

The Gospel Goes to All

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[0 : 0 0] We turn out our reading and in the book of Acts, so Acts chapter 10, and you'll find that on page 918, 918, if you're using one of the church visitor Bibles.

Acts chapter 10, and we're reading from verse 1, picking up the story with Peter. Last week he was healing Aeneas and Dorcas, and we pick up the story.

He's been staying with Simon the Tanner. We read that in verse 43 of chapter 9, and we pick up the story in chapter 10, 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 arms 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 arms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon, who is called Peter.

[1 : 3 1] 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. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the house stop 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.

[2 : 4 1] 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 to be his guests. 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 worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up, I too am a man.

[4 : 11] And as he talked with them, 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 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 asked 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 arms 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 Atana 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've been commanded by the Lord. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality.

[5 : 23] 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 the 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 judge 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.

[6 : 40] 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. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, please do turn back to Acts chapter 10. Give you a moment to do that. Acts chapter 10.

The chapter we read earlier. Now this passage is the answer to a question that you and I don't really ask.

[7 : 51] For us, the answer seems so obvious. The question seems to us to be a moot one. But it certainly wasn't at the time. The question is, is the gospel really for everyone?

And more specifically, is the gospel for the Gentile as well as the Jew? And the answer this passage gives is emphatically yes. In this passage, a major, major barrier to the spread of the gospel is dismantled.

The age-old but always temporary wall between Jew and Gentile is brought crashing down. This really is a monumental passage, and the implications of which you and I perhaps take for granted.

But without the events of these verses, if this didn't happen, then human history would look very different indeed. Most of us wouldn't be here.

Chapter 10 of Acts is the key movement, the key moment in the movement of the unstoppable gospel as it continues its spread according to Jesus' agenda that he set back there in chapter 1, verse 8 of the book.

[9 : 04] Now, the gospel has, by this point in the book, been well established in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria. We've seen that in recent chapters. But now, as a result of what we read earlier, the gospel really starts to make inroads to the Gentile world.

The gospel proclaimed to the ends of the earth. And we learn in this passage that the barriers that have been permanently removed.

We learn that it's the very same gospel that's preached to Gentiles that was preached to the Jews. And we learn that there is only one people of God. These are major lessons, major lessons for Theophilus, who first read this to learn, and things for us to grapple with.

So we'll look at it in three sections. We'll look at, firstly, verses 1 to 33. God's gospel servant prepared. And we learn in this section that the barriers have been permanently removed.

Now, by the end of this section, verse 33, we have Peter in Cornelius' house where he's been invited to share with those gathered.

[10 : 20] He's been invited to share the gospel. And Peter is willing to do it. That is a major barrier that has been overcome. Peter has now come to understand that the barrier between Jew and Gentile has now been permanently removed.

And we see all this through two key individuals. Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, and Peter, the apostle. And both go through something of a transformation, a conversion, to some degree.

Cornelius, although he's a good man, he's not a saved man at the start of this chapter. But by God's grace, as he hears the gospel proclaimed, he responds in repentance and he's baptized.

And Peter, likewise, goes through something of a journey. His understanding at the outset is that there is a clear distinction between Jew and Gentile. His understanding was that it was not permissible for Jews to mix with Gentiles.

And so he perceived a major barrier in terms of who he is able to bring the gospel to. But through this chapter, his understanding is totally turned on its head.

[11 : 36] And so we see in this opening section that God is preparing his gospel servant for this huge step forward in the progress of the gospel. So let's look at this. We see in verse 1 to 8 we're introduced to Cornelius.

He lived, as we see there, in Caesarea, which was the center of the Roman administration in the province of Judea. And it was largely a Gentile city.

And Cornelius was a Gentile himself. He was serving in the army. And he was a thoroughly good man. Look at how Luke describes him.

He was a devout man who feared God. He was generous. He prayed. He was a seeker, much like the Ethiopian eunuch that we met a couple of chapters ago, but not yet saved.

But the Lord intervenes and begins to orchestrate events to bring about the pivotal encounter with Peter later in the chapter. In a vision, an angel of the Lord came and spoke with Cornelius and told him to send for the apostle Peter who was staying in Joppa.

[12 : 49] But the question in the back of our minds is would Peter be willing to go? Would Peter be willing to go to this Gentile household? But for the intervention of the Lord, he wouldn't have gone.

He acknowledges as much himself, doesn't he? Look down with me at verse 28 where Peter is addressing Cornelius and those gathered in his home. This is what he says. You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation.

It's a major problem, isn't it, identified by Peter? But look on to what he says next. 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. So there would have been strong reasons for Peter to decline the invitation from Cornelius, but he didn't.

The Lord showed him that it was now okay for him to go and visit with a Gentile. Now what had happened to Peter? What had the Lord shown him that such a major change in thinking had occurred?

[14 : 05] So big barrier, isn't it? Just imagine yourself in Peter's shoes. For your whole life you've known it is not okay to go and sit with Gentiles and eat with them.

That is a major barrier to overcome, isn't it? But here he is, he's willing to go. What has happened? Well, let's look on to verse 9 and following. Cornelius has sent these three men to go and bring Peter and as they're en route, Peter himself sees a vision.

And in the vision he sees this great sheet descending from the heavens and in the sheet were all kinds of animals. And Peter is then given the instruction, rise, kill and eat.

But Peter objects. He says, no, I can't kill and eat these animals. I've never eaten anything unclean or common in my life. Peter's concern here is that he remains holy.

And his understanding, Peter's understanding is rooted in the scriptures that he had been brought up with. And so when the Lord speaks to him, he doesn't rebuke him. But he does press home the implications of the words and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 22] Because in him, in Jesus, all the Old Testament laws to do with food, they find their fulfillment. Things have now changed. And so the voice came to Peter again.

Look at verse 15. What God has made clean, do not call common. What God has made clean, do not call common.

The barrier that once had been put in place by the law between foods deemed clean and unclean has now been removed. three times Peter is given this vision.

And the implications begin to fall into place for Peter. Yes, the Lord had for a time put in place the good but temporary laws to do with food.

What were they there for? Well, they were there to remind God's people that they were holy. They were set apart. They were different because they were God's people.

[16 : 24] And these laws were there to protect them. To protect them from the false religions of the Gentile world. To protect them from the Gentile nations around them. Now there was, of course, nothing wrong with the food itself.

Jesus says as much, doesn't he, in Mark chapter 7. Listen to what Jesus says. Nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean. It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.

But the Lord had given his people these laws to help them be a nation set apart and holy and not like the nations around them. And so that made mixing with the Gentiles quite difficult, didn't it?

If there were all sorts of food they couldn't eat. God had effectively built a wall between Israel and all the Gentiles. But it was this wall that Peter now understood to be dismantled.

That barrier that the Lord had erected had been brought down. David Gooding helpfully explains, he says this, as an Israelite, Peter regarded himself by definition as holy because he was a member of the holy nation and because he kept the ceremonial food laws.

[17 : 48] Gentiles, on the other hand, he understood to be common because they were not members of the holy nation. He regarded them as unclean. And it was that situation that Peter now understood to have been changed.

If God cancelled all those prohibitions on food and pronounced all foods clean, then Gentiles were no longer unclean because they ate certain foods that had changed.

So if God was now doing away with Israel's special privilege, destroying that wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, then the Gentiles were no longer common by definition, nor the Israelites totally by definition.

Jew and Gentile now stood alike on the same platform. It had all slowly but surely clicked into place for Peter.

The Lord is showing him the implications of the work of Jesus. All that Jesus came to do and fulfill, the Lord is helping Peter to understand. And so he now knows, he's able to say that he should not regard any category of persons as common or unclean.

[19 : 01] He was therefore free to visit with those from a Gentile nation. He was free to visit with Cornelius to eat with him and ultimately to share the gospel with him. So what makes somebody clean or holy?

It isn't what food they eat, but rather it's their attitude towards the living God. do they listen to him? Do they submit to him?

And by faith do they walk with him? Whether they're Jew or Gentile, that is the thing that matters. And this, as we've seen, is a major moment of breakthrough.

It's so big in Luke's understanding that he repeats this account three times. Here, again in chapter 11 and then again in chapter 15. it is a monumental, groundbreaking, foundational shift in understanding to grasp that the barriers that have been permanently removed, to know that there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile, to then take the gospel to the Gentiles, that is huge.

That is a big, big moment in the book of Acts. And we perhaps today take that for granted. It takes quite a bit of thought to think yourself into Peter's shoes, doesn't it?

[20 : 23] We understand instinctively that the gospel is for the Gentiles. Most of us here, I would think, are Gentile in origin. Most of us have Gentile roots. So this was a big shift in understanding for Peter and for the apostles.

So we need to remember, we need to remember the fundamental lesson that the Lord was teaching Peter here. You see, the Lord, he doesn't make a distinction.

He doesn't make a distinction between certain classes or categories of people. All have fallen short of the glory of God. All need salvation.

And we are to go to all nationalities, all classes, all sorts of people and share with them the gospel. There is no distinction. And so, although at first glance we may think this doesn't really apply to us because, well, we understand that the gospel is for all, but do we really have categories in our own thinking?

Are there particular groups of people that we perhaps write off? People that we wouldn't go to? Places we wouldn't visit? Are there certain folk that we would unwittingly deem unclean?

[21 : 42] Or to put it another way, are there certain people we have so clearly fixed in our evangelistic sites that we miss others? Are we so focused on one group that we miss others?

Do we miss the unexpected sort of folk, the people who are eager to hear the gospel, who, like Cornelius, are searching and ready to respond?

See, Cornelius is so eager, isn't he? He's searching, he's looking, he's inviting Peter, he brings all his friends and relatives to come and hear. So, we too are to be on the lookout for the eager.

No matter what class or category of person they might be, we're to look for the hungry. And they may not be the sorts of people that we would naturally want to sit down with and share the gospel with.

I don't suppose that Peter was initially all that comfortable with the Lord asking him to do this. But he did it. He was willing to go.

[22 : 48] Once his understanding had been shifted, he was able to set aside those prejudices, set that lifetime of understanding aside and go to Cornelius' house to meet with him, to eat with him, to share the gospel with him.

So, it's a challenge in terms of thinking who do we reach out to with the gospel? Are there certain categories we've unwittingly ruled out?

But it's a challenge not just in terms of who we want to reach out to but also how we view ourselves. Peter came to understand that certain categories of people weren't just by belonging to that category somehow automatically saved.

He knew that because he was a Jew he didn't automatically make him one of the Lord's people. He understood now that Jew and Gentile were on the same level.

There is no room for boasting or pride. And for us today, just subscribing to a certain label that counts for nothing. Just referring to yourself under the label of Reformed Presbyterian or Evangelical or Sound, that doesn't count for anything.

[24 : 03] Because all people in all places must come in order to be welcomed into the family of God. They must come to the same place. They all must come to the foot of the cross because all of us by our nature are sinners in need of a savior.

All of us need to be forgiven on the same terms. Faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sin and rose again. And that leaves nothing for us to boast in.

But only everything to rejoice in together. All of us are on the same footing on our own terms, aren't we? We all need the grace that is found only in Jesus.

Well, there's the first thing. And it is a massive step. God's gospel servant is prepared. He comes to learn that the barriers between Jew and Gentile are now removed.

He can go to the Gentiles and sit with them and eat with them. And then let's look on then to what happens as Peter speaks with Cornelius and his household. So look on to verse 34 to 43.

[25 : 14] God's gospel sermon is preached. And we learn here it's the very same gospel that was preached to the Jews. Peter begins by reiterating the understanding he's now come to.

Look at verses 34 and 35. He says, 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.

So he's just reiterating what he's come to understand. God shows no partiality. And he knows that although God had given the people of Israel a special and a distinct role, it was always his intention that through Israel all the nations would be blessed.

It's just as Willie was reading at the very start from Isaiah. That great day when all nations would be gathered to the Lord's mountain. That was always in view. And Peter has clearly grasped this.

He knows that God doesn't show any favoritism. The gospel is for all people in all nations. And so it is the very same gospel message that Peter proclaims to Cornelius and all those he's gathered around in his home.

[26 : 28] It's the same gospel. It's a message of good news through peace found only in Jesus Christ. Look at what he says here. Look at what he tells the people there.

He talks about Jesus who has been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. He went about doing good and healing in the country of the Jews in Jerusalem. But staggeringly the Jews put Jesus to death.

But God raised him. Peter says many of us are witness of this. We ate with him after the fact. And he commanded us to go and preach to the people to testify that he is the one appointed to be judged.

And that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins. So Peter he preaches the very same gospel he's preached everywhere he's been so far.

It's the same gospel that he preached to the Jews. Just listen to the conclusion of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost from Acts chapter 2. Here's what he said then. He says repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

[27 : 43] Look what he says here in chapter 10 verse 43. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Same gospel. Same call to repent. And the gospel it remains the same no matter who you're speaking to. No matter where you are.

And Peter had immediately grasped that hadn't he? Once he understood that God had removed the old barrier between Jew and Gentile once he understood that God shows no partiality he understood that all must hear the same gospel about the Lord Jesus Christ about his life his death his resurrection because he is Lord of all.

Jesus Christ Lord of all not just the Jews but all. And the gospel that you and I are to take to the people we know is the very same gospel that Peter took to Cornelius.

It was the gospel message that Cornelius needed to hear and to respond to. Yes Cornelius was undoubtedly a good man he was a seeker but he still needed to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and be forgiven and Cornelius knew that.

[29 : 04] He knew that despite all that he had and all that he was he knew that more than anything he needed salvation that was found only in Jesus. And so he repented he acknowledged his sin he sought forgiveness in the abundant mercy of God and he found life.

Cornelius found life abundant life. And so you and I we can't allow our judgments of other people to cloud our perception of their fundamental needs.

I imagine if I had met Cornelius I would have thought yeah you're a good guy just crack on as you are but no he needed to hear the gospel. And so if you and I the nicest person you know if they haven't received Christ as their saviour they need to.

If Cornelius did a man who enjoyed a stellar reputation who was generous even religious then they must too. But we also can't allow our self-perception to be clouded either.

We need to see ourselves through the lens of Peter's gospel which is Paul's gospel which is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only gospel with real hope because it's the only gospel that deals with our real problem.

[30 : 31] It's the only gospel that really grapples with the reality of the human condition. All have sinned all fall short of the glory of God all must find forgiveness in Jesus' name.

All of us no matter our reputation our status we need our sins forgiven in Jesus Christ if we're to belong to God's family and enjoy life everlasting.

That is the only way. So be sure this evening be sure that you're clear on that. Be sure tonight that you are clear on the gospel.

If you're not clear then you need to get clear. This very evening speak to someone speak to me speak to the person next to you. If you've not responded to the call of the gospel in Jesus Christ then you must.

It's what Cornelius did and it's what I must urge you to do tonight as well. And it is a gospel as we see that Cornelius gladly accepts.

[31 : 38] That's clear from the final section. It's the same gospel that's proclaimed and it's the same spirit that is poured out. Verses 44 to 48. God's gospel spirit is poured out.

We learn that there is one people of God. Look there at verse 44. While Peter was still saying all 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.

You see God is doing just what he said he would do. And those with Peter they're amazed as they see this happening. The Lord has made clear to Peter that the old barriers are now dismantled.

He was now free to sit with them to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles and he's just done that. He has said to them just what he said to the Jews in Jerusalem. He's made the same appeal to repent and to be forgiven of sin.

[32 : 48] And God now pours out on these Gentiles the same Holy Spirit that he poured out at Pentecost on the Jews. The same Holy Spirit that he poured out on the half-Jews the Samaritans in chapter 8.

The very same gift of the Spirit. And so the point is clear. There is now only one people of God. No distinction.

No barriers. No categories. Just one people of God. And so God proves, doesn't he, without doubt, that there is one people of God.

The barriers have been removed. Jesus has welcomed these Gentiles into the family of God on the basis, not of their background, but on their response to his word, their response of faith.

That is, that is the only thing that matters. And so it's clear, isn't it, as we read this, God makes no distinction.

[33 : 48] all need to submit to Jesus, all need to believe in him, to receive forgiveness of sins. And all that do, all that respond in faith, trusting in Jesus, they will be welcomed in, they will be given the gift of the Spirit in them.

And so for each of us here tonight, the question is, have you heard, have you responded to the call of Jesus in the gospel? He calls all people, everywhere.

He makes no distinction, no person, no group of people, no type of personality, no color of skin is beyond the reach of the gospel.

There is no distinction. Nothing holds anyone back from knowing Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Nothing is stopping anyone.

apart from their own refusal to repent and turn to him. That is the only barrier. Our own pride, our own refusal to recognize what God makes plain, that we're sinners in need of salvation.

[35 : 05] You see, the great encouragement from this passage is that all who respond to that call, all will be gladly accepted. It's the wonderful news at the heart of this passage.

Even the Gentiles, even Cornelius and those gathered, and many, many millions of Gentiles since. That is the great joyful note of this passage.

The gospel is exploding out from Jerusalem, from Judea, from Samaria to the end of the earth. It's going. It's gone. We've seen that over the centuries.

So have you accepted? Is your voice alongside many millions of others? But do you also, do you tell others of this same gospel?

Those you rub shoulders with, no matter who they are, no matter their background, their lifestyle, nothing prevents them from hearing the gospel?

[36 : 10] Because there is no barrier. There is only one gospel. There is only one people of God. And he delights to welcome into his family all.

All are welcome. And that is a wonderful thing, isn't it? To God be the glory. Great things he's done. Great things he is doing.

And great things he will yet do. And as his gospel goes, to the ends of the earth. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for the implications of this passage, which we so often take for granted. God's love. What an extraordinary thing for Peter to say.

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.

[37 : 19] So, Father, give us voice to rejoice in that truth. You show no partiality, but all who call upon your name will be welcomed. And so, Lord, you help us to be a people that rejoice to bring that gospel to the nations, that we would be a people that make no distinction.

Help us, Lord, in that task. How quickly we write people off, how quickly we look to those who we think will be receptive. Lord, open our eyes to the eager, open our eyes to the hungry, and may we be willing vessels with your gospel.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.