

Opening Scripture: Acts 11:16-18 [Peter replied to the Jerusalem leaders] “I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’¹⁷ If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?”¹⁸ When they heard this they became silent. And they glorified God, saying, “So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.”

Introduction: Up to this moment and this story, the Gospel has largely been preached only to Jews or Samaritans (half-breeds). Beginning with the conversion of Cornelius and his extended family network, Gentiles are now granted the grace of repentance and receive the promised Holy Spirit and eternal life in Christ. **The law code of Moses forbade Jews** from engaging in Gentile practices, **normally centered around table fellowship and the dietary laws that governed that fellowship.** After this event in Acts 11, Peter will have to give an account to the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem—and their question is not “How could you baptize a Gentile into our faith?” but “How could eat and share table fellowship with a Gentile household?” This shows us the importance of dietary compliance to the Jewish system. *Circumcision, Sabbath and festival observance, and kosher dietary laws are the three badges of membership in God’s covenant family. To transgress this was to kick yourself out of Covenant compliance.*

Recap: Last Week we learned that Cornelius is a Gentile Roman and a Centurion—likely retired and now openly loyal to the God of Judaism. He has been faithful to lead his family in devotion to the Lord, and has been generous to a fault toward the Jewish people both in prayer and in his finances. While he is praying, an Angel appears to him distinctly, unmistakably in a vision. *Acts 10:4-6 The angel told him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have ascended as a memorial offering before God.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.”* This has certainly gotten God’s attention, what he doesn’t have is God’s salvation.

Meanwhile, God has sent a cryptic vision to Peter who is also praying in a town 35 miles south in Joppa. Peter is hungry so his team prepares a meal for him while he is up on the flat roof praying and seeking Christ. *This weird vision is alarming—because the voice from heaven commands him to violate Torah dietary law.* Something like a sheet bound at four corners is let down of heaven and he sees every kind of creature—from the creepy crawlies to Camels and shellfish—these are “unclean” and “common” creatures that are forbidden. And the voice says, “Go! Kill and eat!” Peter refuses the command (typical Peter) responding, “I’ve never in my life eaten anything impure or ritually unclean.” **The voice replied, “What God has declared clean, do not call unclean.”** This vision is repeated 3 times and Peter is “deeply perplexed”—thinking “What could this vision possibly mean?” While he was pondering the meaning of the vision, the Spirit told him *“Three men are here looking for you.²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and go with them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them.”*

Just then, there is a knock at the door and sure enough the men arrive asking for Peter. They relayed the story and the message from Cornelius and the following morning Peter and his associates (Jewish Christians) travel with these Gentile messengers back to Caesarea.

They arrived to a packed-out villa. Cornelius likely lived in a home that could accommodate up to about 200 people (talk about a house church!). And he has invited his entire extended family and many friends who were sympathetic to his faith. Peter enters the gate and Cornelius overwhelmed in the moment does the only thing a born pagan would know to do—he bows in homage to his new Patron. Peter refuses his worship on the basis that he also is merely a man—a created being.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why have you sent for me?” At this, Cornelius recites the heavenly vision. So now we are all in the presence of God to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord to say to us.

Peter stipulates what everyone already knows (Acts 10:28): 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 he has made impure or unclean.”

At this, Peter begins preaching the Gospel to them.

Let's take a few minutes this morning and observe some of the highlights of Peter's Sermon

1. God's plan was to favor all nations with salvation. Acts 10:34-35 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.

But God had favored Israel and their ancestors in the past. Why?

- **Gen 8:6:** God favored **Noah** "Noah, however, found favor with the Lord."

Between Noah and Abraham, you have what Theologians refer to as "the Great Divorce." God divorcing himself from the idolatrous nations and turning his affections to one nation—Israel.

- **Gen 12:1** God showed favor to **Abraham** and chose him to be the father of many nations.

- **Exod 11:3:** God favored the nation of **Israel** and set them apart as his special possession on earth.

- **Isa 42:6** God promised that the nation of Israel would be a **light to the Gentile** world.

- **Isa 61:1-2** God promised to send an anointed **Messiah** to proclaim the year of the **Lord's favor** to Zion—the house of Israel.

- **Lk 4:16-30** Jesus explicitly quoted the Isa 61 passage and amended it to include the Gentiles as receiving God's saving favor (grace).

- **Matt 28:19-20** After having risen bodily from the dead—Jesus commissioned the Apostles to **make disciples** of all nations—offering God's favor to all the tribes on earth.

- **Lk 24:47** "repentance and the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to **all nations** starting with Jerusalem."

- **Acts 1:8** Jesus told them they would be his **witnesses** to this Gospel of salvation beginning in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria and then to the rest of the entire known world.

God favored Abraham and his lineage so that he could ultimately declare the year of the Lord's acceptable favor to the entire Gentile world.

Paul says in 1 Tim 5:21

I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.

The reason we don't practice favoritism and discrimination in the church is because we serve a God who does not discriminate—he offers his salvation to both Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free.

This was God's plan all along.

2. Peter now understands the plan of salvation.

Acts 10:34 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.” After all that Jesus had taught them in his Great commission in Galilee, his Great Commission in Jerusalem, and his Great Commission in Acts 1:8—*now Peter finally gets it.*

What did Peter understand?

God accepts everyone who believes in Jesus (10:35). It was very common for converted Jews to ask and seek an answer this question of “what must I do for salvation.” The rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” At Pentecost the crowd asks Peter “**What must we do?**”; Saul of Tarsus is told what he must *do* in Acts 9.

Jesus’s Answer: Jn 6:28-29 “What can we do to perform the works of God?” they asked.²⁹ Jesus replied, “This is the work of God—that you believe in the one he has sent.” This statement is high irony. The question is “what is the list of do’s and don’ts that will make us acceptable to God? The answer is, “here’s the list: believe on Jesus.” Jesus’s response is to contrast works and faith.

Peter’s Answer: Acts 2:38 “Repent (turn away from your unbelief; Mk 1:15 Jesus preached, “The Kingdom of God is here; repent and believe) and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Paul wrote in Romans 10 “It’s with your heart that you believe and are made righteous; with your mouth you confess and are saved.

Paul’s Answer: Romans 3:20-23 “For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.²¹ But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets.²² The righteousness of God is through **faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (to those who repent of their unbelief and turn to Christ in belief)** since there is no distinction.²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;²⁴ they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

I want to say clearly, if you are a person who is still striving to be accepted by God through your works, perfectionism, a determined religious-go-getter—you are not only still bound in your sins, you are also burdened by the false hope of religion.

Illus. The Pastoral staffers are going through a biography the life and preaching of perhaps the greatest most gifted preacher in Church history—George Whitefield. What is surprising about Whitefield’s story is that he was originally best friends with Charles and John Wesley. In college at Oxford, he had initially subscribed to the Wesleyan method of austere Christianity—extreme piety and devotion in order to be acceptable and pleasing before God. **It was the pursuit of a perfectionism in devotion that finally drove George Whitefield into the hospital, clinging for life in his body and renouncing the false spiritual life he sought through works of achievement.** Whitefield biographer **Arnold Dallimore** writes,

But now, when there was nothing else that Whitefield could do, God revealed himself in grace and granted Whitefield that which he had learned could never be earned. In utter desperation and in rejection of all self-trust, he cast himself on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and a ray of faith, granted him from above, assured him he would not be cast out.

Whitefield's account of it:

God was pleased to remove the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold of his dear Son by a living faith, and by giving me the Spirit of adoption, to seal me, even to the day of everlasting redemption. O! with what joy—joy unspeakable—even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled when the weight of sin went off it, and an abiding sense of the love of God broke in upon my disconsolate soul! My joys like the springtide overflowing the river banks.”

The question “What must I do” is always an appropriate question. Because there is an answer to that question. And the answer is always surprising to us because we think we must strive and perform and earn his favor —**Salvation is not about what you do for Christ it's about what Christ has *done* on the cross for you.** God accepts everyone from every tribe and every tongue who fears him and does what is right. And the work that is right, the work of God is this—believe on his one and only Son.

Listen, if Luke means to say that Cornelius was already saved because he was doing good works—then there would be no reason for this encounter at all.

What an absolutely marvelous realization Peter has come to? The God who favored Abraham and his lineage has now chosen and anointed a Son who announces God's year of favor through Israel to the whole Gentile world.

3. Peter proclaims the plan of salvation Acts 10:36-43

Peter begins where the Gospel begins—first to the Jew. Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation—first to the Jew then the Gentile.” So Peter begins to recount for them a Jewish Messiah, sent to the Jewish region of Palestine, witnessed by Jewish disciples, all fulfilling the *Hebrew* Scriptures.

A ministry of Israelite reconciliation: ³⁶ He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. **This was first offered to the Jews.**

And then he tells them about...

A historical Jesus: “You know the events that took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism John preached” We’re not talking about merely Jesus as an ideal moral man. Not a phantasm, a hallucination, a mere “Jesus of faith” or a vision. No. Jesus the incarnate Son of God who walked the earth and lived in Galilee, baptized in the Jordan. That Jesus. The Jesus of the Gospels. **There is no gospel apart from the *historical Jesus*—a historic event took place.**

This historical Jesus was...

Confirmed by signs and wonders: ³⁷ “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.” **The word tyranny was used to translate a word that means “reign of terror.” The opposite of a tyranny is not a democracy because every human government run by fallen and sinful human beings can become corrupted.**

The opposite of a reign of terror is a benevolent theocracy. Where God reigns supreme and brings his benevolent grace and love to human beings so that we may experience true human flourishing in the gospel. **Jesus’s earthly ministry was anointed to confront the power of Satan to destroy our lives, to keep us bound in a self-made hell of rebellion, addiction, and self-worship.** Here’s how we know when salvation and the gospel lose its power? When we deceive ourselves into thinking that our sin is merely a disorder; a life of hapless mistakes. **Our sin is an affront to God’s absolute holiness and rebellion to his absolute rule. And Jesus said “the one who sins is a slave to sin.” And Paul said, “for all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory” which is his holiness.** **Jesus’s ministry was confirmed by signs and wonders to undo the reign of the Devil’s tyranny over the human race.**

This historical Jesus who was confirmed by supernatural signs and wonders was...

Witnessed by the Apostles: 39 “We ourselves are witnesses of everything he did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, and yet they killed him by hanging him on a tree.” The gospel was offered first to the Jew—they became the historical eye-witnesses to his crucifixion by the Romans. The historical Jesus was witnessed—his death on a cross for our sins.

Peter goes on to say that he was...

Vindicated in Resurrection: 40 “God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen, ⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” His claim to be the Son of God and God the Son is howling-at-the-moon madness if it's not true. And the resurrection of Jesus is God's way of vindicating and authenticating Jesus's claims. He was not witnessed by all (meaning he could not have been mistaken for an apparition, a spirit, a mere vision, or a phantom.) **We sat with him over dinner and breakfast and ate and drank with him—he has risen in his physical body.** This is why folks, we do not refer to anyone today as Apostles. When is the last time you met anyone who sat and ate and drank with Jesus in his resurrected physical body? That person would have to be 1,987 years old.

No gospel apart from a risen, vindicated Jesus.

And this historical Jesus, attested by miracles, unjustly crucified and risen from the dead singularly chose the Apostles...

Uniquely authorizing the Apostles: 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.” They were uniquely authorized to testify to this historical revelation. **John says in his letter “That which we have seen with our very eyes, that which we have heard with our very ears; that which we have touched with our very own hands—that, he says, is the revelation that we proclaim to you.”**

Last but not least...

Propesied in the Scriptures: 43 “All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.” Wherever a sinner has been forgiven—there the Kingdom of God is. The devil's reign of tyranny has been overthrown and replaced by Christ's reign of Grace. And this was all foretold in the OT Scriptures.

While Peter is telling them about this **Jewish Jesus**, ministering in **Jewish Galilee and Judea**, witnessed by **Jewish apostles** and prophesied about in the **Hebrew Scriptures**—the same Spirit who was poured out on the Jews on the day of Pentecost—is suddenly without warning, without a heads up poured out overflowing into the hearts of these Gentile Romans. This large gathering at Cornelius' home experiences the saving work of Jesus.

I Get the sense from this passage that Peter's message was interrupted. I get the feeling that Peter wanted to take the time to unpack this. To take them back to Gen. 3:15, and stories of David, the psalms and the Prophets to show them the Scriptural case for Christ. But before he can get to it...

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message (**Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the proclaimed 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. (**How did they know that...**) ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God (**same signs as Acts 2—unwinding the curse of Genesis 11**). 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.

Apart from converting to the marks of Judaism—Circumcision, Sabbath observance, and Kosher dietary conformity—these Gentiles receive the same Spirit and the same baptism that the Jewish believers had—*who were circumcised, sabbath and dietary compliant*.

This was the astonishing revelation here: a person does not have to convert to being a Jew in order to follow the Jewish Messiah. Mind...Blown!

It is unmistakable: God accepts even the Gentiles in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Closing: Tim Keller said “The Gospel doesn't affirm our religion it *challenges* our religion.” And, the best this town will ever have is to be a God-fearer without the Gospel. We are called to accept all men without necessarily affirming their views. Acceptance does not require approval. We are called to accept people who don't think like us—and to avoid putting any unnecessary barriers between the unbeliever and the cross.

Our outreach team and the lunch today is designed to inform and equip us as believers to make inroads—to look for those opportunities and to help people discover the good news of salvation in Jesus the Messiah.