Jews first. That’s exactly what we find in the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts. And then, rom Acts eleven to this very day, the Gentiles, you and I, are also being called into His Kingdom.

Folks, do you why we make it as plain as we can that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and that God’s ways are higher than ours. Whenever we see God’s ways and read and understand God’s thoughts, we should pay very close attention to what He’s doing and how He does it.

So, look with me at the message of Acts 11 today.

First, God’s plan for outreach is this: “love.” Jesus Himself made it very plain. John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

God is not willing that any should perish. That’s His heart. That’s His thoughts. That’s His ways. So God’s plan for outreach begins with His heart. His whole heart is toward the salvation of mankind. That’s why He sent Jesus into our world.

Second, the Gospel was spread first to and through the Jews. Look with me at verse nineteen. Acts 11:19 *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch,* ***preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only****.”*

Persecution had moved the Church out from Jerusalem. Saul had stood by and watched while one of God’s servants, Stephen, was stoned to death. But, as a result of the persecution that came upon the Early Church, the Gospel was taken westward out into and across the Mediterranean Sea by Jewish Christians to three main places; Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch.

**Phenice** is a harbor city on southern coast of the Greek island of Crete. Its modern name is Phoenix. **Cyprus** is another Mediterranean Island. And **Antioch** is located in modern-day Turkey. So, yes, the Gospel advanced into these locations. But the LORD tells us that it was given only to the Jews. You see, first the LORD sent the Gospel to the Jews and then, as you will see here in Acts 11, the Jews took the Word to the Gentiles.

First, God’s plan for outreach is this: “love.”

Second, the Gospel was spread first to and through the Jews.

Third, the Gospel is God’s plan for outreach. Here’s the essence of God’s plan for outreach. Acts 11:20*“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [inside modern day Libya], which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians,* ***preaching the Lord Jesus****.”*

And how did the Gospel get into the hearts and minds of the Gentiles? Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene, a city on the northern tip of Africa in modern day Libya. So, as the Gospel began to move from Jerusalem to cities around the Mediterranean Sea, it was primarily given to the Jews.

But, what was the LORD’s plan for outreach? Here it is. Acts 11:20*“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [inside modern day Libya], which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians,* ***preaching the Lord Jesus****.”*

Folks, this is the LORD’s plan for outreach. We may do many, many things as a Church to grow our Church. But, the way God intended both then and now to advance His Church was to advance the Gospel.

When the Gospel moved from city to city in the ancient world, it happened because ordinary citizens, people just like you and me, told people the message of the LORD Jesus.

Now, notice what this means. There are two ordinary words here. They are “spake” and “preaching.” Acts 11:20*“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [inside modern day Libya], which, when they were come to Antioch,* ***spake*** *unto the Grecians,* ***preaching*** *the Lord Jesus.”*

This word “spake” is the modern word “speak.” It’s was you and I do every single day. And as they “spoke,” they “preached.”

Many, maybe even most Christians, think the only time preaching is done is from the pulpit. But, folks, there were no pulpits here. The carriers of the Gospel were ordinary people. Here’s what we have: Christians speaking to neighbors and work mates and schoolmates and friends and strangers. They “preached the LORD Jesus.”

Now, the word “preach.” What does the Bible teach? It teaches that you, the ordinary, everyday, hard-working Believer in Christ do the preaching. Maybe one of the reasons why we’re not growing as we’d all like is because we’ve wrongly convinced that the preacher is the one in the pulpit and not in the pew.

Can you see with me the thoughts of God? Can you see with me the ways of God? Can you see with me God’s plan for outreach?

Let me take you back just a few chapters to Acts 8.

Acts 8:1 *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and* ***they were all scattered abroad*** *throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”*

Acts 8:4 *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad* ***went everywhere preaching the word****.”*

Do you see what was happening? The ordinary way the Gospel advances is by the ordinary Christian scattering, going everywhere preaching the word.

Preaching may certainly be what you hear from preachers every Sunday from pulpits. But it was by ordinary conver-sations that the Gospel advanced in those days. That’s God’s plan for outreach; you and I telling someone about Jesus.

Now, here’s something else. Look again at verse nineteen.

Acts 11:19 *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch,* ***preaching*** *the word to none but unto the Jews only.”*

Now, what is the Bible teaching here? Simply this.

Acts 11:19 *“…****preaching*** *the word…”* = “speaking”

Acts 11:20 *“…****preaching*** *the Lord Jesus.”* = “evangelizing”

This word “preaching” in verse nineteen isn’t the same as the one in verse twenty. In verse nineteen, it’s “speaking.” Yet, it’s translated into English as “preaching.” Why? Because preaching isn’t just for Pastor and preaching isn’t just creating and delivering a sermon. Preaching is speaking to someone about Christ,

Then, look again at the twentieth verse. Acts 11:20*“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [inside modern day Libya], which, when they were come to Antioch,* ***spake*** *unto the Grecians,* ***preaching [evangelizing]*** *the Lord Jesus.”*

This word “preaching” here in verse twenty is the Greek word “evangelize.” Can you think of a more wonderful thing than to follow God’s plan for outreach?

What is it to evangelize? To “evangelize” is “to bring the Good News to” someone; “to speak to someone the LORD Jesus.” Folks, every time you tell someone about Christ, you are both evangelizing and preaching. Today we use the term “witnessing.” It is getting the word out. That’s all it is; telling, speaking, evangelizing. When you tell someone what the LORD has done for them, that’s evangelization. That’s God’s plan for outreach. That’s how the Church advanced in the NT. That’s how the Gospel went from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And look at what happened. Here’s what Luke tells us about the advance of the Gospel. Acts 11:21 *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and* ***a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord****.”*

Acts 11:24 *“For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and* ***much people was added unto the Lord****.”*

Acts 11:26 *“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught* ***much people****. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”*

And did you notice what these people who “preached Jesus” to their friends and families and neighbors and workmates came to be called? They were designated “Christians.” And, notice, it wasn’t because there were men specifically set apart to the pulpit. No, the pulpits of the first century were the dining room tables. Today we’d say the pulpits are the couches and chairs and coffee tables in people’s homes.

Folks, this is how the Gospel has spread around the globe. Yes, God has used some great quote “preachers” to advance the Church of Christ. But, what is the LORD’s original plan? That plan is to use the preachers in the pew.

And here’s something to think about. “This past Sunday … more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called Christian Europe.” And, according to one statistic, the Gospel has advanced more in the past fifty years around the globe than at any other time than during the days of the early Church.” [Found on [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)].

And what is the means of that advance? It’s the ordinary Christian making the effort and taking the time to bring up the topic of God and Christ and salvation to friends and family and those around them.

Now, for sake of illustration, you all know what a chain store is, right? Chain store: ˈCHān ˌstô(ə)r/*noun*

“One of a series of stores owned by one company and selling the same merchandise.”

Every store in a chain has the exact same look. They all sell exactly the same things. They all have the exact same advertisements.

Well, each one of us who take the Gospel to someone else is simply one link in a chain of the Gospel that stretched from the city of Jerusalem to Old Saybrook.

By the way, notice this. In 2017 all of the following chains will be closing lots of stores.

1. JC Penny – 1,000 stores will close in 2017
2. Macy’s – 68
3. Sears and Kmart – 150
4. Radio Shack – 552
5. Payless – 450
6. Staples – 70

Why are these companies called a “chain” store? Because

they all began from one original store which multiplied itself. Folks, the Gospel chain has traveled around the entire world. And it’s been by one main method of outreach; people telling people the Good News of Jesus Christ. God’s plan for outreach is for you and I to tell, to speak, and yes, to preach the word to those around us.

This is God’s plan for us just like it was God’s plan in the Book of Acts. Each of us is a link in the chain of God’s plan from that day to this. It’s really a simple plan. We open our mouths and tell someone.

No doubt, if something good happened to you this week, you’d tell somebody. Let’s say “you won the Lottery.” No, I would never recommend you purchases a Lottery ticket. You win every day you don’t buy one. But, let’s say, you won. Didn’t something good happen to you? Now what? Now, you will definitely tell someone what happened.

And didn’t something good happen to you on the day you were saved? That something is salvation. And that salvation message is what someone else needs to hear. We tell the Good News every time we speaking up. God has done something very good to you and for you. Now, spread the word.

And what will you do with today’s message on God’s Plan For Outreach? Will you commit yourself to getting that message out this week? Here’s a suggested prayer *“LORD, I thank you again for the simple Gospel message. Please use me this week to tell someone this Good News. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray? Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”