

The Conversion Of Cornelius

Acts 10

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Tonight in Acts 10, I want to emphasize the importance of this chapter. This is a very, very, very key strategic chapter in that, simply stated, this is the chapter which the gospel goes officially to the Gentiles. Now, that may not seem like any great big deal to you; but in the early church the believers were first Jewish, and the racial prejudice that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles was enormous, far greater than anything that we have or we experience in our world today. The world was divided into those two categories: the Jews and the Gentiles. Neither of them had anything to do with one another, and the hatred that Jews had for the Gentiles was so very, very great. Needless to say, Jesus was a Jew and the early Christians were Jewish, yet the gospel is for the whole world—God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son—and it was Jesus that said that we were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He told them in the book of Acts before He ascended to heaven that when the Spirit of God comes upon you that you'll be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. They hadn't really gone out officially to preach to the Gentiles and to welcome them into the church. They didn't realize that the church was a new humanity—it wasn't just Jews, it wasn't just Gentiles, it wasn't just men, it wasn't just women, but it was men, women, Jews, Gentiles, all races, all people—and we are all one in Jesus Christ.

A great parallel passage tonight is Ephesians 2. (If we get time after looking at 48 verses, and you're probably thinking, If you're going to cover 48 verses, you better get rockin and rollin, Pastor John.) In that chapter, he talks about how God has taken the Gentile and the Jew and broken down the wall and made one new humanity, one new man; that is, the church. The church is an amazing thing, and it's so awesome to realize that in the church that we're one—Jew and Gentile—and we have an equal standing before a holy and righteous God.

We've seen three conversions (including tonight will be number 3) in Acts 8, 9 and 10. In Acts 8, we saw the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Interesting, that in each of these conversions they were very religious but they were lost. Here was a man who came to Jerusalem to seek the God of Israel gone back in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah, and then Philip came running alongside of his chariot, "Do you understand what you're reading?" He says, "How can I lest someone guide me?" Philip jumped up in the chariot and began to share with him Christ. He accepted Jesus and was baptized and went on his merry way. In Acts 9, we saw the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a very religious man who hated and persecuted Christians, but he was a Jew who was a Pharisee and very religious. Tonight, in Acts 10, we get the conversion of Cornelius who was a religious man as well. He was a Gentile who was believed to be a proselyte into Judaism and a man who was really seeking the Lord, praying, and giving alms. He probably believed in the God of Israel but was, again, lost and needed the good news of Jesus Christ.

I want to back up one verse, Acts 9:43, to introduce us to Acts 10. Luke says, "And it came to

pass, that he tarried," that is, Peter, "many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner." Now, I threw a map on the screen for you last week. We won't do that tonight, but Joppa is on the seacoast. It's over to the west of Jerusalem, right along the seacoast. The tanner was a man that would use the skins of animals to create canvases and make tents with them. He was one who skinned animals, so it was an unclean kind of profession. They couldn't skin animals and still be kind of set apart for God and worship in the temple or go to the synagogue and things like that. Peter is already kind of doing stuff that's a little bit radical as far as their sanctity for the Jews are concerned, but the fact that he's with this man named Simon, who is a tanner in the city of Joppa, comes into play when Cornelius gets directions to call for Peter to come to him and share the gospel.

Begin with me in Acts 10:1-8 where we have God preparing Cornelius for the gospel. It says, "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," which is 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I'll come back to that. It says, "...of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius." Interesting, God knows our name. He called him by name, Cornelius. "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," so there was Simon the tanner and there was Simon Peter. They both had the same name, one was the tanner and the other was the apostle Peter. "He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side," tanners would often be by water so they could use it for cleansing and washing and so forth of the skins, "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, in verse 1, was a Roman centurion. A centurion was a Roman general. He was a soldier who was over a group of men. In the Bible, whenever you find centurions, they're always presented in a good light. They are always good men who are honest, moral, and helpful; and that's the case with Cornelius. It says that he was over a band called the "Italian band." This isn't a rock band. This isn't a music group. The word is a reference to a cohort or a group of soldiers numbering about 100, so he was over about 100 soldiers known as a Roman cohort. He was in the city of Caesarea, which is north of Joppa about 20-27 miles. Actually, next week about this same time we'll be in the city of Joppa, and we'll be in the city of Caesarea. It's going to be awesome. We're going to actually do this same Bible study overlooking the ocean in the city of Caesarea right where Cornelius was. We'll see where Joppa is, where Peter was, and it all comes into view, this Roman garrison, this Roman fortress, and we'll see the harbor that was built by Herod the Great. Notice it says there that he was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

There's a lot that could be said and pointed out about Cornelius and his devotion, but I want to

get right to the point. The point is that he was devout, religious, and was a man who prayed. He believed in the God of Israel, but don't miss this, he needed to be saved. He needed the gospel. A lot of times people complain that, "You Christians go to these other nations and their culture and share Christianity with them, and they have their own religion, and their religion is just as good as yours. You don't really need to do that. You should leave them alone and respect their culture and respect their religion," and that kind of a thing, but this makes it very clear that even though he was religious, he was lost. Even though he believed in God, he wasn't saved. Some of you were here Sunday morning where we looked at the book of James and talked about faith without works is dead. James mentions that even demons believe in God and tremble but obviously they're not saved. Orthodoxy, or believing in God or having correct belief, doesn't save anyone—it's faith in Jesus Christ who died and was buried and rose again and being born again. It was to Nicodemus, the religious Jew in John 3, that Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you have to be born again if you're going to see the kingdom of God." Sometimes we get the idea that, Oh, they're religious. They don't need God. They don't need Christianity. I don't need to preach to them, they're very religious. It's possible to be very, very religious yet be lost.

John Wesley is a great example from church history. He came to America to convert the Indians. He left and went back to England dejected and discouraged. He wrote in his journal, "I went to America to convert the Indians, but who shall convert me?" On his trip back to England, he was on a ship with some other believers. They were called Moravians. They were early evangelical Christians. They were born again and loved Jesus. A storm hit the ship and Wesley was observing these Moravians—the peace that they had and they weren't afraid to die. He was worried and frightened and unsure of his salvation even though he was quite devout, fasted, prayed, read his Bible, and came to be a missionary. When he got back to England, he wanted to know what they had that he didn't have, so he made his way one night in London to a Moravian meeting. He slipped in the back late, and the minister was reading the preface to Martin Luther's commentary on the Book of Romans. He made reference to the fact that you can be saved or justified by faith and trusting Christ. Then, Wesley, after that meeting that night, hearing the gospel for the first time said, "I did trust Christ and Christ alone for my salvation," and said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." That was the conversion of John Wesley and began the Methodist Church and the Methodist movement, the great work that God used him in England at the same time George Whitfield was in America preaching the gospel, and there was great revival.

It is possible, as we see so often, for a person to be very devout, very pious, and very religious but indeed very lost; and such was the case with this man we call Cornelius. It's believed that he was what was called a "proselyte of the gate," that he hadn't fully entered into Judaism but believed in the God of Israel and was reading Scripture and following after Him as best that he knew how. Obviously, he would be ostracized by the Jews and wouldn't be able to fully enter in. He was looking for something. He was a hungry heart, and God always meets a hungry heart. God always reaches a hungry heart. The Bible says that if you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him. I believe that those that really want to know God, that God will come and reveal Himself to them and meet them in their need. We see in this whole story (it's one

long story that actually goes into chapter 11) the providential hand of God in orchestrating Cornelius' conversion in preparing Peter to preach the gospel to him.

At the end of verse 2, Cornelius was praying. In the ninth hour he saw a vision, verse 3. The ninth hour, as I said, was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The Jews prayed three times a day, which kind of convicted me today. I thought, Wow, if the Jews could pray in their religion three times a day, why can't I pray in the morning, noon, and evening, at least? You know, spend that time... so at 9 o'clock in the morning, 12 o'clock at noon, and 3 o'clock in the afternoon they would pray. He was going through his little prayer at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and here we have another angel in the book of Acts, verse 3, "...an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius."

These angels are amazing to me. He looked at this angel and said, "What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." The angel then instructed Cornelius to "send men to Joppa," south of Caesarea, 27 miles 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." In chapter 11, we're going to learn when Peter recounts this story...by the way, this story is told about another three or four times because Luke felt it was important for us to get that he will tell you all the words of this life, all the things you need to know about salvation. "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."

A second point I want to make that's very important: Notice that the angel did not preach the gospel to Cornelius. You're thinking, Dude, you're right there. You just came from God. Why don't you just tell Cornelius what he needs to know about Jesus Christ? But God has actually chosen—why, I don't know—but ordained that the gospel be preached through sinners who have been saved. God wants to use you. God wants to use me. God wants to use us to tell other people. If you've got a heathen neighbor and you're praying, "God send Gabriel to my neighbor across the street to ring their doorbell and to share the gospel with them," it ain't gonna happen. God wants you to go over there, to open your mouth, and to share with them. So, the angel says send to Joppa for Peter. Peter will come and tell you all the words of this life. He'll share the gospel with you. How amazing that God would actually allow us to be His servants and His instruments and His mouthpieces, that we would get to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who need to hear.

In verses 1-8 are Cornelius' preparation, and verses 9-22 is the preparation of Peter to come preach the gospel. "On the morrow, as they went on their journey," it would take probably a couple of days to get there, or at least a day and a half, "and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour," this was the noontime prayer. Remember I told you noon, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, as well as nine in the morning, so it's noontime and they're right on the coast at Joppa. It's a beautiful spot right on the Mediterranean Sea. The houses were flat, and you could get on the patio on the roof. What cooler place to go up and to

pray and take a nap than on the top of a flat-roofed house on the beach overlooking the ocean. He went up there to pray, it was about the sixth hour. By the way, Cornelius was praying, and God came and spoke to him; and Peter was praying, and God came and spoke to him. Guess what? God comes and speaks to us when we pray. Amen? Even though we're praying, God speaks to us. In prayer, I think it can be both ways—we speak to God and God speaks to us—and God can teach us and reveal things to us as we're spending time in prayer.

Peter became very hungry and would've eaten, but while they were making ready, he fell into a trance. It was noon. He was on the beach. He was on the roof. He was tired. He was praying. All the makings...and they were cooking the lunch downstairs, and the aroma was coming up. Remember those old cartoons when they put the pie in the window and the smoke would turn into a finger and draw people in and Sniff you'd be smelling the pie? I see that in my sanctified imagination, you know, the aromas. They're probably baking lamb downstairs and the aromas coming up with the finger pulling Peter down.

Peter has this dream while he's up on this roof. It says that he goes into a trance. This is so important. He "...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." It was probably an outside courtyard. They couldn't get to the actual house, so they were probably yelling out from the gate, "Is there one named Simon Peter who is here?" It says, "And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19 While Peter thought on the vision," notice carefully verse 19, "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. 21 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."

Verse 23, "Then called he them in," which is an amazing thing that Peter, being a Jew, would even invite these Gentiles to come into the house with him. He called them in to lodge, "And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." Stop right there in verse 23. First we have the preparation of Cornelius, God sends an angel and tells him to send for Peter. Then, Peter is down by the seaside. He's at Simon the tanner's house, and they're going to fix lunch so he says, "I'm going to go up on the roof and pray." While he was praying, he fell asleep, which seems to be kind of a pattern for Peter, by the way. Remember what he did when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Have you ever fallen asleep while you're praying? Well, you're in good company. The apostle Peter is joining you. Remember Peter was praying and Jesus said, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Rise, Peter, watch and pray. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Here he is again. He's up on the housetop. He's hungry. They're cooking the meal, and he falls asleep, but God gives Peter a vision. It's interesting that God works on both ends—He speaks to Cornelius, He speaks to Peter, and brings the two together. God didn't just speak to Cornelius and he then had to convince Peter. God didn't just speak to Peter and he had to convince Cornelius. God worked at both ends. If you feel like God is calling you in the ministry or to minister to someone, you can expect God to work at both ends. God not only prepares you, but God prepares the recipients. God not only prepares you, the messenger, but God prepares those who will receive the message and you can pray, "God, go before me and speak to hearts and prepare the soil and open the hearts," and God brought the two of them together; again, the hand of God working in this situation.

While Peter is on the rooftop he gets a vision. In this vision, it's this great big blanket or sheet, and on the four corners are ropes let down from heaven. If you have a hard time visualizing it, just get *The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes* or some kind of action Bible for little kids. Believe it or not, I actually read these little kid Bibles with pictures and illustrations because it gets the juices flowing and you can actually see it happening. Here's this sheet coming down, and on this big sheet there are all these animals that the Levitical law condemns as unclean, so they were not kosher. They weren't ceremonially clean animals that the Jews could eat. It says there were, "...fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." Isn't it interesting that he's on the roof of whose house? Simon the tanner. What did tanners do? They kill animals—probably a lot of creepy animals. He probably saw carcasses hanging all around the place, you know, it was kind of in his brain as he went up there and had this dream, but it was really the hand of God.

I probably shouldn't tell you this story, but I'll never forget. It was...I don't know how many years ago, I've been around so long now I forget. It was probably 30 years ago. I was in China. I made several trips into China, and we're in this little border town of China over from Hong Kong called Canton. If you've never been into China and experienced a meat market, you've never experienced a meat market. They eat everything! I mean everything! Little sparrows, lizards, snakes, frogs, all kinds of creepy things, and dogs. A lot of them are alive. They are actually chirping and barking and whining and fussing. Every time I read this story of all these animals—all these creepy things, all these unclean things—immediately I'm back in the meat market of Canton, China and see all these creepy things. I remember there was this one big box full of turtles, and they were alive. One of them got out and we were screaming, "Run, little turtle! Run, little turtle! Run for your life!" He's trying to get out of there, but we actually saw dogs hanging on hooks. They eat dog, and the delicacy over there is black dog. It's on the menu. If you open the menu, you can have black dog in the restaurant.

That's what happened to Peter! This sheet comes down and all these things that you would, "No. I don't eat that!" All these creepy animals are on the sheet, and then the Lord speaks to Peter and says, "Get up, kill it, and eat it." What Peter does is a classic oxymoron, a classic so-

to-speak contradiction, he says, "Not so, Lord." Excuse me, Peter? You can say, "Not so," and you can say, "Lord," but you can't say, "Not so, Lord," because if He's Lord it's, "Whatever You say goes." It's, "Yes, Lord," but you can't say, "Not so, Lord." Here he is arguing with the Lord, which is kind of like classic Peter. Again, when Jesus said that He was going to go to Jerusalem and be crucified and slain, what did Peter say? "Not so, Lord. That shall not happen to You." Jesus had to say, "Get behind me, Satan, because you're not saying the things that be of God but the things that be of men." Here's Peter again arguing with God.

As I pointed out, these are things that were, according to Levitical law (Leviticus 11), ceremonially unclean and no Jew would eat these things, but God was making it clear. Now, in this vision, and I'll just kind of spill the beans but you'll see if unfold, God was showing Peter that He was saving Gentiles. These creepy animals represented God saving the Gentiles. What the Jews considered to be unclean and rejected, God was actually saying, "That which I have cleansed call not thou common or unclean." This was all preparation to get Peter and the other Jews to be willing to preach the gospel to these Gentiles.

Jump down to verse 19, Peter hears the Spirit speak. Again, this is the gospel of the Spirit, and here's the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit said unto him, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." Again, a little footnote—an important thing—the Holy Spirit is a Person. The Holy Spirit is the divine Person, and what you see here is the Holy Spirit speaking and the Holy Spirit guiding, and the Holy Spirit directing. It implies, which the Bible teaches, the doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the leading and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. No sooner had Peter received this word, he didn't understand what God was trying to say by just seeing the animals on the sheet in the vision, but the Holy Spirit made it very clear to him. The vision kind of left him wondering, but then the Spirit made it very, very clear what God was doing. "I want you to go with these men," and the minute God said that, KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK there at the door. God's timing is amazing, isn't it? The minute God spoke to him preparing his heart, these guys are at the door.

Now, we see the obedience of Peter to go, verses 23-33. It says, "Then called he them in, and lodged them." Again, that would be unthinkable for a Jew to hang out with a Gentile. "And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." He took some other Jewish Christian brothers with him because, no doubt, he realized that he was going to be in hot water, and that's what happens in chapter 11. The other Jews that are Christians in Jerusalem, the other leaders in the church, call Peter in and are very upset with him. They say, "We heard you went to Gentiles and preached to them and ate with them and hung out with them. Don't you realize you're going to get cooties?" (It's not in the text, I just threw that in there.) He tells the story about the Spirit told me to go. Who was I to resist the Holy Spirit? After that, it says "...they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." Not only did Cornelius want to hear what Peter had to say, but he wanted his friends and family to hear as well. We should have the same heart to share the gospel and to invite friends to come to church and hear the good news.

Verse 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." Peter realized that was a dangerous thing, "I'm just a man. You don't want to worship me." Obviously, Peter was not the Pope. He didn't want to be worshipped or venerated. He was just a man. "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?" Peter makes contact with Cornelius. He sees all the people in the house, and it's not the best way to first start your witness to this unbelieving, Gentile group by saying, "You know, it's not right for me to be here because you all have cooties. I just want you all to know that I'm not supposed to be here—you're all unclean—but God told me to come, so I'm here." He still kind of wonders what is going on. "Tell me why you have called for me?"

Verse 31, 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," a reference to the angel, "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." This is what I call a preacher's dream come true—an entire group of people, prepared by God, eager to hear. Their ears are open, and they're listening. They're focused and not falling asleep or looking at their watch or checking their phones. They're listening and dialed in and said, "We're all here to hear. We're all here to receive what God has to say. We're all here to know what words you want to speak to us." Any preacher would be over the moon thinking about this, that this congregation of people are ready, hungry, and eager.

"Then Peter opened his mouth," verse 34, and we have the preaching of Peter down to verse 48, "and said, Of a truth I perceive," here's actually one of the main lessons of the whole chapter, "that God is no respecter of persons," isn't that great? That God does not show partiality. Peter is saying, "I am blown away to realize that God does not show respect of persons." Verse 35, "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Now, don't misunderstand verse 35. He's not saying that wherever you go in the world that if people fear God and do good deeds that God will forgive and accept them. What he's trying to convey in verse 35 is actually that God is no respecter of persons. Anyone who repents and turns to Him and believes in Him can be saved in spite of what nation or ethnic background they are from. That's what he's saying in verse 35.

In verse 36 it says, "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,” referring to Christ, “and hanged on a tree,” a reference to the cross, “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41 Not to all people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us,” he’s speaking of his post-resurrection appearances, “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,” alive, “and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name,” notice it carefully, verse 43, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Again, this is the lesson that God had taught Peter here. It doesn’t matter who you are, Jew or Gentile, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” This is an awesome sermon that Peter preaches. It could be an abbreviation record that we have by Luke here, but Peter starts off talking about the Word God sent unto the children of Israel.

It’s interesting that in the story you have the Spirit of God calling a man of God who preaches the Word of God so that people can come to believe in God. I don’t believe that God’s methods have changed—the Spirit of God using a man of God to preach the Word of God to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. So, Peter preached. There is no substitute for the preaching of God’s Word through his servant. He speaks about Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Let me point them out. In verse 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,” that’s God the Father with God the Son, so it’s His life and His ministry summarized in that statement.

In verse 39, we have His death. When we’re preaching the gospel, we should always focus on the Person of Christ and His death on the cross. He says, “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,” so we have His life and ministry, His death—the substitutionary death on the cross—and then His resurrection in verse 40. “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly,” His death and resurrection and the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and was seen after He rose, and then he gives the proofs that we’re, “witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead,” Peter and the others on the sea of Galilee as Jesus was roasting the fish. They came, ate, fellowshiped there, and saw Him after He had risen from the dead. He points out that soon He will be the coming Judge. It says, “And he commanded us to preach,” verse 42, “unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick,” or alive, “and dead.” Jesus will one day come back, and He will judge the alive and the dead.

Verse 43, “To him give all the prophets witness,” so, He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets, “that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Basically, right then and there where Peter was starting to make application, that whosoever—you Jews, you Gentiles—whoever wants to believe, whosoever can come. Put verse 43 alongside John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” I believe in a

“whosoever” gospel. Whosoever means whosoever, by the way. It means whoever will believe will be saved. God won’t turn anyone away.

Now, “While Peter yet spake,” in other words, Peter was long winded, so I follow in Peter’s train. Peter was going long. Peter kept preaching, and the Holy Spirit says, “Okay, enough is enough, Peter, you need to wrap this up,” so “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word,” and that’s what we want as well—God’s Spirit to fall on those that are hearing the Word. “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,” this is how they knew, “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.” That’s not giving us a formula, and he no doubt baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as Jesus had instructed, but they baptized them into the Lord and His authority. “Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”

This is the cool ending or conclusion, and the story goes on into chapter 11, by the way. We’ll pick it up when we get back from Caesarea, Joppa, and the places we’re reading about right now. The story continues into chapter 11 where Peter gets in trouble for going to these Gentiles, and the church still continues to struggle with this idea of letting Gentiles come in on an equal standing as the Jews, but while Peter was speaking, he didn’t even get to say, “I want every head bowed and every eye closed, and if you’re here right now and you want Jesus Christ, raise your hand.” It kind of messed him up. You know, he got out of rhythm here. It just kind of threw him for a curve. He’s still speaking and all of the sudden the Holy Spirit fell on all these Gentiles and the whole group, (I don’t know how many there were. It probably was a good-sized house that Cornelius the centurion owned) all were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues.

What I want you to notice is that different than earlier episodes in the book of Acts where the apostles had to come down and lay hands on the Samaritans and after they were converted then they received the Spirit and there was a time lapse and all that took place, or Paul had to have Ananias lay his hands on him and receive the Holy Spirit, what I want you to notice is that there really is no pattern that you can develop through the book of Acts as to how people are saved and the Holy Spirit works. If you do want to have a pattern, I think that Cornelius would be a good one for the church today in that there was no interval between their believing and receiving the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t say that they even prayed or asked God to give them the Holy Spirit. There were no hands laid on them. There was no fire or cloven tongues over them like Acts 2, but they did hear them speak in tongues. The Bible says that tongues were a sign for the Jews. Certainly, it stood for a sign for these Christian Jews to realize God was saving Gentiles.

You’ve got to understand, that was a very difficult thing for them to believe. Actually, they believed in their Jewishness that God had only created Gentiles as fuel for the fires of hell—they were fodder for the fires of hell—that’s the only reason God created Gentiles, and Gentiles

couldn't go to heaven, that Abraham stood at the gate of heaven and if any Gentile tried to come in he would turn them away. They referred to them as dogs, Gentile dogs, but the church is made up of Jews and Gentiles, and there is no division. The wall has been broken down, and we who were strangers are now made fellow citizens of the household of God. We're a new habitation. We're a building of God inhabited by the Holy Spirit. You can read all that in Ephesians 2, but how marvelous it is that those who believe in Him receive the forgiveness of their sins, verse 43, and the gift, verse 45, of the Holy Spirit. Amen? You don't have to plead. You don't have to beg. You don't have to wait. You don't have to tarry. You don't need an apostle to lay their hands upon you, that if you trust in Jesus Christ, He'll forgive your sins, He'll come into your heart by the Holy Spirit, and He'll fill you with His Spirit and with His power. What a marvelous thing that is! God saves you by His grace, and He gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter is amazed that God saved these Gentiles. What this is doing is conditioning the Christians to realize that the gospel is universal. The gospel isn't just for Americans. The gospel isn't just for westerners. The gospel isn't just for people in the United States or in the western hemisphere. The gospel is for every tribe, every kindred, every nation, every tongue, and every people. It took several years for Peter and these guys to get out to the Gentiles, and God had to send an angel to Cornelius and send a vision to Peter to get him going.

May God help us to get going. We still have work to do. Amen? There are still people who need to hear. There are people right here in our nation and in other places that need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the great commission is still just that—a commission for us to go into all the world and preach the gospel. We need to pray, we need to give, we need to serve, and we need to go and do all we can to get the gospel out to every tribe, every nation, every kindred, every tongue, every people. When we get to heaven, we're going to see people from all nationalities, and the church is a reflection of that right now, but when we get to heaven, there's not going to be different sections of different countries and border walls and people living over here and there, you know. We're all going to be one in Jesus Christ redeemed from every kindred, tribe, nation, and tongue and a glorious truth that is! Let's pray.