



The Walls Come Tumbling Down

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 10

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I was listening to sport radio this week...the Mount Rushmore of the New York Yankees... If I were to create a Mt Rushmore of the Christian Faith, I think I would put Abraham, Moses, Paul, and Peter on the mountain. The more I think about Peter, the more I am struck by the fact of how incredibly important he is in the history of the church, how Christ honored him and used him mightily to spread the gospel, to lead and shepherd the early church, and to encourage and exhort fledgling believers to remain faithful to the calling of Christ. In Matthew 16, after His great confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." To the Peter and the apostles, Christ was giving the authority of opening and closing of a door to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Apostles, by the doctrine that they teach and preach, and faithful preachers today, open and close the way to heaven. That is true for all time. But in a special sense, when Jesus gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom, He appointed him to a great honor and responsibility -- to open the door of the gospel to two distinct groups of people, to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

We have already seen the door of the gospel thrown wide open to the Jews in Acts 2, and now today, we will see Peter open the way of the Kingdom to Gentiles as well. It is an amazing story and so let's pray and then we will look at it together...

Sovereign Preparation of Cornelius (1-8) Let's pick up the story in verse 1: "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God." (Acts 10:1-2, ESV) Whenever we see centurions in the NT, they always make a good impression. The very first Gentile that we have record of our Lord Jesus having dealings with was a centurion, who was stationed in Capernaum. You remember that guy from the series in Matthew. He was man whose faith caused Jesus to marvel and exclaim: "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and

west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”” (Matthew 8:10–12, ESV) Those words would begin to find their broader fulfillment in another centurion, Cornelius, and his family, in this text today.

Centurions, of course, were the backbone of the Roman army. As a military officer who was in charge of a unit of at least 100 men, it was required that he be a skilled and effective commander and warrior. Unlike many positions in the Roman army, this was not a position that you received as a political favor to one’s family or anything like that. Centurions were, as a rule, strong, hard, no-nonsense, combat oriented men, who generally did not have anything to do with the populace of the cities that they occupied, except to keep them in line, with an iron fist if necessary, which is what makes the description of Cornelius so interesting.

Luke describes him as a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. What does this description mean? That Cornelius was a devout man who feared God means that he was what is referred to as a “God-fearer.” A God-fearer was a Gentile who was drawn to the God of Jews, one who had rejected the polytheism of the pagan religions and who attended the synagogue to hear the Word of God read, to listen to the singing and to the prayers and even participated in the worship but who had not become a proselyte of the Jewish religion through circumcision. For that reason, he was not welcomed in the synagogue as a full-fledged member. Although he would have been able to attend the worship, he was confined to the back rows of the synagogue.

His exposure to the Law of God and the prophets had a profound effect on his life. He led his family to the synagogue to learn of the One True God and to hear God’s Word, hungry to hear of this God that was so unlike any he had ever heard of. And what is more, rather than maintain the typical distance that a centurion would keep from the general populace, he was engaged in caring for the poor and the sense here is that he observed the Jewish call to prayer, continually praying to God, morning, noon and evening. But he was not a proselyte. He was not a convert to Judaism, had not been circumcised and did not follow the dietary and ceremonial law and so he remained a Gentile and that is important to remember.

The great question we have to ask is “Why was Cornelius like this?” How did he even come to be interested in God? Why would he leave the polytheism in which he was immersed since childhood as a true Roman? Remember he was a part of the Italian cohort; he was a *paisan*, a true Italian Roman. The answer is – nothing less than the sovereign and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit upon his heart. What we see in this man was the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of this man to bring him to salvation. From a host of Scriptures, we know it must be so – Eph 1 and 2, John 3 and 6, Mathew 11. As Paul would later say: “As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.” (Romans 3:10–11, ESV) No man, dead in his sins, seeks after God, after the true God, on his own. It is a spiritual impossibility. But like the Ethiopian eunuch before him, this man was seeking to know God and that only happens by the drawing of God. Unlike so many Jews who were only enamored with the Jewish religious system but had no real love for God or for his truth, the focus of this man’s heart was to fear God, at least as much as he knew of God, and to live out as faithfully as he could the commandments that he knew. The Spirit of God was working in the secret places of this man’s heart, breaking up the fallow ground and preparing him to hear and receive the full truth about God, His Christ and the gospel so that in His salvation, God would receive all the glory. What is behind his hunger for the truth? God is drawing Him by His Spirit. Sovereign grace is at work in his soul. His is not yet saved, as some erroneously claim – that would make the rest of this story pointless – but he soon will be.

Luke continues: “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”” (Acts 10:3–6, ESV) During his evening prayer time, the ninth hour, which is 3 o’clock, God interrupts his devotions with a messenger from heaven. He beholds the vision of an angel and he is terrified. I think that is important to note. This battle hardened warrior sees a holy angel, glorious in his appearance and completely unexpected and unlike those in our day who casually claim to see angels and speak rather flippantly of it, he is terrified. He knows that this is a messenger from God and the message that he receives is both comforting and curious.

Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. This is the kind of language that was used to describe God’s pleasure in the sweet-smelling sacrifices that faithful Israelites would offer to the Lord in the temple or in the tabernacle. The sense is that God is pleased with his prayers. Now I want you to think about that. God caused this man to have a

seeking heart; Cornelius lived up to the light that he had, pleasing God, and now God would respond to his seeking and to give him the full truth. How beautiful this is. God gives to a dead man a seeking, willing heart and then God responds to his seeking and his willingness as if it were the man's own idea. Glory be to God for his mysterious ways of grace. Clearly God is preparing this chosen one for salvation. To hear these words for Cornelius would have been a great comfort. But what the angel told him next would have been curious.

Send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. There is no evidence that Cornelius would have even known who Peter was and yet he had the command of the messenger of God to send for this man, Peter. With no delay, he does what he is told. "When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa." (Acts 10:7-8, ESV) Note that. He sends two of his household and with them one of the devout soldiers from his command, another "God-fearer" to go and fetch Peter. Just as God was preparing Cornelius to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, so too was He preparing Peter to be the instrument of the salvation of Cornelius and of all in his household.

Sovereign Preparation of Peter (9-23) Now beloved, as important as the preparation of Cornelius was so is the preparation of Peter. We have to remember that Peter was Christian but he was a thoroughly Jewish Christian. Though God was renewing his mind and heart as He studied His Word and as the Spirit of God illuminated His truth, he was still a thoroughly Jewish believer and was still much affected by Jewish traditions and prejudice.

To the Jewish way of thinking, Gentiles were filthy dogs and to be avoided at all costs, unclean and uncouth, spiritually defiling. You remember how important it was for Peter to witness the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans, those half-breeds, so that he would know and be able to testify that even Samaritans could be saved through faith in Christ. That was a momentous occasion. But they were at least partially Jewish and they engaged in some form of sacrificial worship of God. At least they were circumcised. The Samaritans, at least, revered Moses' Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. But Gentiles were another matter. They could become proselytes of the Jewish religion, but even then they were always viewed with contempt and considered second-class citizens.

Part of the reason for this kind of thinking was the messed up view that the Jews came to have of their election by God, their place as God's chosen nation. They thought of themselves as special, as God's favorites, and in a way they were special, chosen by God to receive His oracles, His truth, His Word and to be the nation through whom the Messiah would come, and through whom, as God had promised their father, Abraham, the nations would be blessed.

They were chosen by God to be a nation of priests, a holy nation, to be instruments of the truth and a light to the Gentiles, but their election for this task sinfully degenerated in their minds to elitism and arrogance, to exclusivity and pride in their national heritage. God had not chosen only Israel so they could be self-satisfied and everyone else could go to hell – let that serve as a lesson to us, church! No, God had chosen them to be a people through whom God would save His elect in every nation. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God had saved his chosen people in the nation of Israel and now this primarily Jewish church, those who were spiritually Jews and not just ethnic and religious ones, those who were the true children of Abraham, must fulfill the mission given to the people of God throughout the ages. As Jesus had told the disciples: “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (John 10:16, ESV) It was time now to go and get those other sheep, those sheep not of the Jewish fold and bring them into the one flock of God. God was going to send Peter to a Gentile, a man who was not even a proselyte. And the way God does this is nothing short of miraculous.

“The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.” (Acts 10:9–16, ESV) God is working on both sides of the equation. As the men sent by Cornelius are drawing near to Joppa, Peter is praying at noon, hungry and waiting for lunch to be prepared and God is going to go to work on his heart.

Now to be fair to Peter, some of his Jewish inhibitions were already starting to fall at this point. He is staying with a tanner, a man whose occupation would have rendered him ceremonial

unclean. He is eating at his table and fellowshiping with him and so we can see that Peter is on the process of being sanctified in his thoughts, but still the man with whom he is staying is a Jewish tanner. But now God is going to really begin to transform Peter's thoughts.

The vision is straightforward enough. A sheet comes out of heaven filled with all manner of creatures, some kosher according to the Law of Moses and some not. When the command comes from God to rise and eat, Peter's response is understandable but still inappropriate – Lord and no do not belong in the same sentence -- “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” With that God says to him: “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

So what is going on here? What was God saying to Peter in this vision? Well, first, He is putting an end to the ceremonial law once and for all. Diet, manners of food preparation, clothing and the like – those parts of the ceremonial law that were the manner by which the nation of Israel was to remain distinct from the other nations and set apart as the people of God, rather than set apart to the gods of the Canaanites or Assyrians for example, those things were passing away, having been fulfilled completely in Christ. The first hint at this came from Jesus himself when the Lord had a conversation, in Mark 7, that was prompted by some Pharisees noticing that some of Jesus' disciples were eating a meal without having observed the ceremonial washing of hands that preceded the meal. This was, by the way, a Jewish tradition; it is never required in the Law of Moses. He said to them: “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”” (Mark 7:18–23, ESV)

But second, the implication of this vision was this: What would identify the people of God in the future was not what they ate or what they wore – that law was good and it was intended to serve to identify the people of God in this world, to keep them unstained from the world, to set them apart as holy to the Lord – and it had served its purpose though by this time the Jews in their sinfulness had lost its intended idea and falsely turned it into a way to earn salvation or magnify oneself, a point of pride and self-righteousness. No, from this point on, what would set the people of God apart, what would identify the people of God, what would make them

distinct was their response to the gospel, their faith in Christ, their cleansing they had received by the blood of Christ that made them truly clean. That was the point of this vision. It was not necessary to follow all of the ceremonial laws, to be religiously Jewish, but to believe in Christ, to have the cleansing that comes from the blood of Jesus, shed for sinners and sufficient for salvation for all who believe – even the Gentiles. Peter didn't understand this at the time but he did begin to really think about it, to think about the implications.

Luke tells us: "Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."" (Acts 10:17–20, ESV) Peter is thinking about what this all means, but he doesn't have time to think very long because while he is mulling this around in his mind, the Spirit of God interrupts him to tell him that three men are looking for, three men sent by God and that he should accompany them without any hesitation, without any prejudice.

"And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him." (Acts 10:21–23, ESV) What is going on here? First, his prayer time is interrupted by this confusing vision from God, then he's told to accompany some men that God has sent to his door, then he finds out that they are sent by Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, and then he offers to take in these Gentiles for the night, to lodge them and feed them as his guests. Peter's tranquility has been turned upside down. The next day, in obedience to God, he leaves with the men and takes some Jewish brothers in Christ with him. He goes to preach the gospel for all men of all nations.

The Gospel for All Men (and Women) of All Nations (24-48) Luke tells us: "And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered." (Acts 10:24–27, ESV) Caesarea was

about a day and half journey from Joppa and when Peter got there, he had to be surprised to see all the people that had turned out to meet him, Cornelius with his relative and his close friends and even more inside. He also had to be surprised at the humility of this military leader in the greatest army of its time. When Luke says that Cornelius “worshiped” Peter, don’t hear that in the way that we would understand that word. The word for worshiped here is a word that means “to prostrate oneself before someone as an act of reverence, fear, or supplication.” Cornelius presented himself as he would before an emperor because he has instant honor and respect for Peter as a messenger from God. But notice, there is no popery from Peter, no extending of the hand to receive a kiss on the ring – that is Catholic tomfoolery. Instead he extends his hand and lifts Cornelius to his feet. Peter knows who he is. He is Christ’s Apostle, but he is only a man, just like Cornelius.

And as Peter addresses the gathered group, you get the sense that he has been doing some real thinking about the vision that he had a couple of days ago.

“And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”” (Acts 10:28–29, ESV) Peter is talking here about the Jewish traditions, not the Law of Moses. Jews did not enter Gentile homes – a Jewish tradition not OT law. They did not speak to or visit Gentiles – a proud Jewish tradition. Peter had been thinking about that and about the vision that he had and in light of the gospel, in light of the blood of Christ shed to cleanse him, a sinner, he had come to the realization that he had no right to call anyone unclean. Apart from Christ, he too was a filthy sinner; he too was unclean with the corruption of sin. He had no special standing before God because he was Jewish. Apart from Christ, Jew and Gentile are in the same boat. And so, he says, “I came without objection, so why did you send for me?”

“And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”” (Acts 10:30–33, ESV) This is beyond anything that Peter could have hoped for. These people are gathered, sensing the presence of God, longing to hear what he would say through his

messenger, ready to receive all that he has to say, eager to hear what the man of God has been commanded to say – the attitude that all of us should have before the preaching of the Word of God. It takes Peter aback. It blows him away.

“So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34–35, ESV) He knew this before. He knew the gospel was to go to all the nations, to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. He knew that in his head, but now he knows it in his heart. He knows now that God does not show partiality – that is, God is not just the God of the Jews but of the Gentiles as well. He knows now that everyone who fears Him, no matter what nationality, and who does what is right is acceptable to Him. And what is right before the Lord? To repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said it. When he was asked by the Jews in John 6: “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”” (John 6:28–29, ESV)

In this instant, Peter knows what he is to do. Peter was on holy ground. He understood that this moment would echo in salvation history. He is there to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that hearing and believing the gospel, these Gentiles would come to saving faith in Christ!

Some people miss this. They rip this one statement in verse 35 out of context and use it as a proof text to say that God saves people who live up to whatever light they have even if they never hear of Jesus Christ. Plenty of them in our own denomination, plenty of them in churches all over the earth. They are everywhere. They will say that people who fear God, and do what is right, what is morally acceptable, will be saved by God in the end whether they ever hear and respond by faith to the gospel or not. They say stuff like “God looks down at the unevangelized heathen in some part of the world who's never heard of Christ and so long as he does right and so long as he's sincere and devout, God will save him.” It is an utter lie.

What is that but works righteousness, salvation by human works, dressed up in religious language and irrational spirituality? That is nothing but utter biblical ignorance, a cheapening of the gospel, and a thorough devaluing of Jesus Christ as Lord. In fact, let me go further that is not only biblical ignorance; it is demonic deception and unbelief. That kind of thinking is the death-knell to missions and evangelism. The whole reason that Peter was there was not

because Cornelius was already saved by living up to the light that he had but so he could preach to him the gospel of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, so he could be saved!

I wish these people would read the Bible or just read the whole book of Acts. “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12, ESV) Why would Jesus have to die and rise from the dead if people could be saved by living up to the light they already have? Why would the apostles and disciples risk their lives to take the gospel to the world if you could be saved without it? Paul clearly says what mankind has done with the light he has been given: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:18–23, ESV)

No, there is one gospel for all the peoples of the earth – Jew or Gentile. “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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”” (Romans 1:16–17, ESV)

There is one gospel and Peter preaches it here. We probably do not have the whole text of the sermon but a Holy Spirit inspired summary by Luke, but I want us to take this thought by thought so you can see the fullness of what Peter says: “As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),” (Acts 10:36, ESV) In just one verse, Peter says a mouthful. He acknowledges the sovereign and gracious work of God. God took the initiative to save people. He sent this word to Israel to preach. This is not a message from men, not a human creation. What he is about to say is directly from God. And it is good news. It is news of peace with God for those who are alienated from God, who are at war with God, who are under the just condemnation of God for their sins. And it is the message of Jesus Christ who is Lord over all men, Lord over all creation, Lord of the Jews and the

Gentiles, with absolute authority. No man makes Him Lord, as some would say. God the Father has made Him both Lord and Christ. What an introduction!

“you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. ” (Acts 10:37–38a, ESV) They know some of the details of Christ’s life but now they need to know what they mean. He was baptized by John, identifying with the sinners He came to save, at that moment being visibly anointed with the Spirit of God for His mission. He went about doing the works of God, demonstrating His power over Satan and the effects of the Fall. God was with Him in a way that God had never been with anyone else. And these are not fairytales; it is indisputable fact. We saw it with our own eyes.

“They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,” (Acts 10:39, ESV) Peter does not have to refer to the cross as a tree – he does it as a reference to the curse that hangs over every human being’s head because of their sin. It is by Christ’s vicarious suffering and death on that tree that Jesus the debt in full that our sins deserve. Because He is holy God, His death has infinite value. Because He is sinless man, His death is the perfect substitute for the sins of man. They put him to death on the cross...

“but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” (Acts 10:40–41, ESV) He conquered death and not in the “what Jesus stood for goes on even after his death” or “even though Jesus is dead, His message lives on” kind of way but in the “death could not hold Him, the holy One of God could not see corruption in the grave” kind of way. And he emphasizes the fact of this real resurrection by telling how they had been chosen to see Him face-to-face, to eat and drink with Him. And then comes the climax.

“And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”” (Acts 10:42–43, ESV) He gave to them, to the apostles and to His disciples this command to tell the world that Jesus is

the One appointed by God to be the judge of every human being, living and dead. What a far different focus than the modern gospel of Jesus loves you. No doubt Jesus loves His people, He loves His church, but make no mistake, Jesus our Judge, not only when we die but right now. And beloved that is bad news unless the Judge is also your Advocate, your Redeemer, your Friend. Everyone who believes in Him, really believes – repentance from sin and false views of God and saving faith in His death on the cross and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins – finds in Christ a Judge who is also Savior, who offers His righteousness in our defense. But unless we trust in Christ alone, unless we believe in the Savior whom the prophets foretold, He is our Judge and our sins are written large before Him and there will be no mercy. But praise God, He is the Judge who saves through faith in Him alone.

This is the gospel truth. This is the gospel God blesses. I want you to see two things here in this gospel. First, it is noticeably absent of any mention of his teaching, isn't it? Did you wonder why that is? Here is why, because until people understand who Christ is, what Christ has accomplished by His death, turn from sin and follow Him, they are incapable of following His commands. When you speak of the commands of Christ absent the gospel, as happens in so many churches, absent the need for repentance and faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, you give people the impression that Christianity is all about being good and it only encourages self-righteousness and a trust in human works for salvation. That is deadly deception. It must always be gospel first and then the teaching of Christ.

One theologian rightly observed: To preach evangelically is, by definition, to preach the doctrine of the Cross in its full theological sense. This means that preaching on marriage, family, or finance without the word of the Cross at the center is a new form of legalism. It is a modern moralism without Christ and the Cross. It is not, fundamentally, evangelical.

Second, Peter does not rework the message, reinterpret, or re-create the gospel trying to tailor it to the Gentiles and make it easier for them to respond, making it more appealing by giving them a little bit of gospel truth here and there. This is the same gospel he preached to the Jews. There is only one gospel for all people. And it is this gospel that God blesses. Whenever people preach something else, they may indeed get visible results, but it is not the gospel and it will not be blessed of God and used by the Holy Spirit to rescue sinners and save the soul. Peter preaches the gospel and does the Spirit ever move here!

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.” (Acts 10:44–45, ESV) Imagine this. As Peter was preaching, the Spirit of God was doing the marvelous mysterious work of regenerating hearts, giving the gift of repentance and faith in Christ, saving souls for all of eternity. Peter and the brothers with him were amazed, astonished, as they beheld the Spirit of God poured out on the uncircumcised, on those who were not even proselytes of the Jewish religion. God saves! Even the Gentiles.

And just so there can be no question, so there can be no wondering if the Gentiles really are in the family of God, on equal standing with the Jews, children of the Living God and full heirs of Christ with them, we read: “For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.” (Acts 10:46a, ESV) They know now, the gospel is for all people.

Peter comes to the only conclusion that he can. ““Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 10:47–48a, ESV) Of course not. How can one withhold the picture, the symbol of what had already obviously taken place in their souls? How can they withhold the visible picture of inclusion in the people of God from those who had clearly been received by the Lord? The walls have come tumbling down! They are received into the visible church, baptized, not circumcised, baptized in the fellowship of believers. And why? “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4–6, ESV)

After they were baptized, Luke tells us: “Then they asked him to remain for some days.” (Acts 10:48, ESV) Peter sticks around for a while, not just to eat a ham sandwich for the first time or to have a pig-pickin’, but to disciple them and train them up in the ways of the Lord. They were hungry for the word and He was glad to give it.

What an amazing story this is. It’s the reason that you and I are sitting here today, because of the extraordinary uncontainable of the gospel, because of God’s steadfast love for people from

every tribe, nation, and tongue, even Gentiles. There are a million things to ponder from this account but let me just give you a few things to take away from this text...

First, let it be written on our hearts, indelibly and unmistakably once and for all that God is the sovereign author of salvation. There is no mistaking the sovereign initiative, the sovereign working of God in salvation in this text. Cornelius' conversion was not a mere accident or chance but the outworking of the will and purpose of God. On the surface, we see Peter presenting the gospel and Cornelius and his family and friends responding, but behind it all is the Sovereign Lord, carefully working in the secret places of men's hearts that He might be glorified in the saving of sinners. This is what God does. Salvation is His work. God gives faith, salvation, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit to whomever He pleases. Salvation is God's choice; we are all born lost and hopeless, and God intercedes as it pleases God to save a people for Himself.

Second, let this text serve as motivation for personal and corporate worship as you consider the means and methods that God used to save you and your brothers and sisters in Christ and to place you in His church universal and specifically in this body of believers. God worked differently in the lives of all of us. He saved some of us in truly dramatic ways, out of the quagmire of sin. Some of us were wallowing in sin, giving no thought to God, some even actively opposed to the gospel and hating Him and hating Christians when He powerfully redeemed our souls. With others, like Cornelius, God put a hunger in your heart to know Him and you really sought for the truth – these two and million ways in between, but we all have one commonality – we were saved when by God's grace we heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ and God deserves all the praise for that.

Third, let us be convinced with certainty that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. Good people do not go to heaven. Sincere people do not go to heaven. Even though Cornelius was a good man, in a sense he still needed to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This means that there is no salvation for good Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists, for good Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses, no salvation for good Americans, apart from personal faith in the biblically defined Lord Jesus Christ. But there is salvation for everyone who repents and believes in Him. Never back down from that truth.

Fourth, let's learn the lesson once and for all that there is no room for prejudice at the foot of the cross. For Peter, the obstacle to preaching the gospel to the Gentile was Jewish prejudice. For us it can be a host of things – race, class, economic position, education level, language, gender, nationality, appearance, dress, and culture. We are all guilty of it to some degree. For the sake of the gospel, we must lay all of these in the dust at the foot of the cross. Whatever prejudice that stands between you and sharing the gospel with someone else needs to die.

Fifth, let us embrace the divine calling to be the instruments of reconciliation we were created to be. God did not have to use Peter. The angel that came to Cornelius could have told him the way of salvation in Christ. But the angel explained nothing of the gospel to Cornelius. Instead that responsibility was given to Peter. Why didn't the angel tell him, he was certainly able. He's a messenger from God. Here's why. As an angel he had never experienced the saving power of the gospel personally, did not know what it was to be redeemed. He did not know firsthand what it was to be a sinner, to be at enmity with God, did not know what it was to experience the fullness of forgiveness through faith in Christ, did not know what it was to receive mercy and grace. Not so with Peter. He may not have the tongue of an angel or the unbroken track record of obedience to God, but he knew what it was to be a lost sinner saved by Jesus Christ.

What qualifies any of us to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers? Not eloquence, not our appearance, not our impressiveness according to worldly standards but simply this -- that we have been redeemed through the saving work of Jesus Christ. That alone qualifies us, so let us do it with faithfulness, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to make our witness fruitful.

I hope you are getting the sense of Acts...

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