

*Gentiles Hear the Good News*

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” <sup>1</sup>

We teach our children about stranger danger. Who did your parents teach you to not associate with?? Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about! From the time of Moses to the time of our scripture the Jews had been misunderstood that the Laws and the Covenant relationship with God were only for them. Therefore, these words of Peter were revolutionary. They swept away the prejudice and indoctrination of generations of Judaism. However, Gentile salvation certainly was a doctrine known in the Old Testament when God told Abraham that his family would be a blessing to all people and when God instructed Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh. But the Jew read the Old Testament to mean that the Jews were God's only Chosen People, the special recipients of His promises and revelation. Here Peter announced that God's program was reaching out to the world through the church.

In our scripture today we know that Peter had to do a great deal of un-learning of what he had obeyed all his life. As a good Jewish boy and man, he had kept the law of separation. However God chose Peter to be the first to learn that God is no “respector” of person and shows no partiality. For the first time Peter understood that God, through Jesus wants to make everyone a part of the family of God.

Chapter 10 is pivotal in the Book of Acts, because it records the salvation of the Gentiles. We know that Peter was already used by God to open the door of faith for the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Ac 10:34-43

Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and also for the Samaritans (Acts 8), and now he was being used of God to bring the Gentiles into the church (see Gal. 3:27–28; Eph. 2:11–22).

This event took place about ten years after Pentecost. We might ask why the Apostles waited so long before going to the lost Gentiles? After all, in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), Jesus had told them to go into all the world; and it would seem logical for them to go to their Gentile neighbors as soon as possible. But God has God's times as well as God's plans, and the transition from the Jews to the Samaritans to the Gentiles was a gradual one.

In order for us to understand Peter's sermon we must understand how he got to Caesarea and happened to be giving the first Gospel sermon to a Gentile audience.

Before He could save the Gentiles, God had to prepare Peter to bring the message and Cornelius and his family and friends to hear the message. Caesarea is sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem and thirty miles north of Joppa (Jaffa). At that time, Caesarea was the Roman capital of Judea. In that city lived Cornelius, the Roman centurion, whose heart had tired of pagan myths and empty religious rituals, and who had turned to Judaism in hopes he could find salvation. Cornelius was as close to Judaism as he could get without becoming a proselyte. There were many "God fearers" like him in the ancient world (Acts 13:16), and they proved to be a ready field for spiritual harvest.

God had sent an angel to instruct Cornelius and, in true military fashion, Cornelius immediately obeyed. At that same time Peter also had to be prepared for this. The Law of Moses was a wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentiles were considered aliens and strangers as far as the Jewish covenants and promises were concerned (Eph. 2:11–13). But this wall had been broken down at the cross (Eph. 2:14–18). God was declaring that, as far as the Jew and the Gentile were concerned, "There is no difference" either in condemnation (Rom. 3:22–23) or in salvation (Rom. 10:12–13).

God's timing is always perfect, and the three men from Caesarea arrived at the door just as Peter was pondering the meaning of his vision of clean and unclean food, which the

Jews had used to justify why they didn't associate or eat with Gentiles. The Spirit commanded Peter to meet the men and go with them.

For the first time in his life Peter allowed the Gentiles to lodge with him, indication that the walls were coming down. (This reminds us in our own time of the Berlin Wall coming down. It had been a wall of separation.) Peter selected six Jewish believers to go along as witnesses (Acts 11:12). This was three times the official number needed. It took at least two days to cover the thirty miles between Joppa and Caesarea. When Peter arrived, he discovered that Cornelius had gathered relatives and friends to hear the message of life. Cornelius rehearsed his experience with the angel and then told Peter why he had been summoned: to tell him, his family, and his friends how they could be saved (Acts 11:14).

There can be no faith apart from the Word (Rom. 10:17), and Peter preached that Word. First Peter said that God is no respecter of persons as far as nationality and race are concerned. Peter now understood that when it comes to sin and salvation, "there is no difference" (Rom. 2:11; 3:22-23; 10:1-13). All persons have the same Creator (Acts 17:26), and all persons need the same Savior (Acts 4:12). To "fear God and work righteousness" is a description of the Christian life. To fear God is to reverence and trust Him (Micah 6:8). The evidence of this faith is a righteous walk.

Peter then summarized the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter outlined the career of Christ (verses 36-43), the sovereign Lord of all, through whom God sent the good news of peace. The word Messiah means "Anointed One"; so when Peter said, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth he was saying, "God declared Jesus the Messiah" (Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 4:27). Isaiah spoke of the Anointed One performing great deeds (Isa. 61:1-3), and as Peter declared, He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.

Peter affirmed that he and his associates were personal eyewitnesses of all Jesus did. After Christ's resurrection the disciples ate and drank with Him (cf. John 21:13). This was proof that the resurrected Jesus was no bodiless phantom and it explains how Christ was seen (Acts 10:40).

Peter made it clear that Christ's ministry results either in judgment (verse 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, Everyone who believes in Him. The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of forgiveness of sins (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) through faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Old Testament prophets (Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26).<sup>2</sup>

Cornelius and his friends knew about Christ's life and death, because these things were not done in secret (Acts 26:26). Peter made it clear that Israel was God's instrument for accomplishing God's work (Acts 10:36), but that Jesus is "Lord of all," and not just Lord of Israel. From the very founding of the nation of Israel, God made it clear that the blessing would be from Israel to the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3).

The public at large knew about Christ's life, ministry, and death, but only the Apostles and other believers were witnesses of His resurrection. Having finished this recitation of the historical basis for the Gospel message, Peter then announced the good news: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sin" (Acts 10:43; see 2:21). His hearers laid hold of that word "whosoever," applied it to themselves, believed on Jesus Christ and were saved.

Some scholars think Peter was just getting started in his message or that we only have a summary of his sermon. At any rate, when his congregation believed the Holy Spirit interrupted the meeting. The Holy Spirit gave witness to the six Jews who accompanied Peter that these Gentiles were accepted into God's church.

Today, as then, sinners are saved by faith. From that time forward, the order was and is: hear the Word, believe on Christ, and receive the Spirit, and then be baptized and unite with other believers in the church to serve and worship God.

So, let me ask the question again...who are the people that we consider strangers, people that we don't talk to or share our faith? In the news this week we met a man who had been homeless for many years, and a reporter finally read his sign, stopped to ask who

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<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:381

he was and what were his skills. The reporter discovered that the man was a former radio announcer who had some drug and alcohol problems in the past, but had been clean for the last 2 years. As of Friday he had been reunited with his family and received several job offers. More importantly than what happened to this man, is the eternal salvation of people. The question is how many people do we pass each day and never speak to or share our faith. Do we talk to people who are homeless, those with mental illnesses; those with developmental disabilities, welfare moms, the unemployed? You see, the same commission given to Peter and the apostles of sharing the good news with all the world applies to the church today. But let me warn you, when we do open our doors and get serious about evangelism, which I pray that we will this year:

- They don't know the customs of the congregation,
- They aren't always quiet and polite,
- They can be noisy,
- They can be busy, etc.

So the question remains, are we fulfilling obey God and invite all people to have faith in Christ?<sup>3</sup> The result will be forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God. Through Jesus the friendship which should always have existed between humans and God, but which sin interrupted, can be reestablish if we are willing to share the good news with others.<sup>4</sup> I pray that we will do our part. Amen

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<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 10:1

<sup>4</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 83