

*Acts 10:1-48*

## **Peter, the Gospel, and the Gentiles**

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It is not until we come to Acts 10 that we read of someone who was not a Jew or a convert to Judaism receiving and believing the gospel. This event becomes a pivotal moment in the early history of the church, marking the time when the gospel really began to be distributed to all people, not just to the Jews. Jesus died for all and we are commanded to preach the gospel to all. No one is excluded from the gospel therefore we should not exclude anyone from hearing the gospel.

### **I. The Roman \_\_\_\_\_ (*Acts 10:1-8*)**

- Cornelius was a morally admirable man, a generous man, and a man of religious devotion. But he had a problem. He wasn't \_\_\_\_\_ because he had not yet heard the gospel and believed on Jesus Christ. (*Matthew 7:22-23*)
- The angel did not give Cornelius the gospel and he did not tell Cornelius that he was saved. He told him to send for a \_\_\_\_\_ who would tell him what to do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ comes when the word of God is delivered by a servant of God and is believed by a repentant sinner. (*1 Corinthians 1:21*)

### **II. The \_\_\_\_\_ Servant (*Acts 10:9-20*)**

- God was illustrating to the world through Israel's manner of living that there was a \_\_\_\_\_ between holy things and unholy things. (*Leviticus 10:10; Deut. 7:2-3*)
- Unfortunately, by the time of the New Testament, the Jews had carried this instruction to an extreme. Jews viewed themselves as a superior race and all the Gentiles as \_\_\_\_\_.
- The vision Peter had was about overcoming \_\_\_\_\_ in the gospel ministry. Peter had to learn that God is not a respecter of persons so we must not be either.

### **III. The \_\_\_\_\_ Souls (*Acts 10:21-48*)**

- Peter had used the word "\_\_\_\_\_" before, on the day of Pentecost. But it would seem that he had a much better understanding of its meaning now. (*Acts 2:21*)
- Silently, while Peter was preaching, these Gentiles were placing their faith in Christ, and even before there was a public profession of that faith, the \_\_\_\_\_ came upon those who believed.
- This event made quite an impression on Peter. Sometime later he stood before a group of church leaders and defended the gentiles against having to keep the Old Testament Law, citing this story as the reason the gentiles did not have to keep the Law to be \_\_\_\_\_.
- Salvation is the same for \_\_\_\_\_. It is by grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (*Acts 15:7-9*)

### **Conclusion**

Prejudice is just as much a problem in the church today as it was in Acts 10. We all have biases and are tempted to show more care for certain people than we are for others. People who look like us, speak like us and share a similar upbringing with us tend to be treated with favoritism while those whose life experience is foreign to us are ignored or marginalized. We must remember the truth Peter learned, that God is not a respecter of persons. Jesus died for all and God has commanded us to preach the gospel to everyone. No one should be \_\_\_\_\_ from hearing the gospel.

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Jesus commanded His disciples in Acts 1:8 to preach the gospel, beginning at Jerusalem and branching out from there to all the world. But it is not until Acts 8 that we find the disciples leaving Jerusalem and going to other regions to share the gospel, and that only happened in response to the persecution of the church in Jerusalem. “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1)

It is not until we come to Acts 10 that we read of someone who was not a Jew or a convert to Judaism receiving and believing the gospel. This event becomes a pivotal moment in the early history of the church, marking the time when the gospel really began to be distributed to all people, not just to the Jews. The central character of the story is a man named Cornelius, a Roman soldier. He was devout and feared God, but He had not yet heard and believed the gospel so he was not yet saved. God sent an angel who told Cornelius to send for Peter. Meanwhile, Peter had a vision through which God directed him to take the gospel to the Gentiles and not to consider them unclean anymore. Peter obeyed God, went and preached the gospel to Cornelius, his family and his friends. They believed and were saved, and God gave them the ability to speak in tongues, just like the disciples did on the day of Pentecost, validating their salvation and the truth that the gospel is for all people. Jesus died for all and we are commanded to preach the gospel to all. No one is excluded from the gospel therefore we should not exclude anyone from hearing the gospel.

**I. The Roman Soldier**

*Acts 10:1-8 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, [2] A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. [3] He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. [4] And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. [5] And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: [6] He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. [7] And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; [8] And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*

Cornelius was not a Jew. He was a Roman soldier and the leader of a unit called the Italian Band. He was stationed in the port city of Caesarea, a town known for its beauty and luxury. The Bible describes him as a “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” (Acts 10:2) He was a morally admirable man, a generous man, and a man of religious devotion. But he had a problem. He wasn’t saved because he had not yet heard the gospel and believed on Jesus Christ. Some people have a hard time accepting the fact that a person can be moral, honest, generous and religious and still be lost and on their way to hell. That is because some people do not understand that those things are not what save a person. The only way to be saved from your sins is to trust Jesus as your Savior. Jesus made this truth abundantly clear in the sermon on the mount.

*Matthew 7:22-23 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? [23] And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

One day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius had a vision. In this vision, an angel of God appeared and gave him a special message. This was an extraordinary circumstance and an act of grace and mercy by God. The angel told Cornelius to send to Joppa for a man named Peter who would tell him what he needed to do. Immediately Cornelius obeyed and dispatched two servants and a soldier to fetch Peter.

Do not miss these very important details. The angel did not give Cornelius the gospel and he did not tell Cornelius that he was saved. He told him to send for a Christian who would tell him what to do. God does not deliver the gospel through visions and dreams. He uses His disciples to share it with the lost. I have heard people say that they knew that they were saved because they had a vision of a cross, a dream about heaven, or that an angel told them they were alright. I do not doubt that they believe they saw or heard something, but I do know that whatever they believe they experienced does constitute a salvation experience.

Salvation comes when the word of God is delivered by a servant of God and is believed by a repentant sinner. The servant may come and go, the Word may be delivered in writing or verbally, and the Word may be believed much later, but the pattern remains the same. It is method God has chosen to deliver the gospel to the lost.

*1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

God was at work in Cornelius' life to bring him the gospel. At the same time, God was working Peter's life to make him willing to give the gospel to people like Cornelius.

## II. The Reluctant Servant

*Acts 10:9-20 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: [10] And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, [11] And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: [12] Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. [13] And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. [14] But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. [15] And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. [16] This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. [17] Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, [18] And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. [19] While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. [20] Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*

As the servants of Cornelius were getting close to Joppa, Peter went up on the roof to spend time in prayer. While he was there praying and waiting for lunch to be ready, he had a vision. In it he saw a large sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals that were considered "unclean" according to the Old Testament Law. These were animals that Jews were not allowed to eat. (see Leviticus 11) Then a voice spoke to Peter saying, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Peter answered, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." This is an instance of Peter's rough edges still showing through. He had argued with Jesus on previous occasions, and though he has come a long way, he still has a little bit of a stubborn streak in him. He is reluctant to obey this heavenly vision. The response came back, "What God hath cleansed, that call no thou common." Three times this same scene was repeated, with Peter being commanded to eat the animals, Peter refusing because they were "unclean," and the voice telling Peter to stop calling things unclean that God had called clean.

Why did God make rules about what animals could and couldn't be eaten in the first place? The reason for those dietary laws and so many of the laws in the Old Testament was stated by God in Leviticus 10:10. "And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean." The dietary laws were never intended to convey that some animals were morally inferior and others were superior, nor were they intended to be a means of achieving personal holiness by avoiding some animals. God was illustrating to the world through Israel's manner of living that there was a difference between holy things and unholy things.

There were also laws in the Old Testament about the people that the Jews could have close association with. God specifically commanded the Israelites to drive out the inhabitants of the promised land and not to enter into marriages or contracts with them.

*Deuteronomy 7:2-3 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: [3] Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.*

Unfortunately, by the time of the New Testament, the Jews has carried this instruction to an extreme. Jews viewed themselves as a superior race and all the Gentiles as inferior. They would go out of their way to avoid interaction with Gentiles. The apostles had apparently been affected by this unscriptural cultural norm and it would take the dramatic events of Acts 10 to begin shifting their thinking.

The vision Peter had was about overcoming prejudice in the gospel ministry. "What God hath cleansed, that call no thou common" was a command to include all people of all ethnicities in the great commission. Peter had to learn that God is not a respecter of persons so we must not be either.

As Peter puzzled over the point of the prophetic phenomenon, the servants of Cornelius arrived and asked to speak with him. At the same time, the Holy Spirit told him that three men had come looking for him and that he was to go with them.

### III. The Redeemed Souls

*Acts 10:21-48 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? [22] And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. [23] Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. [24] And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. [25] And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. [26] But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. [27] And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. [28] And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. [29] Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? [30] And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, [31] And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. [32] Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. [33] Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. [34] Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I*

*perceive that God is no respecter of persons: [35] But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. [36] The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) [37] That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; [38] How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. [39] And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: [40] Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; [41] Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. [42] And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. [43] To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. [44] While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. [45] And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. [46] For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, [47] Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*

The day after his vision, Peter went down to Caesarea to meet this man Cornelius. It becomes immediately apparent that Cornelius is still confused because he falls down and starts worshipping Peter. Peter corrects him and they go into the house together where a large crowd had been gathered by Cornelius to hear what Peter had to say. After each of them shared a little about their visions, Peter began to preach the gospel to them all.

Peter's sermon began with the declaration, "God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." The gospel was not to be confined to the Jewish nation, it was to be given to all people everywhere. But Peter does not deny the special role that the Jews have in God's plan. Though them God's sent His Word and through them the Messiah, Jesus, came into the world. Jesus' ministry was mainly among the Jews and it was the Jews who had Him crucified.

But even though Jesus was a Jew, His death and resurrection were not for Jews only. The gospel is for everyone. Peter stated in his conclusion, "through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Peter had used that word before on the day of Pentecost. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:21) But it would seem that he had a much better understanding of its meaning now. It wasn't "whosoever of the Jews." It was truly "whosoever."

Silently, while Peter was preaching, these Gentiles were placing their faith in Christ, and even before there was a public profession of that faith, the Holy Ghost came upon those who believed and they began to speak in foreign languages. This was the same sign gift that the disciples received and the day of Pentecost and it was given so that the Jews would know that the Gentiles had an equal share to salvation and the Holy Spirit. Peter, taking all this in rather quickly, called for the believers to be baptized because they had obviously been saved and received the Holy Spirit just like Peter and the other Jewish believers had.

This event made quite an impression on Peter. Sometime later he stood before a group of church leaders and defended the gentiles against having to keep the Old Testament Law, citing this story as the reason the gentiles did not have to keep the Law to be saved.

*Acts 15:7-9 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. [8] And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness,*

*giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; [9] And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

Gentiles are saved the same way that Jews are saved. Men are saved the same way women are saved. Poor people are saved the same way wealthy people are saved. People who have darker colored skin are saved the same way that people who have lighter colored skin are saved. Salvation is the same for everyone. It is by grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ

### **Conclusion**

Prejudice is just as much a problem in the church today as it was in Acts 10. We all have biases and are tempted to show more care for certain people than we are for others. People who look like us, speak like us and share a similar upbringing with us tend to be treated with favoritism while those whose life experience is foreign to us are ignored or marginalized. We must remember the truth Peter learned, that God is not a respecter of persons. Jesus died for all and God has commanded us to preach the gospel to everyone. No one should be excluded from hearing the gospel.