

# WORSHIP SERVICE - 8.3.2025

## PART 26 - THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES

### I. INTRODUCTION

- In our study through Acts, we looked at major cultural and ethnic hurdles that were overcome when the gospel was taken to the Samaritans and many were converted and baptized.
- The gospel transcended the barriers that had separated Jews and Samaritans for centuries.
- But an even greater barrier was ahead for the church of Jesus Christ.
- It was the barrier between Jew and Gentile. The Jews had a strong hatred of Gentiles.
- How would Jewish believers overcome their deep-seated prejudice toward those they viewed as outsiders?
- In our passage today, we will see how God tore down the spiritual wall of division between Jew and Gentile and how he shattered human barriers of prejudice and exclusivity that would have hindered the spread of the gospel.
- The story unveils God's heart for the nations and it is a reminder for us about our call to proclaim Christ universally.
- The story is a turning point in redemptive history as the good news broke through ethnic, social, and religious boundaries.
- Acts 10 is a key chapter in the book of Acts.
- The conversion of Cornelius and Peter's role in bringing the gospel to Gentiles is the longest of all the narratives in the book of Acts.
- It is a pivotal moment in the advance of the gospel in the continuing ministry of the ascended Christ.
- Beginning with the story in our passage, the kingdom of God is opened to the Gentiles and the gospel is going to shed its Jewish trappings.
- As we study our text today, pay close attention to the divine initiative as the Lord sovereignly prepares both Cornelius and Peter, and how Peter's prejudices are overcome.
- May we be challenged today to cast off anything that would hinder us from sharing the good news with anyone and everyone, regardless of race, class, ideology, or background.

Acts 10:1-33

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 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. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the

sea.” 7 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, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 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. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

17 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 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” 22 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.” 23 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. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 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. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

30 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 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 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.’ 33 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.”

## II. SOVEREIGN PREPARATION

- At the end of chapter 9, Luke closes his narrative by telling us that Peter stayed in Joppa for an extended period of time at the home of Simon, a tanner. That's not an insignificant detail.
- Jews despised tanners because they handled the skins of dead animals. Their occupation made them ceremonially unclean in the eyes of the Jews. And here we find Peter staying in his home.
- God was already at work in Peter to break down some of the man-made traditions and prejudices that could have hindered him from preaching the gospel message to outsiders.

- To the north of Joppa is Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea with mainly a Gentile population.
- We are introduced to a man named Cornelius.
- He was a centurion, a captain with roughly 100 men under his command.
- He was therefore a Roman citizen with a distinctly Roman name.
- He was also an exemplary religious person.
- He was devout, a God-fearer, though not a Jew, he had accepted the ethical standards of Judaism, he was sympathetic to the Jewish faith, and inwardly pious.
- He was generous.
- He prayed continually to God.
- His devotion to God overflowed into generous living and giving.
- But he is still, no matter how devout—a Gentile.
- No matter how religious and devout he was, he still needed salvation through Jesus Christ alone.
- His religious devotion and inward piety could not save him.
- The most devout person is still a sinner who needs the gospel.

## JEW AND GENTILE DIVIDE

- Why did this barrier between Jew and Gentile exist? Why would a Jewish believer hesitate to take the gospel to the Gentiles as Jesus had instructed them to do?
- God's covenant with Abraham--in choosing to bless his one family, he was purposing to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's descendent (Gen 12).
- Psalm 2:8 The Lord's anointed would inherit the nations.
- The prophets foretold that Messiah would be a light for the nations bringing salvation to the end of the earth (Is. 49:6).
- But over time, Israel became puffed up with racial and ethnic pride; they alone were God's specially chosen people.
- The man-made traditions that were developed by the Jews were meant to widen the gulf between them and the unclean Gentiles.
- There was a deep-seated prejudice that the Jews harbored toward the Gentiles.
- They would not enter into their homes nor invite them into theirs.
- They would not sit down at the table of a Gentile to share a meal with them.
- Gentiles were unclean and to be in their presence was defiling.
- This is the extreme prejudice that had to be overcome before any Gentiles could be welcomed into the Christian community and have equal footing with the Jewish believers.
- We saw what God had to do to overcome the potential division between Jewish and Samaritan Christians.
- What will he do to prevent an even larger threat to the unity of the Church?
- God is going to use Peter. He will be the instrument God uses to open the kingdom of God to the Gentiles.

## CORNELIUS' VISION

- Cornelius is given a vision of an angelic messenger that instructs him to send for Peter.
- The ninth hour is a time of prayer for the Jews, and Cornelius clearly has a vision of an angel of God coming to him and calling him by name.
- The angel tells him that his prayers and alms have ascended like a sweet-smelling memorial before God.
- This is profound--God is treating Cornelius' prayers and alms as being equivalent to the sacrifice of a Jew.
- God is the one who takes the initiative to break down barriers.

- He is given a directive and without hesitation, Cornelius obeys and sends two of his servants and a trusted soldier to locate Peter.
- The reason Cornelius received this vision was to bring Cornelius and Peter together, their lives must intersect so that Cornelius can hear the gospel and be welcomed into the family of God.
- God was drawing Cornelius to Christ. He was preparing his heart to receive the gospel.

## PETER'S VISION

- Knowing what we know of the hatred Jews had for Gentiles, how would God deal with any lingering prejudice Peter might have towards the Gentiles?
- It's the following day and the men sent by Cornelius are approaching the city.
- Peter is on the rooftop around noon and he is praying.
- Both Cornelius and Peter are praying and receive special revelation in the midst of prayer.
- The Sovereign Lord has directed the timing of these events and has prepared both of these men for their encounter.
- While he is waiting for his meal, he has an extraordinary vision.
- He doesn't see an angel, he sees heaven opened. And a large sheet, being lowered by its four corners filled with a mixture of animals and unclean animals and birds as determined by Jewish law.
- And Peter hears a voice saying, *"Rise, Peter, kill and eat."*
- V14 But Peter says, *"By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."*
- The Lord replies, *"What God has made clean, do not call common."*
- This sequence of call and response happens three times and the vision ends with the sheet being taken back up to heaven.
- Chapters 9 and 10 recount four visions, one each given to Saul, Ananias, Cornelius, and Peter.
- All of them recognize it is the Lord who speaks to them.
  - Saul--*"Who are you, Lord?"*
  - Ananias-- *"Here I am, Lord."*
  - Cornelius--*"What is it, Lord?"*
  - Peter--*"By no means, Lord!"*
- Peter needs to have a conversion experience and the Lord is using this vision to bring that about.
- He is going to have his prejudices and assumptions challenged.
- God has to prepare his heart and reshape his theology to take the gospel to the Gentiles and to help welcome them into the Christian community.

## THE MEANING OF THE VISION REVEALED

- Christ fulfilled the civil and ceremonial laws God had given to Israel.
- Those laws that were meant to set Israel apart as God's specially chosen people, as a chosen nation, have been set aside.
- Why? Because Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of all of those things the law pointed to.
- The dietary restrictions in Leviticus 11 were given for Israel to be aware of their need for holiness because God takes holiness seriously.
- Through these types of laws they learned the distinction between what is holy and what is not.
- But these laws were not eternal laws binding on all people.
- They were given to a specific people for a specific time.
- Those expired with Christ's death and resurrection.
- With the inauguration of the New Covenant, those things that were part of the Old Covenant no longer apply.

- Mark 7:17-23, Jesus declared that all foods clean.
- Col 2:16 We should not let anyone judge us regarding food and drink.
- Roman 14:14 Paul says he is persuaded that nothing is unclean in itself.
- But there is a greater reality that God is showing Peter through this vision.
- The vision isn't just about food, it's about people.
- All of the distinctions that separated Jews and Gentiles, God had abolished.
- The sheet with the four corners represents the whole earth; all the nations of the earth. (Isa 11:12; Jer 49:36).
- All of the people of the earth need to hear God's truth of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- There are no unclean people—there is no one off limits to the gospel of grace.
- Peter doesn't immediately make the connection.
- As he pondered the meaning of the vision, the men arrived and called out from the gate of the house inquiring if Peter was there.
- At the same moment, the Spirit of the Lord spoke to Peter telling him the three men are looking for him and that he is to go with them without hesitation, because it is the Lord who has sent them.
- God had attended to every detail to bring about the meeting of Peter and Cornelius that will usher in the era of Gentile inclusion.
- Peter goes down and they explain the purpose of their visit. They recount Cornelius' vision and Peter invites them as his guests.
- That is something a devout Jew would not do as they were Gentiles.
- But the Spirit of God had been preparing Peter and commanded him to receive them and go with them.
- Patrick Schreiner, *"The visions were like magnets pulling these two individuals into the same space."* (Christian Standard Commentary)

### III. GENTILE ACCEPTANCE

- The next day they depart, and some of the brothers from Joppa go with them.
- These are Jewish believers. They would serve as witnesses to the events when Peter goes back to Jerusalem to give his report.
- Peter is about to do something that he has never done, enter the home of a Gentile.
- Notice the language of "entering" in our text.
- V24 *"they entered Ceasarea..."*
- V25 When Peter entered...
- V27 As he talked with Cornelius, *"he went in..."*
- Peter is entering Gentile space that was considered taboo.
- This is what the church has to learn how to do--enter other people's spaces as guests.
- What spaces are you unwilling to enter to take to the good news?
- What kind of people would you be unwilling to sit down and share a meal with if invited?
- Cornelius is so deeply moved by Peter's visit, that he falls down to worship Peter, thinking him to be a divine messenger.
- Peter enters Cornelius' home and he is blown away that there's a large crowd gathered.
- Cornelius had called all of his family, his relatives and close friends to come.

- He wants those near and dear to him to hear whatever message Peter is going to bring.
- Are you inviting others to hear the life-changing message the gospel offers?
- Peter knew that the gospel message was to go to the Gentiles. That wasn't the issue.
- The issue was the barrier of how Jews viewed Gentiles as unclean and how it was forbidden to have table fellowship with a Gentile.
- God revealed to Peter that Gentiles were clean, therefore, Peter can be welcomed into the home of a Gentile and he can have table fellowship with them.
- He tells the people who gathered, that they all know it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with, let alone, visit the home of a Gentile, But God has shown him otherwise. They are not unclean.
- Gentiles could not only be saved by faith, they don't have to become Jews in order to be acceptable to God.
- In order for the early church to engage in Christ's mission to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, they had to overcome this major barrier of kosher food laws and prohibitions of eating with Gentiles.
- There is no more intimate space than when you are sitting at someone's table and sharing a meal.
- This is why this is so monumental.
- Jewish Christians can accept Gentiles as Gentiles.
- Cornelius acknowledged they were in God's presence, and expressed his eagerness to hear from Peter all that the Lord had commanded him to say.
- What a great invitation for Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

## CONCLUSION

- We cannot overemphasize how significant this event was.
- From the OT standpoint these Gentiles were unclean, but now they are cleansed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Peter's vision is an amazing illustration of the gospel.
- All of those unclean animals that the Jews avoided in their attempt to be holy and distinct from the pagan nations around them, God used those unclean animals to represent the pagan nations themselves.
- That is a picture of us—we are Gentiles.
- And through the redemptive work of Christ, we also received the gospel of grace so that we can be forgiven and made clean.
- Ephesians 2:11-17 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.
- Praise God that we Gentiles are saved by God's gracious initiative.
- We don't have to become Jews. The gospel is the great-equalizer!
- We are tempted to raise up new walls: racial, social, political, theological, or cultural.

- But we must remember that in Christ, the dividing wall has been obliterated!
- So here's the call:
  - If you have trusted Christ, live like someone who's been brought near by his grace.
  - Refuse to treat others as unclean. Reject all prejudices that Christ died to demolish.
  - Befriend people who are not like you.
  - Show hospitality toward everyone, open your home and your life to others, because Christ welcomed you into his family.
  - Share the gospel across the boundaries of race, class, and comfort.
  - Like the lunch table at school.
- The gospel calls us to sit at new tables, with unlikely people, because we have been invited to Christ's table for all people.
- If you find this to be difficult or if you hesitate in wanting to live this way, it might be that you are harboring a hint of pride and self-righteousness in your heart. If so, you need to repent and ask the Lord to change your heart and give you a heart for the lost and those far from God.
- Christ overcame every barrier of separation between us and God to reconcile us to himself.
- The gospel is not just a message to believe. It's a barrier-breaking mission to live.
- Get up and go sit at someone else's table!
- Christ is preparing hearts, just like he did with Cornelius, and he may be preparing them through you.

## **APPLICATION AND REFLECTION**

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?