

17. The Wall Comes Down

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Date: 10 May 2009

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read in Acts chapter 10. The wall comes down.

That's what this is all about. Last week we saw together that it's a wonderful reality that even when things seem most dark for the church of God and the people of God in the midst of great hostility and persecution for the church, the risen Lord is on the throne.

And he is powerfully present with his servants, with his saints. His effortless power is at work to accomplish his eternal purposes.

And so to energize his people in their ongoing part in that great mission of life that he has shared with them. So the story that began in Acts chapter 8 verse 1 with a great persecution breaking out against the church ended in Acts 9 verse 31 with the church spreading and maturing and multiplying.

And we saw examples of how that happened in both Lydda and Joppa last time in the stories at the end of Acts 9. Now as we come to Acts chapter 10, we see that the great opposition and hardship for the church was in fact the womb for the greatest breakthrough for the Christian gospel ever.

[1 : 35] And the events that totally changed the whole history of the world forever afterwards. That is, it's the church breaking out of the relative isolationism of a faith centered on one nation and one people into a totally worldwide movement of faith in the God of Israel.

Indeed, into the worldwide true faith in the world's only true God. And now made known at last to all peoples in all nations through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles came down. And it came down forever that day. And God himself, moreover, is seen to be the one who is the way and the truth and the life for all peoples of this world.

He opens the way, he leads to the truth, and he alone imparts life. And he does it publicly and pointedly to a whole Gentile community in the household of Cornelius in Roman Caesarea.

So let's look at this long narrative then under those headings and see what Luke is recording for us and wants to tell us about those momentous events that happened on the day the wall came down.

[2 : 59] First of all, verses 1 to 33 are all about how the Lord opens the way. He opens the way with the preparation of his people for a mission to all peoples that offers them, all peoples, the same common status of salvation in Jesus Christ as they had had.

The Christ who alone can cleanse and make people holy. If you look at verses 1 to 7, they introduce us to Cornelius. He lived a little bit further up the coast from Joppa, where we were last week, in Caesarea.

He's a Roman soldier. But like the Ethiopian that we met back in Acts chapter 8, he too, verse 2 tells us, is a very devout man. He's a seeker after God.

And the wonderful thing is that God is determined that he is going to become a finder. And so he reveals himself in a vision to him and tells him to send to Joppa for one Simon Peter. And he even gives him, as it were, the Google Map directions to tell him exactly how to get to his house with Simon the Tanner.

Now, why does God do that? Is it because this good, good and kindly man deserves special treatment from God? Well, no, we can't believe that if we believe everything else that Jesus and the apostles teach us.

[4 : 22] But no one can merit God's favor that way. Jesus is very clear, isn't he? Matthew 11, verse 27. No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

He goes on to say a little later, to the one who has, more will be given to him. And here's a man who has. He is responding. His life of piety surely is evidence that God is already at work in his life,

drawing him out, leading him on towards real truth and light.

And so here is God, about to give him much, much more. But if we can understand why God would appear in this unusual way in a vision to a Roman soldier, Cornelius, we can understand that, because obviously this man had never had any other opportunity to hear the gospel any other way. But why should God have to appear also to Peter in such a strange experience of a vision as verses 9 to 16 tell us all about? Well, the answer is because there was a big problem to be overcome if Cornelius' messengers were to accomplish their task and be able to take Peter to preach the gospel to them.

Because they were Gentiles. And it was against the Jewish law. For any good Jew to eat with or to have hospitality from a Gentile.

[5 : 55] Look down to verse 28. Peter says that plainly himself, doesn't he? It's unlawful for a Jew to associate with and visit anyone of another nation. So that's a problem. And we seem to come across something very strange here.

An apparently contradictory command of God. On the one hand, Jesus commands his disciples to go out to preach the gospel to the very ends of the earth, to all nations.

And yet on the other hand, the very commands that he gave to his people to be holy would seem to prevent them from doing exactly that. You can't be holy in your walk with God and evangelize these Gentiles.

So there's a barrier there. Something has got to be removed if the gospel march is going to go on and reach all nations. And that's why God had to prepare Peter and all the other Jewish Christians in this striking lesson that began in that dream that Peter has.

And he's told three times in this dream that the food that he has always, all his life known as unclean, he's now in fact to treat as clean. Now notice what God does not say to Peter in the dream.

[7 : 16] God does not berate Peter for being a bigot, for being a xenophobe, for being a holiness freak. He doesn't just say, stop all that, Peter. You're wrong. Loosen up a bit. Nor does he say to Peter, Peter, for goodness sake, you should have already known this.

How can you be so stupid? Most Bible commentators, it seems, seem to treat Peter like that. It's very easy after 2,000 years to be so clever, isn't it? That's not what God says to Peter. Now what God does say to Peter implies absolutely no fault whatsoever in Peter's understanding and his behavior for how he should have acted in the past.

But he does say to Peter that from now on, everything is very different. Because, look at verse 15, God himself has made things clean that were formerly unclean.

He says it three times to convince Peter it really is true. Because it's a big change. And Peter quite naturally finds it very hard to grasp. You don't expect a God to suddenly change his commands about holiness, do you?

About what's right and wrong. If God was always changing his mind about what's right and wrong, how on earth could we possibly live consistently and try and do the right thing? And God knows his people take his word seriously.

[8 : 40] And that's why he's patient with Peter. That's why he's patient with his church. And it's why he speaks with absolute clarity when there is a change to certain things.

Between the way things used to be in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant and the way things are going to be in the New Age. The Age of the Kingdom. The Age of Fulfillment that has now arrived in Jesus Christ.

And we should note that general point, by the way. That we should expect, shouldn't we, to find clear and unambiguous unambiguous and unmissable revelation from God in the New Testament where there are going to be changes in God's commands about how we as Christians are to live differently from the people of God under Moses before Jesus came.

And of course, we do have that, as we'll see, for things like food and circumcision and matters of sacrifice and so on. We don't find, of course, anything of the kind for matters of sexual morality, for example, marriage and so on.

In fact, we find quite the reverse, don't we? We find the assumption of an ongoing clear moral code as to how we're to live. In fact, what we do find in the New Testament on all of these matters is a far, far greater demand for purity.

[9 : 57] Just read the Sermon on the Mount. Go back to Peter here. God makes clear to Peter three times that he has made all foods clean.

Well, why? Why has he done that? Well, the next section helps us to get to the heart of it. Verse 17 and following. So, Peter's pondering the whole thing in verse 17 when God gives him immediately lesson number two to make the penny drop.

It is about repealing the food laws, but it's about far more than food. That's the point. It's about God doing something far more radical than just that. He is removing the distinction totally in his sight between Jews and Gentiles, all the nations of the world who are not Israel.

Look at verse 20. As he's thinking through it, the men from Cornelius come and ring the doorbell. And so God says to Peter, go on downstairs and answer the doorbell.

Verse 20, go with them making no distinction. That's a more helpful way to translate that. If you look at chapter 11 verse 12, Peter is relating the story a second time later on and exactly the same Greek words are used there as are translated here without hesitation.

[11:18] Making no distinction. In other words, making no distinction between you and them. Between you as a Jew and them as Gentiles. I've sent them, says God, and I'm telling you to break the law that once upon a time I gave.

Wow, that is a very dangerous concept, isn't it? Supposing I said that to you. Supposing I had my hands on the church's money.

You'll be very glad to know I never had my hands anywhere near the church's money. But supposing I had. I just decided to take 10,000 pounds out of the church's money to get myself a new car. And somebody challenged me about it.

And I said, well I know. I know it's against God's law to steal money but God told me specifically to do it. Well, people have been known to do that sort of thing, haven't they?

You see, I'm not an apostle of Jesus. And you shouldn't expect anyway to have fresh revelation of that kind from God in that way today.

[12:22] There is no fresh revelation in that sense but because God has spoken His last word to man in the revelation that is in Jesus Christ and in the apostolic witness to the revelation in Christ which is unique and once for all as the faith delivered to the saints.

That's what Jude tells us. But Peter was an apostle of Jesus and this was genuine revelation from God. In fact, it was vital revelation from God concerning the significance of the whole new age for the world as it dawned in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And it was something very radical. It was a real change in God's laws for His people. That's why it was difficult for Peter but Peter did grasp it.

He met the men and as verse 23 says, he broke the law. He invited them into his house to be his guests. Now remember that Peter was already making himself unclean, wasn't he?

He was living in a tanner's house and so God was preparing him already in that sense it seems. But we've got to tackle this issue head on.

[13:32] Why is God repealing a law that once upon a time He gave and was very, very definite about? Has God decided that He needs to modernize Himself a bit?

Has He been far too narrow-minded and bigoted in the past? Is that what it is? Or has He realized that it's just going to be too awkward in a modern day first century culture to demand people to be holy?

He's worried that, well, maybe no young people will come to the church if we make the demands too difficult so we better loosen up a bit. Is that what God's doing? Or perhaps God's admitting that He's made a mistake in the past.

Maybe He's doing what our Prime Minister is famous for never doing. Saying, sorry, I was wrong. I'll change that bad law. Is that what God's doing? Well, of course that's not what He's doing.

Because it wasn't ever a bad law. It was a good law. It was a vital law. But also, it was a temporary law.

[14:36] And now it was no longer needed. In fact, to go on keeping it now would make it into a very, very bad law indeed because it would stop the march of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

And what could be worse than that? Now, if you've got a difficulty with that, just think of it this way. We've got lots of experience of laws that are very, very good and necessary but are temporary. So, for example, if you're going down the motorway and there are enormous roadworks going on and there's a reduced speed limit temporarily, it can be very irritating, can't it? Especially now because there's always average speed cameras and you really do have to keep to the average

speed.

But when you've got a contraflow going on the M6 and great juggernauts are coming up and down, it's a very good law to make people slow down so they don't kill themselves.

But of course, once the roadworks are finished, well, that law is not needed anymore. If you keep that law and you can only go 30 miles an hour down the M6 forever and ever, well, it's chaos, isn't it?

[15 : 35] Disaster. Or, for example, during an enormous drought in the summertime, wouldn't that be nice? And you've got a hosepipe ban.

Well, it's a very good law, isn't it, to preserve water. But, if it was raining nearly all the time and we had plenty of water and there was no difficulty, it would suddenly become a very bad thing, wouldn't it?

Never to be able to go and water your garden, never to be able to get a hosepipe out and mess about with the kids, never to do these things. So, you see, a rule, a law, can be very, very good for a time, but become a very, very bad thing if times change.

Why, though, did God give these food laws to Israel in the first place? What were the temporary circumstances that made something like that so essential?

Well, the answer, of course, lies way, way back in the time of Moses when God called his people out of Egypt and made them his special people, called them to be a people holy to the Lord for a very special purpose.

[16 : 42] They were to be God's vehicle of salvation to the whole world. And he set them apart from all the pagan lands round about and he put them in their own land and he called them to be radically different, to be holy, says the Lord, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

That's the refrain that runs again and again all the way through the so-called holiness code in the book of Leviticus. See, in those chapters in Leviticus, God spells out all matters of worship for his people and they're to be different, radically, from the pagans all round about them.

They're not to worship the dreadful gods that they worshipped that demanded child sacrifice and all kinds of ritualistic orgies in worship. You're to be different, holy.

And in matters of conduct and how the people live, they're to be different, they're to be holy. You're to keep my statutes and rules and do them in the land where I'm bringing you, says God.

Not the practices of the pagan nations who have gone before you, which I detest. And that included all kinds of sexual immorality. You can read about it in Leviticus chapter 18.

[17 : 57] All kinds of exploitation and greed and social wickedness. You read about that in Leviticus 19. You are not to make yourselves unclean by any of these things, says the Lord in Leviticus 20.

I am the Lord your God who separated you from the peoples. Leviticus 20 verse 24. So there are all these laws about morality and about ethics and about worship and about integrity in the way that people are to live as God's people.

And then God says at the end of Leviticus 20, I am going to give you these laws about food and some other things as well. You are to consider some of these things clean and others unclean that you can't eat and you are therefore to keep yourself separate from the pagans around about you. It was rather like God was giving them a badge to wear that said remember you are a people holy to the Lord. Some of our young folk today wear badges don't they? Little bracelets that say WWJD. What would Jesus do? Well that's what God was giving his people Israel in these laws. A bracelet like that in and of itself doesn't do anything for you but it reminds you doesn't it?

[19 : 09] Who you are who you belong to who you're living for how you're to live for him. And that's what the food laws did for God's people Israel. Every time you even thought about having a meal you were made to think about the fact that you were called to be God's holy people.

You remembered God's word be holy for I am holy. So at least three times a day that command would register in your mind. Not a bad thing is it?

That's why we as Christians give thanks for our food when we eat it not to somehow bless the food and make it different but to give thanks to God our Father who gives us all things to remind us of our debt of gratitude to him.

And things that marked out people the people of Israel as separate also helped to keep them separate from the polluting and the perverting power of the pagan world round about them. And they needed that.

Of course they did. Because although God called them to be holy nevertheless they were still human weren't they? And they were open to all kinds of temptations and if you read through the Old Testament you'll find that again and again they were tempted to go astray and live the way of pagans.

[20 : 21] And so these rules as one writer puts it built a wall around God's people to protect them to keep them pure and intact as a people holy to the Lord to keep them as the people of the one true God in a world full of sin and corruption and perversity.

Now you might say to yourself well I can see that but it seems a bit overkill surely it's surely blanket rules that totally separated the people from others like that. Why could that be so good?

Well sometimes blanket rules are necessary aren't they? What do we say to our young children? Never ever talk to strangers or get in a car with them or let them give you sweets.

Isn't that right? A blanket rule and it's a good necessary rule to protect them isn't it? Why do we make that blanket rule? Not because every adult is likely to harm our child and take them away and kidnap them?

Of course not. But alas some might do that. So we need to protect them. But of course there comes a time when our children grow up and if they're in their twenties and they've never ever talked to a stranger in their life well they've kind of had an arrested development haven't they?

[21 : 42] Of course they can of course they must talk to strangers because otherwise they'll never have any friends. of course the basic point of that command is still the same isn't it?

We don't want our grown up daughters to just go off with any old person do we? But of course grown up practice of that principle is going to look a little bit different for that new stage than it did when they were two or three or four years old.

Now that's the issue here. You see to understand God's law we have to understand the story of God's people. It's a story from infancy through adulthood to maturity because that's how the Bible speaks about the unfolding history of God's great salvation.

Paul uses precisely that language in Galatians chapter three and four. He says that before Christ came God's people Israel were like a child under tutelage under the guardianship of God through his laws given by Moses.

And a big part of that was because of the necessary preservation of a pure people so that at last in the fullness of the time the promised Christ would come.

[22 : 53] Not only says Paul to redeem those who are under the law the people of Israel but also those who from all nations in Christ become the offspring of Abraham. They're all one in Christ Jesus says Paul as the true Israel of God.

There's no longer any Jew or Gentile. He says the same in Ephesians chapter two. Christ he says has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility so that Gentiles now also can be holy with God's people.

They can be fellow citizens and saints, holy ones, members of the household of God. Jesus has broken down the wall because the purpose of Israel has been now fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God's servant people have at last brought forth the saving servant, the Messiah Jesus. And the salvation that is of the Jews as Jesus himself says it's now come to the whole world.

That's why when you read the gospels you'll see that Jesus himself abolished as it were the food laws, Mark 7 verse 19. Or rather they ceased to be needed because he had fulfilled them.

[24 : 08] he'd fulfilled the very purpose for which they were created because they provided the womb of a distinct and holy people through whom the Messiah at last would come.

And now that he had come there was no place for them anymore. But of course Jesus didn't ever reject the concept of holiness in God's people.

He didn't ever reject the actual principle that these laws were given in order to protect. Far from it. As I said, read the Sermon on the Mount. He pointed now to a far greater and deeper holiness in every single area of worship or morality than you can possibly think of.

As did his apostles. If you read Paul in Galatians 5 and 6, what does he say? He is emphatic. Circumcision or uncircumcision counts for nothing.

What matters is faith, working through love. What matters is that you are a new creation, walking according to this rule, fulfilling, he says, the law of Christ.

[25 : 15] And if you read what he says about what walking according to that rule means, walking in the holiness of the Spirit, it's still the same calling as ever. Be holy for I am holy.

Not, says Paul, in sexual immorality and impurity and sensuality and envy and drunkenness and dissension, but rather in love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control.

That's the fruit of those who walk in the Spirit as God's holy people. Radical holiness is still the calling of God's people. But it's not a holiness that keeps out.

It's a holiness that reaches out to draw in. It removes the barriers and allows others to become God's people too. You see, that was very, very important for Peter and the others to learn because the Jews often had become rather proud and superior in their thinking.

Just as many Christians have likewise become very proud and superior in theirs. God's good laws that mark out his people are easily corrupted, aren't they?

[26 : 30] Because we're sinful. But no, you're only holy, says God, because God has called you to be holy whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. And that's the point now. He is calling people from every nation to belong to his one new holy people in Christ.

That's vitally important. One new holy people in Christ. The wall coming down wasn't so that holiness didn't matter anymore.

It wasn't so that God's previously holy people could become filthy and disgusting just like the Gentiles ignoring all God's laws and morality. It was quite the reverse. The wall came down so that those unholy pagan outsiders could now come in and become part of God's holy covenant people who live as God's holy people.

And the separation unto holiness that these markers signified in the Old Testament times is now the calling of all people and all the Gentiles.

It's not that God's Israel joins a pagan world of unholiness but that they can join the holy world of God's one true people. That's why some people today get very, very confused.

[27 : 45] They're totally back to front. When they say, oh well, we can just disregard a few obscure texts in the book of Leviticus about sexual practice for example.

It doesn't matter anymore because you can eat prawns and do what you like. No! It's because the food laws are no longer a barrier that all the world is called to live according to the holiness of the way of the one true God.

Paul says to the Athenians in Acts 17 these times of ignorance God overlooked but now he calls all people everywhere to repent. So that is a big change a real change that God's signaling to the world in Peter's dream because it's the fulfillment of what these laws meant at their deepest level all the time.

it was all about how such people could be made holy in God's sight and Peter bless him at last he gets it. Do you see verse 28? God has shown me that I shouldn't call any person clean common or unclean.

He says I understand it this whole food thing what it was about it's all about which people God can call holy and I can see that he's saying that we're to call all people without distinction to become God's holy people Israel.

[29 : 14] Look at verse 34 it says the same again God shows no partiality from every nation not just from the Jews everyone who fears him and does right is acceptable they're justified they're declared holy in the sight of God.

But notice this is very important notice again what he's not saying he's not saying that to truly fear God and do what is right can happen without faith in Jesus Christ he's not saying that a fine pious respectable good man a soldier like Cornelius doing all that he can religiously doesn't need evangelism it's the opposite isn't it?

Just as the pious honorable Jew Nicodemus must be born again said Jesus so this pious honorable Gentile soldier though God fearing must find Jesus Christ personally he needs to be brought into the full light of Jesus Christ now it leads to the second thing God opens the way through preparation of his people but the Lord also leads to the truth through the proclamation of his people in mission to all people a proclamation that offers the same common message of salvation through Jesus Christ because he alone must make people holy and cleanse them even good and kind and pious wonderful men like Cornelius notice again the emphasis verse 34 God shows no partiality there is one way to true holiness and to true salvation one way only whether you're highbrow or lowbrow

whether you're a seeker or whether you're a rebel against Christ whether you're a civilian or whether you're a soldier maybe a different approach perhaps

Peter does deal a little differently with Cornelius than he did for example with Simon the sorcerer remember with Simon the sorcerer he immediately called him to repentance for his outright wickedness here it's different Cornelius is already a man seeking repentance but Peter leads him to the one who alone can give him that but it's the proclamation isn't it of the same message the same Jesus Christ that Cornelius and his household here to be saved just as all the other Jews heard to be saved notice just three things about this gospel proclamation first of all verses 37 to 41 I hope you can see he preaches the events of history Peter preaches the Jesus of history he tells us about his life his beauty his good works that's important isn't it because any seriously good person like Cornelius they're bound to be drawn aren't they to the goodness of Jesus Christ Mahatma Gandhi do you remember was drawn to the goodness the works of the Lord

Jesus Christ but not only does Peter preach that fact of history he also preaches his death at the hands of the Romans and the Jews notice and he preaches verse 41 his resurrection as a historical fact that they were witnesses to we could say much more about all of that but the gospel is first of all about the events of real history our faith is a historical faith second though Peter preaches not only the events of history but also the explanation of the apostles verse 42 history is not enough you see we have to say well what does it mean well it means says Peter what Jesus himself says it means when he verse 42 commanded us to teach it what did he command two clear things look at verse 42 Jesus commanded us to preach that he

[33 : 21] Jesus is the judge of all Jew and Gentile of the living and the dead notice that that's very interesting isn't it the very heart of the New Testament gospel what Jesus commanded the apostles to go out and preach is to say this I will come again and judge this world secondly verse 43 he commanded them to preach that Jesus also is the saviour of all who believe everyone who believes in his name receives forgiveness of sins through his name that's what all the prophets of the Old Testament promise says Peter do you see that all the prophets pointed to him isn't that a striking thing the Old Testament is all about the message of the forgiveness that comes in the coming of Jesus the Messiah and in the New Testament the message is all about the judgment that comes in the second coming of Jesus the Messiah it's the reverse isn't it of what people so often think of the Old

Testament is all about judgment and God's anger the New Testament oh it's about love not here according to what Peter says Jesus told them to preach first of all that he is coming to judge the living and the dead he's the judge of all but go back to your Bibles he says because he's the savior of all who will believe our faith is a historical faith it's about real events but it's also an apostolic faith it's revealed in apostolic explanation but thirdly Peter preaches about the experience of the spirit must be a personal faith he says in verse 43 it's for everyone who believes it is a historic gospel it is an apostolic gospel but it must become a personal gospel even for wonderfully good men like this soldier Cornelius God shows no partiality except men from every nation who fear

God and do what is right but to fear God and do what is right means believing in Jesus Christ the judge of all the earth and the only savior of those who believe that's the truth that God leads Cornelius to through the proclamation of his apostle Peter God opens the way God leads to the truth but finally the Lord himself imparts life and he gives therefore proof to his people that his mission is to all peoples because he gives them obviously the same common experience of salvation that the Holy Spirit of Jesus had also given to them verse 44 do you see while Peter was still saying these things these words the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word you see the power of God does not accompany the preaching of the gospel the gospel is the power of God for salvation he speaks as Charles

Wesleyan listening to his voice new life the dead receive and when the gospel is proclaimed as Peter did to God's people the voice of Jesus Christ himself is heard that's what Paul says in Romans 10 how can they believe in him whom they have not heard believing comes by hearing the voice of Christ calling you and how can they hear he says without someone preaching Peter preaches his own words but through it Christ speaks his own word and he imparts life and it's unequivocal verse 46 says it can't be denied it amazes the Jewish Christians that these pagan Gentiles are blessed with an exact replica of what happened on the day of Pentecost the exact same experience of being filled by the Spirit can't be denied says Peter verse 47 Jesus has welcomed these pagans into his family so how can we not do the same says

Peter and welcome them into the church of Jesus Christ the true Israel of God and so they're baptized welcome to the church you see what Luke is telling us he's telling us that faith in Jesus is the only way to real forgiveness that's what verse 43 says forgiveness comes through belief in him much more than that even an apparent saint like Cornelius must find forgiveness that way but also it is the complete and perfect way to real sainthood to holiness to full acceptance with God nothing else is needed not circumcision they weren't not special food and dietary laws they didn't keep them nothing else than the new life that comes from the spirit of Jesus Christ when his voice is heard and when it's responded to in faith people from any nation any background who shows that they are truly fearing God by buying the knee to the

[39 : 02] Lord Jesus Christ and declaring him to be Lord of all and that's what it meant that the wall had come down in Jesus Christ who has always been Lord of all and certainly will therefore be the judge of all he can now also be the saviour of all not automatically of course not the saviour of all without exception even a Cornelius must believe and find forgiveness in his name alone and yet all without distinction who do believe can come in whatever their race whatever their religious past or social past or sexual past or any other kind of past and God proves it he did that day and the proof is all around us today in this church and in churches all around the world in the new life that he alone can give wherever this historic apostolic and personal gospel is proclaimed let me close with just three short implications for us today what happened that day means for us forevermore first of all it's a warning to God's people

God has opened the way clearly and unequivocally for his people to take the gospel to all peoples of this world all can be made holy through Jesus Christ but all must be made holy only through Jesus Christ there is no other way even for fine good religious soldiers like Cornelius and therefore it's a warning to us let no one seek to close that door that Christ has opened let no one seek to rebuild that wall that he has broken down don't dare mercy in the church of Jesus Christ there is no place for evangelizing people of other religions or cultures they don't need Jesus Christ they are already religious they are Hindus or Jews or Muslims or Sikhs or whatever else that is to destroy what God has done in breaking down the wall it's to call unclean what he has purposed to be clean and likewise don't dare ever think in the church as long as we are holy as long as we stay undefiled in our holy huddle we can leave the pagan world to do its own thing go says God to Peter without hesitation because I want them to meet the Lord

Jesus Christ it's a warning second it's an encouragement God will and does lead people to full light in the truth of Jesus Christ and there are seekers like Cornelius good kind religious people people seeking the good all around the world in every culture every nation and God knows just how to bring messengers to them to lead them into full light of Christ and our part is to listen to Jesus we are to go and when we find them we are to tell them about the Christ who commanded us to tell them about his historic apostolic personal gospel the gospel of Jesus the judge who can also be your savior it's an encouragement and finally it gives us confidence that the Lord does and will impart life full and free and prove himself to us to be the author of life for all who believe he'll do it as the gospel is spoken and heard and as the voice of Jesus himself is heard and calls people into the joy of eternal life in him just as he did that day just as he did for us he'll amaze us constantly the people upon whom he delights to pour out his spirit all because the walls have come down forever all barriers have been removed forever and

Jesus is welcoming a people from every tribe and tongue and nation into his true family and what God has made clean don't ever ever dare to call common not even yourself you feel deeply within there's some reason that would cause you to be unclean in his sight that's to be at odds with God broken down the wall if he has cleansed you you're cleansed indeed and no one can unclean you I don't think that about anybody else either he has welcomed into his precious family the wall has come down in the death that Jesus died so says Luke the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the

Gentiles I guess that's most of us sitting in this church today not all of us but praise God he prepares the way he leads to the truth and that he has and does and will give life let's pray we thank you our gracious God for the abundant mercy of your wonderful plan that led your people through all the ages until the great day came when Christ the Messiah at last walked this earth we praise you that in him every wall that would divide every person in this world from you has been broken down and destroyed the way is open and your voice is calling we pray that every one of us would be like Cornelius who despite all that he had and was knew that he had and was nothing until he

found grace abundant through the gospel of the
[45 : 38] Lord Jesus Christ may every one of us here this morning we pray with joy as he did find
the life that can be found in him alone for we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen