

Acts 11

Changing the Game

Scripture: Acts 11

Memory Verse: Acts 11:26b *“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”*

Lesson Focus: This chapter chronicles a game-changing shift in the early church. Up to now the church was mostly made up of Jewish Christians. But today we see God change the posture of the early church from being more closed and exclusive to only Jewish people to being willing to take the gospel to the surrounding non-Jewish nations as Jesus said they would! There is a lesson in this chapter for everyone, believer and non-believer!

Activities and Crafts: Gospel Power Coloring Picture, Word Search of different terms from lesson, Bring it Home Discussion for 3rd – 5th.
Craft for 1st/2nd Grade: Let Your Light Shine

Starter Activity: Cheese Touch

We will keep all of the kids in the Summit Room for this starter activity. We will watch a short clip from the movie, *“Diary of a Wimpy Kid”*. This is the “Cheese Touch” scene which many of the kids should be familiar with.

Q: How many of you are familiar with the “cheese touch” story from the Diary of a Wimpy Kid books and movies? In this silly story there is this ugly, gross slice of cheese that has been sitting on the playground for a long, long time. When a kid touches it, he gets labeled as the “cheese touch kid”. That kid becomes an outcast and everyone treats him as if he is gross and ugly just like the cheese. *

NOW PLAY THE CLIP

While this silly story makes us laugh, sadly this ugly labeling and excluding of others is something people do to each other all of the time. And this doesn’t just happen today, but it happened even back in the early church!

If you were here last week, you may remember the story of Peter and Cornelius. Peter was Jewish and Cornelius was a Gentile. And Jewish people back then sort of “labeled” Gentiles (or non-Jewish people) like they had “cheese touch”! (And the Gentiles didn’t really like the Jewish people all that much either!)

But God brought Peter and Cornelius together in such a way that not only showed Peter how silly this was, but that also totally changed the game for the church as it continued to preach the gospel. Let’s open our Bibles and take a look!

Bible Study:

Acts 11:1-3: Here you see the outrage of the early church (which was still ethnically Jewish) when they learn that Peter had spent time with Gentiles like Cornelius. It is very similar to the nonsense that we saw in that little video clip. It was like they were saying, “You went into ‘cheese-touch’ territory and spent time with ‘cheese-touch’ people! How could you?”

This national pride of the Jewish people ran very deep. They were, after all, God’s chosen people. And yet God chose them not because they were better than everyone else (quite the opposite according to Scripture!), but because they were part of His plan to fulfill His promises to bring a Savior into the world! Remember that Jesus Himself was Jewish! *

Acts 11:4-10: Peter now begins to share with them what we saw last week in Acts 10. The Jewish people had very strict eating laws that set them apart from the surrounding nations. But Jesus’s coming and fulfilling of the law changed the game!

Q: How many times did Peter see this vision? A: Three times! This isn’t the first time Peter had to be instructed three times about something before he “got it”!

Q: How many times did Peter deny Jesus? A: Three times! *

Acts 11:11-12: And immediately Cornelius and his men show up. This is where Peter figured out that Gentiles were no longer to be considered as “cheese-touch” outcasts! *

Acts 11:13-14: And not only did God reach out to Peter, but He also reached out to Cornelius (the “cheese-touch” person) through an angel! Why? So that Cornelius and his household could be saved. Here we saw God’s heart for all people, regardless of race, * nationality, language: that they may learn about Jesus’s death/resurrection and be saved!

Acts 11:15-17: Peter rests his case by sharing how he saw with his own eyes the Holy Spirit falling upon these Gentiles who believed in Jesus Christ. This sealed the deal for him. He realizes that if God Himself would reach out to the “cheese-touch” Gentiles, why shouldn’t he?

Acts 11:18: I’m sure they were all astonished and had to think hard about all of this! *

Q: Have you ever been so astonished or surprised by something that you didn’t know what to say at first? * But they rejoiced as they saw how God’s love was for all people!

Teachers: Consider playing a quick game to help the kids better understand exclusion and inclusion. Have several volunteers lock hands tightly and form a circle. Put a Bible open on the floor in the middle of the circle. Then have another volunteer be an outsider trying to get in so they can “learn about Jesus from God’s Word”. Have the kids in the circle try and block them out and of course remind them to be gentle. Point out how this illustrates how the early church treated Gentiles: as outcasts. * Afterwards, have them stay in their circle but turn around to be facing outside. Instead of having locked hands, have them welcome and invite the outsider to come in! Point out how this illustrates what the early church will be more like now and how God wants it ALWAYS to be! *

This was a game-changer for the church and also for the rest of the book of Acts. As we will see as we continue in Acts, almost all of the action is now in reaching Gentiles. *

Acts 11:19-20: You may remember that the stoning of Stephen is what set so much of this in motion back in Acts 7. Notice that they are no longer just bringing the good news of Jesus to Jews, but also to “Hellenists” who were “cheese-touch” Gentiles! *

Acts 11:21: Here we see the gospel going out to these Gentiles in Antioch and they turn away from their sin and believe in Jesus! This is the same pattern of repentance for people today: believers are to turn away from sin and turn toward God in faith! *

Acts 11:22-23: This causes quite the stir among the Jewish Christians and they send good ol’ Barnabus (known as the “Son of Encouragement”) to check in on them. And he was so pleased by what he saw he encouraged them with something very important!

Q: What did he tell these new believers to do? A: To wholeheartedly CONTINUE their walk with the Lord. *

Boys and Girls: This is important! Trusting in Jesus isn’t something Christians do only once or when in a church building. It is something they continue to do their whole lives!

Acts 11:24-25: The church was growing so fast in Antioch that Barnabus needed help!

Q: And who does he seek out? Saul! You might remember that Barnabus was the one that welcomed Saul into the church when everyone was considering him an outcast! *

Acts 11:26: Paul and Barnabus begin this partnership of ministry that we will see God use to take Christianity even further out into the world! And note that it is in this “cheese-touch” city of Antioch, not Jerusalem, that people were first called Christians. *

Acts 11:27-30: Wow, what a game changer this all is! At the beginning of this chapter, we see a more closed church of mostly Jewish believers uninterested or unwilling to include the “cheese-touch” Gentile people with the gospel. But now by the end of it we not only see Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus, but they are giving of their food and money to aid these Jewish believers that originally wanted nothing to do with them!

Why? Because they are all brothers and sisters in Christ now! All Christians are God’s people now whether Jew, Gentile, black, white, male, female, etc. (Teachers: Consider inviting those volunteers up again that formed the “exclusion” circle. Give some treats to the outsider to now hand out to everyone in the circle to illustrate this!) *

Key Point: This should remind us that God’s love is indeed for EVERYONE! * And He expects Christians to do away with “cheese-touch” labeling of people that may be different from us. Is there a kid at school that has no friends? Maybe you could reach out to him/her in kindness this week!

If you are a Christian, God also wants you to CONTINUE in your faith. The word “Christian” means “belonging to Christ Jesus”. You are His! Follow Him this week! * If you are not a Christian, like these people in Antioch, turn from your sin and turn to Jesus who loves you and made a way for you to be saved. And you will become a child of God!

