

Acts

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.

(Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

The Gentile Pentecost

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Acts: 10:1-48

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Good morning Redeemer! Please open up your Bibles with me to Acts 10.

God's Word is always good. It is always necessary. It is always useful to train, teach, refine, and shape us. We will experience these things no matter where we turn to in God's Word. Yes and amen. But sometimes, we come to a text that we know this to be *especially* true of. Sometimes, we come to a text that changes everything. Acts 10 is one of those places.

Right now in this cultural moment, we are experiencing a tremendous amount of disunity. There are barriers and obstacles that make it seem impossible for us as Christians to engage with the culture. Anyone feeling that? Things have become so murky as there are seemingly less issues we can agree on with those around us. The Church in North America is feeling the distance, the gap, the extreme disconnect between them and their neighbours. It wouldn't be unreasonable to say in moments of weakness, 'Lord, is there a way for you to reach these people?!?!'

But our text reminds us that this is nothing new. The Church has always had barriers to break through. And in Acts 10 as we are going to see, God moved and shattered the barriers that once stood between the Jews and the gentiles. He broke down the religious and cultural barriers and answered the question, 'is salvation for the Jews only?' with an emphatic NO!

The promise of salvation, of God restoring fellowship between Himself and His rebellious creation was never meant *solely* for the Jews but for the whole world. The promise to Abraham, long before there was even the Israelite nation was this:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, **and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.** (Genesis 12:2-3 ESV)

The precious jewel of salvation that the Jews treasured was ALWAYS meant to be shared beyond their physical and racial barriers. The message that God desires to save men and women from every tribe and tongue is a truth that was built into this famous promise to Abraham.

This morning we are going to see how God opened wide the door for the Gospel to not only go from Jew to Jew or Jew to Samaritan but from Jew to Gentile, breaking down every barrier that once was there. Now with this text being as long as it is, we are going to take it chunk by chunk.

With this things in mind, hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today. Acts 10:1-8:

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. 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." 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 10:1-8 ESV)

Now as 21st century Christians living in North America, it is easy for us to overlook the significance of this text. That's because we don't generally think about the difference between Jew and Gentiles. But for the early Church this was a ground breaking event. And here, God was orchestrating the next phase in the Church's mission. The plan is unfolding as Jesus said that it would:

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.** (Acts 1:8 ESV)

The gospel was moving forward in power and this was another vital step its progress. I love how one commentator captures this texts significance:

It (Acts 10) deals with the decisive issue in the history of the early church, namely the recognition that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and it makes clear that this was no merely human decision, **but that it was the result of God’s clear guidance.**¹

That’s what this text is about. God shattering the boundaries and fences that once stood between Jew and Gentile. And as we will see, God did this by bringing about another Pentecost, but this time it would be different from Acts 2, this would be the *Gentile Pentecost*.

The Gentile Pentecost

Now when we think of Pentecost we think of THE PENTECOST. The Acts 2 event where God poured out His Spirit fulfilling the promise found in the prophet Joel. There God said this:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:28-29 ESV)

Now here, in Acts 10, we see what appears to be ANOTHER Pentecost. God is putting His undeniable stamp of approval on what is happening in this story. The Gentiles are being brought into the Kingdom, and God won’t allow us to miss the fact that this is HIS doing. This was huge. This was unprecedented. This was ground breaking. In this first section, we see:

1. A Gentile Called

Look with me to the Acts 10:3-6 to see this:

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

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *TNTCS: The Acts of the Apostles*, accessed via Olive Tree Bible Software.

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)

In the Old Testament we saw glimpses of God extending mercy beyond the Jews to the gentiles, think Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite, but never like what we see here.

Cornelius was a Roman soldier serving in an important city for Rome: Caesarea. But unlike other gentiles, Cornelius wasn't content to worship the idols of his culture and was drawn to the God of the Jews. He is described as being a man who was devout, who feared God along with his whole family, and was known for his great generosity. Cornelius was leaning in, with the limited understanding that he had, but he had not yet heard about Jesus.

So God in His sovereign grace called to Cornelius telling him to go send for a man named Peter who would tell him what he needed to hear. So Cornelius gets up in obedience and sends for Peter. Did he know what was coming? Did he know how this would shake up the Church for all time? I imagine he did not.

But God was doing something unthinkable. He was calling the people who were on the outside of Judaism to Himself. He was prepping the ground for a build that would consist not only of Jews and Samaritans, but of all people! He was sovereignly softening the hearts of those who were *going* to hear the Good News. He was tilling the soil before the seeds of the Gospel would be planted.

Isn't that good news? Some of us need to be reminded that our God is the One who is preparing our families, neighbours, co-workers and strangers we meet for the Gospel conversations that we are going to have. I can't help but be encouraged and challenged by this. I often go into conversations or situations feeling defeated before they even begin. Already resigned to the fact that God can't soften a heart. But then I read in Acts about God transforming lives, families, cities, and whole geographical regions. Maybe you needed to be reminded of that this morning.

Secondly, as we move into the next scene, we see a preacher prepared:

2. A Preacher Prepared

We are going to read Acts 10:9-23 to see how God prepared Peter for the task ahead of him:

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.

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." 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. (Acts 10:9-23 ESV)

Let's talk about why this dream was so significant. According to the Jewish dietary laws found in Leviticus 11, God had declared these animals unclean to eat. How many of you remember our Leviticus on the Lawn series a few years back? Well Peter had those texts ringing in his ears but he was told to kill and eat. Now Peter, being a good Jew automatically refused. He was probably thinking, 'what is this a trap?!' But he was told three times to kill and eat with the nail in the coffin being this:

What God has made clean, do not call common. (Acts 10:15 ESV)

Luke tells us that Peter was perplexed by the vision. He didn't know what to make of it. Acts 10:19-20 says this:

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 10:19-20 ESV)

I think it would be helpful to quickly sketch out what Peter would have been thinking. He was a good Jew. He was used to obeying Jewish dietary laws. He was careful with his dealings with gentiles for fear of becoming unclean. Think back to the early days of covid 19 when a cough brought on the dirtiest looks from those around you. The thought of breaking the Jewish ceremonial laws was outrageous to Peter.

But God was showing Peter that the time of the dietary and ceremonial distinctions between Jews and gentiles had come to an end! Jesus had already foreshadowed this in Mark 7. There we read:

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.**) (Mark 7:18-19 ESV)

God was saying, you no longer need a Jewish and a gentile menu! Your distinction from the world no longer has anything to do with the foods that you eat but only with the Gospel that you believe! Peter could go with Cornelius’ messengers, enter a gentile household, eat a gentile meal, and be confident that he remained clean before the Lord.

Peter needed this vision and preparation in order to accomplish his next task. He needed to have the blinders removed. He needed to see that in Christ, the ceremonial laws- the dietary restrictions- the ceremonies- the sacrifices were now obsolete because in Christ, they were perfected and envisioned in full!

The sacrifices and ceremonies were object lessons, but their purpose was to *prepare* us for Jesus. When he came, he FULFILLED the law and the ceremonies and the sacrifices and the feasts! He ushered in a new day, and Peter is being helped to understand that here. And it is BLOWING his mind! This changes everything Thanks be to God!

I would argue that this is a text where prejudices go to die. The Jews were never *meant* to hate the gentiles. They were never meant to look down on them. They were meant to be a blessing to them. Their lives, their distinctions, from the way that they worshipped, to the God they worshipped, to the way they did justice, food, family, all of it was meant to show the world that the only right way to live is found under the guidance and lordship of Yahweh. But the Jews let the false notion slip in that gentiles were second class citizens. They let prejudice get the best of them. They had lost sight of the mission that God had originally given to Abraham. His heart stretches to the nations. It always has.

Do we do the same? Do we subtly look down on people who are in another class of society? Do we look down on people of other ethnicities? As we began this morning talking about our culture, don't we sometimes look down with disgust rather than with compassion and mercy? We see the error and the tangled mess they have found themselves in and instead of trying to help them up from their metaphorical fall, we point and say I told you so. Is there a barrier in your heart that the Lord needs to tear down?

Peter needed to hear that the distinctions between Jew and gentile were gone. And maybe some of us need to hear this message in order to set our hearts ablaze for the thousands of lost people around us. Maybe the Lord needs to do some prepping in in our hearts for those He's calling us to minister to.

Peter was perplexed by the vision, he didn't fully get it. But as we see in the story, things started to make more sense in the third scene. There we see:

3. A Sermon Preached

Look with me to Acts 10:23-43:

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 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. 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.”

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.”

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. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 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. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 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. 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 10:23b-43 ESV)

Peter enters this joy filled gentile gathering not knowing what was about to happen. Little did he know he had an eager audience before him. One commentator says this:

Peter could have had no better-prepared and eager an audience than this and was quick to seize on the situation as the starting-point for his address.²

As Peter hears Cornelius recounting his dream, all of the pieces come together in his heart and mind! He bursts out in praise and preaching declaring that God’s salvation is evidently for ANYONE-Jew AND gentile. There are no more distinctions! So he begins to preach the same Gospel as he would to a Jew. Why? Because the same Gospel that was preached to the Jews on Pentecost was the SAME ONE that would save Cornelius and his household that day!

² I. Howard Marshall, *TNTCS: The Acts of the Apostles*, accessed via Olive Tree Bible Software.

So what did they hear? That Jesus is the bringer of peace. And this peace isn't the mere absence of chaos or strife but of reconciliation with God! Jesus is the Lord of all and the ONLY one by whom we can have peace with God. Jesus demonstrated this as He performed miracle after miracle. He healed the blind, paralyzed, raised the dead, casted out demons, all demonstrating that He had come to usher in peace between God and humanity.

And then He died and rose again. Cornelius' and his friends needed to hear that Jesus truly died on a cross and truly rose again three days later! They needed to hear about Easter! That Jesus' bore the sins of the world-EVEN THE GENTILES, in order to bring about our peace with God. That's how we are made new. That's how dead people are made alive. By trusting in Jesus' sinless, perfectly righteous, abounding in good works life. By trusting in His atoning death where our sins were placed on His shoulders and He bore our just punishment. And why can we trust that His sacrifice was enough? How can we be certain that our sins are gone in full? Because God powerfully raised Him to life again after three days declaring that Jesus paid our debt in full! It is finished and there is no doubt about it! Thanks be to God!

And our King Jesus will return again in glorious power to judge the living and the dead. Then every knee will bow to Him once and for all. Once and for all Jesus will be seen as the glorious King who is worthy of all our worship and love. He's coming again.

That's what Peter preached. That's the gospel. It's what Cornelius and his household needed to hear. It's what we need to hear. It's the announcement that brings lost, dead, hopeless men, women, boys and girls, into life everlasting.

Before we move on, would you not agree that this faithful, bold, and clear Gospel preaching is a needed reminder? How many of us, through the fear of man, whether it be due to different backgrounds, religion, education or temperaments dull the Gospel? How many of us are afraid, or maybe worse, doubtful that the good news of Jesus actually saves lives? This text, this tremendous event is here to remind us that not only does God make no more distinctions between Jew and gentile, but also that it is the SAME GOSPEL that saves both.

Your co-worker who has a totally different past and outlook on life than you needs to hear the same Gospel that saved you. Your neighbour that seems so closed off to any offer of the Gospel or church event needs not to have a softer, more culturally relevant Gospel, but the same one that saved YOU! We need to hear this. We need to believe this. How are we offered entry to the kingdom of God? How do we receive peace with God? How do we receive life everlasting? Only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before Peter even got to Cornelius' house, God was working. He was working in the vision he gave to Cornelius, in the vision he gave to Peter, and He was working as the Gospel was preached to the house full of gentiles. And what happened? Fourthly, in this gentile Pentecost, we see:

4. A People Brought In

Look with me to the end of our text to see this. Beginning in verse 44:

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. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "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. Then they asked him to remain for some days. (Acts 10:44-48 ESV)

This is the end and the climax of the gentile Pentecost! As Peter preached, the room full of gentiles heard the Gospel and believed! In that moment, just as it happened at the first Pentecost in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit opened the hearts of these men and women and they were saved. They received the Spirit just as Peter and the early Church did! One commentator is helpful here:

Since elsewhere the gift of the Spirit comes to people who repent and believe, the implication is twofold: first, that the Gentiles present responded to the message with faith; and, secondly, that God accepted them and sealed their faith with the gift of the Spirit. **Once Gentiles had been given an opportunity to hear the message, they responded, and God received them.**³

³ I. Howard Marshall, *TNTCS: The Acts of the Apostles*, accessed via Olive Tree Bible Software.

The gentiles were recipients of the Spirit and Ezekiel's prophecy was coming true in them just like it had in Acts 2! There we read:

“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 36:26–28 ESV)

And Peter seeing this, said, let's get them baptized! And there you had the first gentiles in the early church hearing, believing, and being baptized into the family of God. The wall was torn down and God had revealed that anyone who calls on the Lord can be saved: Jew or gentile. In Ephesians 2 Paul said this:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. (Ephesians 2:13-14 ESV)

What happened in Acts 10? The gentiles, people like you and I, heard the Gospel, believed and were brought into the family of God. The early Church learned that Jesus truly would build His church and nothing would stop Him. His glorious Gospel would transform the world beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

As we come to a close this morning, I think it would be helpful for each of us to ask ourselves, is there a barrier that I believe the Gospel cannot breach? Or, is there a hurt that is so deep that even Jesus won't be able to heal? A relationship, a prejudice, a grudge, a bias that you can't let go of. Do you think that our modern, speak your truth, go your own way culture is too far gone and not worth your preaching? Do you think that God can't break down the barriers?

The early Church would have felt the same, but God's promises never fail. He said He would build His Kingdom, and He will. The Gospel will go to all peoples: Jew, Samaritan, Gentile, to the ends of the earth, and God's name will be hallowed, worshipped and loved. Do you believe that? Do you long for that? Oh Lord make it so in each of us. For Your glory and for the good of the world. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.