

Introduction: The story of Peter we'll look at today naturally leads from his statement about race to a story when Peter learned the lessons of racial reconciliation decades before.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Now he tells them God has laid a precious corner stone—the entire edifice of the body of Christ is built on the foundation stone of Jesus the messiah. **Jesus is a stone that makes men stumble—it is a rock of offense.**

- Crucified men were slaves and brigands—usually the worst kind of revolutionaries.
- Resurrection was for the Jewish nation as a whole—and the notion that it had already begun in one person from Palestinian Nazareth no less, was absurd.

Listen—the success of the gospel of Jesus is a miracle. There is no objective identifiable reason why this message would have taken hold in a culture that was hostile to it.

Jewish hostilities were due to their extreme aversion to a message that welcomed all Men of every ethnicity under heaven. They were the chosen race in Abraham. Royal Priesthood, Holy nation, A special possession.

Transition: How did an ethnic Jew, a man proud of his Abrahamic lineage; a man who struggled with his own biases and bigotry—A man who was taught from childhood that Jews do not associate with gentiles.

How did he overcome this to have such a warm, friendly and outreaching disposition toward people of all races and ethnic backgrounds?

If Peter had **not overcome this**, you and I wouldn't be here today.

Now, Peter had a tough time learning the lesson of ethnic reconciliation.

- He and the other disciples urged Jesus to send away a Canaanite woman who's daughter was possessed.

Series: God of All Grace
Message: A Chosen Race / 1 Peter 2:6-10 / Jeff Kennedy

- They followed Jesus to a Samaritan village. Samaritans had no dealing with Jews and Jews none with Samaritans. Deep divisions of racial tension existed for hundreds of years between these groups. And Jesus told the Samaritan woman the truth, he showed her mercy and her entire village put their faith in Him.
- Peter was there when Jesus gave the disciples the command to go and make disciples of all ethnicities.
- He was there when Jesus told them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the earth.
- And now God is personally challenging Peter's ethnic and cultural biases and prejudice.

God finally cured Peter of his ethnic snobbery in one decisive encounter.

Acts chapter 10.

The story takes place in III acts...

Act I: 10:1-7 Cornelius' Vision: “There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.”

Cornelius is a high-ranking Roman Centurion who commands the Italian regiment. He has a soft spot for Jews and Israeli religion. He has chosen to worship the Jewish God and a life of patronage/sponsorship towards Jews.

This, naturally gets God's attention. And God sees his benevolence and worship as a memorial to his chosen people—the Hebrews. Sends an angel to tell him, v. 5 “Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” Then servants are sent to find this man named Shimon/Peter.

- Caesarea 33 miles north of Joffa. A gentile coastal town, Joffa a Jewish coastal town.
- The Italian regiment was about 1000 soldiers.

Act II: 10:9-16 Peter's Vision: Meanwhile... Peter goes up to a rooftop to pray while a meal is being prepared for him and Luke says “He fell into a trance.” He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. ¹² In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. ¹³ A voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ “No, Lord!” Peter said. “For I have never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean.” ¹⁵ Again, a second time, the voice said to him, “What God has made clean, do not call impure.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and suddenly the object was taken up into heaven.

Act III: 10:17-30 The Reconciliation: The two men sent to find Peter finally locate him, the Spirit tells Peter to go with the men. The next day they set out to go to the home of Roman Centurion Cornelius. When they arrive, Cornelius is overwhelmed at Peter's presence and leads him to the house where they are waiting to hear what he has to say. In anticipation of Peter's arrival to fulfill the vision—Cornelius has summoned all of his household.

This would have included his servants and their families; his children; his in-laws and everyone he can get the word out to.

Luke says there was a large crowd gathered—assembled to hear the message Peter was bringing.

Upon Arriving: 10:26 Peter said to them, “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean.”

Notice the direction of Peter’s prejudices. They come *from his laws*. They come from Jewish Pharisaic traditions, which have screened out that mass of passages where the OT Jew is commanded to make room for and welcome the foreigner. Peter has been taught in this 2nd Temple Judaism to draw hard lines between himself and those impure unclean, unsavory Gentile wretches.

What do we learn is God's project to reconcile men back to himself and to harmony with each other?

1. The Church is the one place where we can hear the truth on these matters.

It's the Church that has been entrusted with His life-changing revelation of the Good News in Christ.

1 Tim. 3:15 "I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

I heard a celebrity this last week, in addressing the George Floyd tragedy—make the claim that his craft, his particular artform, was the last place in America where the truth can be told.

No it isn't.

The church is. This is the place where the truth about race relations can be proclaimed.

Acts 10:39 We ourselves are witnesses of everything he did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem **(historical Jesus)**, and yet they killed him by hanging him on a tree **(Crucifixion)**.⁴⁰ God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen **(resurrection)**,⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses **(first hand eye-witness testimony)**, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead **(bodily resurrection)**.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead **(final judgment for sin; justification for the righteous)**⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." **(the Gospel according to the Scriptures—Jesus is the fulfillment of past promises).**

Proverbs 14:25 "A truthful witness rescues lives, but one who utters lies is deceitful."

The truth:

- *Every person is made in God's image.*
- *Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard.*
- *God desires that all men everywhere come to the knowledge of the truth and salvation.*

If you don't know those three truths as foundational—you *haven't even started to get on the map* of how to fix anything that ails our culture.

2. Salvation is from the Jews but it is for the world.

God doesn't play favorites among the nations. All nations and ethnicities are welcomed into the family of God. Now, after Cornelius—this Roman Gentile—recalls the vision God gave him of finding Peter so that he could hear the message of salvation which is for the nations...

³⁴ Peter began to speak: “Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism, ³⁵ but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ **He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.**”

Now, to be clear, Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. He is the fulfillment of Abraham's promise that through Abe's faith God would bless the nations. God would coalesce a people from every tribe speaking every tongue on earth. We have adoption as sons. We have sonship that leads to heavenly glory. We have heavenly glory that leads to new creation—resurrected bodies and a resurrected, restored world.

3. God desires to heal the whole world by healing the individual.

Acts 10:37 “You know the events that took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the devil, because God was with him.”

Luke 4: “The spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me.”

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair And they will be called righteous trees, planted by the LORD to glorify him. ⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will restore the former devastations; they will renew the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

The focus of this prophecy of the anointed Messiah who comes is to fix the man before you fix the world.

Illus. You fix the man, you put the world back together. The little boy was asked how he so quickly solved the puzzle of fixing the world—he answered, “Oh easy daddy. I realized there was a picture of a man and woman on the other side. So, I just put taped the people back together, flipped it over and I fixed the world.

The Spirit of God anointing Jesus of Nazareth to bring Good News to the impoverished—spiritually bankrupt.

To heal the brokenhearted—those heartbroken over injustice and the pain of a culture without law.

To announce Jubilee—Liberty and freedom to the captives and the imprisoned.

To Preach the day of God’s vengeance on injustice.

To comfort those who mourn.

To exchange their ashes for a crown of beauty—their mourning for the oil of gladness.

Planted like oak trees—unmovable, unshakable—resilient in their faith.

Rebuild what was destroyed and left in ruins.

4. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to everyone.

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message.

⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because **the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.** ⁴⁶ **For they heard them speaking in tongues** and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

So here we have a historically disenfranchised group of Jews; who have suffered oppression, slavery, occupation, maltreatment—and mass execution on Galilean hillsides—this Jewish man who has every reason naturally, to hate his fellow man; to despise his very existence; to harbor anger, resentment, hatred—and God cures him permanently of his bias. God sets him free by showing him that He accepts all men, regardless of their race, their nationality, their wealth, their position of power or lack thereof.

And the Roman whose very position as a Centurion no less—his very position in life is representative of the historic disenfranchisement of the Hebrew people—he receives the gift of the Spirit.

Before God can convert Cornelius to a believer in Jesus he must first convert Peter to a believer in racial reconciliation.

God must challenge Peter's inherent, culturally conditioned biases against Gentiles and Romans.

Paul, who himself was a zealous Jewish rabbinic student came to realize this in Christ. Writing to the Ephesians who were representative of some of the sickest, most cultic cultures in all of Greece—Paul says this...

Eph. 2:11-21

So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” **(that’s a slur, a pejorative)** which is done in the flesh by human hands. ¹² At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world **(because you were not a Jew, born into Abraham, given the Mosaic Law).**¹³ But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ **For he is our peace,** who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, ¹⁵ he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, **resulting in peace.** ¹⁶ He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. ¹⁷ He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

John saw a vision of the masses in heaven who have come out of the extreme persecution of Christians:

Rev. 7:9-10

After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God,
who is seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb!

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are **a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises** of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Since we have the truth we need to boldly proclaim it.

Since we, as gentile believers, have been included in God's holy family we need to invite others.

Since the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all peoples let's pray for that very thing.