

Talk – Acts 10:1-48 – The Gentile: Cornelius (From Samaria to the Gentiles)

Prep

Structure

10:1-8 – Cornelius’ vision in Caesarea

10:9-16 – Peter’s vision in Joppa

10:17-23 – Cornelius’ men meet Peter

10:24-33 – Peter meets Cornelius

10:34-43 – Peter’s Sermon (first to a Gentile Audience)

- Life of Jesus (vv37-38)

- Death and Resurrection of Jesus (vv39-41)

- Judgement by Jesus (vv42-43)

10:44-48 – Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles.

11:1-18 – Peter recounts.

Central Truth

The Gospel Confronts Piety and Prejudice

Purpose

I would like the listener to reflect on the importance of a relationship with Jesus over that of a relationship with church or tradition.

Bible Reading:

Acts 10:1-48

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Outline

Mother's Day

Two Men

Cornelius

Simon Peter

Two Visions

The purpose of OT Food Laws

Leviticus 20:25-26

Mark 7:18-23

The Gospel Confronts both Piety and Prejudice

The Sermon

Point 1: God shows no Favouritism - 10:34-35

Point 2: Jesus is the Good News - 10:36-38

Point 3: They killed him, God raised him, We saw him - 10:39-42

Challenge:

that *everyone* who believes in receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' – 10:43

Holy Spirit

Removing Barriers to the Gospel

Application

Our Piety

Our Prejudice

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CHECK TIME

Talk

Mother's Day

Mother's Day Lunch – have you abided by the food laws of Leviticus 11? Just checking!

I heard the other day that my Mother was downloading these sermons to listen too. Happy Mother's Day Mom. And to all the mum's, grandmum's, god mum's, Aunties and women here who play a role in the bringing up of children – Happy Mother's Day.

Prayer

Lord and Father,

If we come before you now thinking that was a saved by any act of piety, we ask that you would correct us.

And if we come before you now thinking that we are better than others because of some assumed status or racial background or Christian inheritance, we ask that you would correct us.

Open our eyes to the gospel of Jesus and the acceptance of all who receive the forgiveness of sins in his name. AMEN.

Two Men

- In Acts 10 we meet two men who would never have crossed paths had it not been for God's clear intervention.

Cornelius

- In Caesarea we meet a centurion named Cornelius a member of the Italian regiment.
- A devout man, God fearing, generous, and a man of prayer – his whole family was.
- Importantly - a Gentile.
- He was about to be confronted with the gospel in a way that would challenge his well-placed drive to do good works in the name of God.
- For him the gospel would challenge his religious piety.

Simon Peter

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- In Joppa we meet, again, Simon Peter, the first apostle and at this point in Acts the most prolific preacher of Christ.
- Importantly – a Christian.
- He was about to be confronted with the gospel in a way that would challenge his understanding of racial and cultural dividing lines.
- For him the gospel would challenge his racial prejudices.

Two Visions

- In Acts 10 those two men crossed paths because God gives them visions which challenge both their beliefs and their practices.
- I hope tonight – that in looking at Acts 10, we might also be challenged to see that the **Gospel Confronts Piety and Prejudice**.
- For those activists among us – let me say upfront, that I am going to try and apply this passage all at the end.

Look with me at the first vision – verse 3 [READ 10:3-6]

- This vision sets the scene.
- A messenger of the Lord appears to Cornelius, commends him for his good works, and instructs him to go off to find a man – no reason is given for the instruction.
- One question that we could raise here about Cornelius – this this – Is he a Christian?
 - If you thought that you were saved by your good works, then Cornelius is your man – he gives generously to the needy, he prays – and the Lord has noticed.
 - If you thought that you were saved because you were Jewish, descendant of the OT people of God, then this passage would present a problem – because Cornelius was clearly not a Jew.
- For what appears to be a fairly straight forward vision, it raises some tricking conundrums.

PAUSE

The second vision happens 24 hours later – this time over in Joppa – from verse 9.

- Peter falls into a trance, the heavens open, a large sheet appears to lower down cradling all kinds of animals – four-footed, reptile, birds of the air.
- And then he gets his instruction – ‘Get-up, Peter, kill and eat’.
- Peter immediately sees the problem with this – as a man of Jewish heritage, he is very aware that for him to kill and eat these kinds of animals, he would be breaking

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the Levitical laws that had been established to set God’s people apart from all the other nations.

- For him even to touch the animals he would be unclean. For him to eat them as well would mean that he was defiling what God himself had instructed – Peter’s holiness would be compromised.
- ‘Surely Not Lord’ he says
- But God speaks again – ‘How can something be unclean, if I have said that it is now clean’.
- Just for good measure – given it was Peter (who tended to appreciate things said to him in threes) – this vision of the sheet and animals occurs three times and then is taken back into heaven.

PAUSE

It is at that point – the men Cornelius had sent arrive and Peter is told – verse 20 ‘Do not hesitate to go with them for I have sent them’ – in fact the word behind ‘hesitate’ could also be translated ‘discriminate’ – Do not discriminate to go with them for I have sent them – and Peter goes.

An aside:

How do you know whether a ‘vision from God’ is reliable? – well here at least you see God making it very clear by giving both sides a corroborating vision.

The purpose of OT Food Laws

- It might be helpful to pause here for just a moment and think about why God originally forbid the eating of some foods?
 - The answer was that he did it to help Israel live holy lives.
- You see, Israel were set apart as a Holy nation for God – set apart from the other nations.
- So that that was obvious there were some things that Israel were not to do, because it would make them like the other nations.
- There were moral instructions – and often that was demonstrated in the adherence to ceremonial laws such as food restrictions.
- Turn back with me to Leviticus 20 (page 118) – and to verses 25-26.
- Here, God is giving instructions to Israel about what they should or shouldn’t eat – and look at what he says about being holy. [READ 20:25-26].

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- The good part of this law is that Israel could see themselves being set apart **to** the Lord - specially set aside to serve him. As good as the other nations could be, it was Israel who had this special role.
- An implication of this law (negatively) was that it made it difficult for Israel to mix with the other nations – if they couldn't eat their food then they couldn't easily relate.
- This was simply a way of putting a divide between Israel who were supposed to be holy (for the Lord) and other nations (as good as they might be) whose influence could be unhelpful.
- If I take a bad piece of fruit and put it next to a good piece of fruit – it is not the bad piece that improves, it is the good piece that is corrupted.
- Israel were to be the good piece of fruit – and as history shows, when they associated with other nations, they generally became as corrupt as the other nations.
- These laws were to help them be and remain holy.

PAUSE

- But this is where the Israel misunderstood the purpose of the of the food laws.
 - Israel, came to think that because they had the food laws – they were better than to other nations. But, God choose not on merit, not on their good works – they had no reason to assume they were better than anyone.
 - Second misunderstanding was this - Israel, came to think of themselves as favourites – and in that sense got special privileges over the other nations. Whatever bad they did, they were accepted, and whatever good that the others nations did , they would be rejected – all because God thought of them as favourite – wrong, wrong, wrong. – and there lies the massive breakdown in relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles that carried right through to Peter and Cornelius.
- More importantly – Jesus taught how the food laws should truly be understood.
- In Mark 7 (page 998), in teaching his disciples Jesus explains (verse 18-23) *'nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'...what comes out of man is what makes him unclean...out of men's hearts come sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly – all these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'.*
- What Jesus was concerned about – reflected what God was concerned about
- Holiness and Sin.

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- It wasn't eating unclean food itself that made a person unholy - it was going against what God had said.

If you disobeyed what God had instructed, then that was where the error lied.

If you disobeyed what God was saying that you could hardly be someone set apart for him.

If you disobeyed God then you sinned – and it was for that reason that you were unclean.

PAUSE

But who could claim to always obey God?

Not Israel, Not any Gentile, Not I and not you.

PAUSE

The Gospel Confronts both Piety and Prejudice

And this brings us right back to the dilemma before both Cornelius and Peter.

- We are about to see the way that the gospel confronts both piety and prejudice – and does that buy dealing with the which makes us unclean – Sin.
- When Peter and Cornelius meet both are comprised.
- In Cornelius – a good man, with many good works, but who was about to find out that it was not his wonderful piety that saved him, but Jesus.
- Peter, in verse 27 – enters a room full of Gentiles and knows that according to the law as a Jew he should not be in association with a Gentile.
- But putting aside his heritage and his culture – he comes as a man of the gospel.
- That concern for holiness which acted as a barrier against anyone of Gentile origin – was being challenged.
- Whatever prejudice that Peter consciously or unconsciously held, was now being overturned as he obediently walked into the midst of a gentile audience.
- He was now aware that it was no longer appropriate to apply the distinction of clean and unclean either to what you eat or to whom you eat it with – and the reason was - because of Jesus.

PAUSE

The Sermon

- In Verse 33, Cornelius invites Peter to say whatever it was that the Lord wanted said.

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- And Peter gives his fifth sermon in Acts – but his first to a gentile audience.
- Three points and a Challenge.
- First Point - God shows no Favouritism. [READ 10:34-35]
- Verse 34 – *‘Now I know how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right.’*
 - If I thought Israel has special privileges – I see now that was wrong.
 - If I thought that the others nations could never be accepted despite any good works – I see now that was wrong.
 - Before me are Gentiles – led here by Cornelius.
- His second point – Jesus is the Good News [READ 10:36-38]
- Verse 36 – the message God sent to Israel was telling the good news of peace, and that news comes through Jesus Christ - but it was not just for Israel, it was for all because Jesus is Lord of all.
- And I can see the value of the good works he did, as you obvious have seen as well.
- He did those good works in the regions that were Jewish areas like Galilee and Judea, but those works were for the benefit of **all** who were under the power of the devil – not just the Jew but the Gentile as well.
- His third point – They killed him, God raised him, We saw him. [READ 10:39-42]
- Verse 39 – we saw what happened – he was hung on a tree and killed.
- And the reason he was hung on a tree was because he was taking the sin of all.
- But God raised him.
- and he appeared then to those who would be charged with the responsibility to be his witnesses.
- We were called to preach to the people and to testify that Jesus is alive – and more that that he is alive as the judge of the living and the dead. As the judge of that which is clean and unclean. As the judge of sin.

But here is the clincher.

Here is the challenge.

Verse 43 – *‘that everyone who believes in him – that everyone, not just Jew, but Gentile as well, who believe in him - receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’*

- Peter knew to preach the gospel, but needed help to see past his prejudice and rach it to the gentiles.
- Cornelius may not have known the gospel. But now having heard the gospel, he was not only a good man, but a saved man.

Holy Spirit

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- And while Peter was preaching – the Holy Spirit comes on all who heard the message.
- Standing and watching were the circumcised Believers now see what looks like a repeat of Pentecost – as all begin speaking in tongues or languages. The difference this time is that now we see the Gentiles praising God – not just the Jews.

Removing Barriers to the Gospel

What God does here is remove the barriers of the gospel:

- Cornelius is prepared to receive the gospel.
 - The piety of Cornelius is confronted with the person of Jesus.
- Peter is prepared to take the gospel and communicate it to an unclean Gentile.
 - The prejudice of Peter is confronted with the person of Jesus.
- And the church in Jerusalem is prepared for the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Application

Our Piety

- Saved by some work?
 - Saved by church?
 - Saved by others?
 - Saved by the Pastor?
- None of these although they might be helpful and appreciated should be more important in faith than that relationship with Jesus.

Our Prejudice

- Christian ‘right’?
 - Pride
 - See yourself better than another
- None of these stand, when the gospel which saves us is available to all

Closing Prayer

Lord and Father,

If we came before you thinking that we were saved by any act of piety, we ask that you now correct us.

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And if we came before you thinking that we were better than others because of some assumed status or racial background or Christian inheritance, we ask that you now correct us.

Fix our eyes on Jesus and the acceptance of all who receive the forgiveness of sins in his name. AMEN.