



The Gospel, for All Nations
Acts 10

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
©Monty Watson, October 28, 2018

THE GOSPEL, FOR ALL NATIONS Acts 10

Forgiven! That's the Gospel. Jesus sacrificed His life for us on the cross – for you, for me – and because He did, the Father has forgiven us of everything we've ever done wrong. Think about that. Every harsh word. Every lustful look. Every selfish act. Every lie, every thought, every hypocrisy. Everything! That's grace. That's the Gospel.

We have this Gospel in our hands. And *this Gospel is meant for every person in the world. Therefore, it is our responsibility to take the Gospel to every person in the world.*

According to the International Mission Board, 4.4 billion of the 7.5 billion people in the world are classified as unreached people groups. An unreached people group is defined as having less than 2% Christian population and with little or no access to the Gospel. There are 7,080 unreached people groups in the world which make up 59% of the world's population. Fifty-nine percent of the world's population has little or no access to the Gospel. So again, if the Gospel is meant for every person in the world, then it is our responsibility to take the Gospel to every person in the world.

And that mission began in the book of Acts. The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection sparked a movement. The first Christians believed that Jesus was the Son of God and that everything He said was true. They were convinced, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to a take stand at great risk. And they are our mentors, and our prayer this fall is their passion would revive our passion. The book of Acts continues to be written. We are writing our chapter every day. *So the story continues, and it's still about Jesus. And the mission continues, and today, in our generation, it's up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.*

TWO VISIONS

Acts 10 is the story of the meeting of Peter and Cornelius. Peter, a Jew. Cornelius, a Gentile, a Roman. Peter, a fisherman. Cornelius, a soldier. Two very different men who had two very dramatic visions from God. Yet these two visions had one message. God spoke to two men, then brought them together to understand that the Gospel is meant for every person in the world.

“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment” (Acts 10:1, NIV). A centurion was the captain of 100 soldiers, and the Italian Regiment posted in Caesarea would have included 600 soldiers. Cornelius “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:2, NIV). Cornelius was a Roman, not fully converted to Judaism, but God-fearing and generous to the poor.

“One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called

Peter” (Acts 10:3-5, NIV). Cornelius was shocked. Angels did not usually appear and talk to Roman soldiers. But Cornelius did as the angel said, and sent his men to Joppa to find Peter and bring him back.

Here’s what was happening with Peter. “About noon the following day ... Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven ... Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision” (Acts 10:9-17, NIV).

Some background on this strange dream. The Jewish Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, prohibited certain foods. One reason was for health purposes, and another reason was to demonstrate that Israel was distinct from other nations. Jews could not eat badgers or rabbits. I could handle that. But no pigs either. No bacon! Say it isn’t so Lord! It was okay to eat fish, but not shrimp and crawfish. I’m from Louisiana. Say it isn’t so Lord! Thankfully, Acts 10 rescinds these limitations and we can eat all the bacon and crawfish we want.

The point of the dream is that God is showing Peter that these foods are no longer unclean. But there was more to it. Peter only had half of the vision. Cornelius had the other half. And God was arranging their meeting so both would learn, at the same time, an incredible message about the Gospel.

So, Peter agreed to go to Caesarea to meet Cornelius.

Acts 10:24, “Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself’ ” (Acts 10:24-26, NIV). After the angel visited Cornelius, he was expecting a message from God from Peter. So, he gathered his family and friends. He wanted everyone he knew to hear this message from God.

Verse 28, so Peter said, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28, NIV).

A Jew was not allowed to associate with a Gentile, not to eat with a Gentile, or go into the house of a Gentile. Israel was God’s chosen people. And, He often told them to be separate from ungodly nations and people. But Israel’s error was thinking their favor with God meant despising the rest of the world. God chose Israel to be “a light to the nations,” to show and share His love with the rest of the world, but Israel never fulfilled their calling.¹

Instead, racism and spite flourished. Gentiles/Romans despised the Jews, and looked down upon them as inferior. Romans felt about Jews what Nazis felt about Jews. And Jews despised Gentiles/Romans as evil oppressors, always threatening with the sword. Jews felt about Romans

what Jews felt about the Nazis. For Peter to walk into the home of a Roman soldier would be like a Jew in 1940 walking into the home of a Nazi officer.

But God had spoken. Peter explained his vision to Cornelius, and Cornelius explained his vision to Peter. And it was clear that these two visions were one message.

ONE MESSAGE

Acts 10:34, then Peter said, “I now realize that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. The message God sent to the people of Israel, of the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, ***He is Lord of all!***” (Acts 10:34-36, NIV). ***The Gospel is meant for every person in the world.***

This is the longest story in the book of Acts, suggesting the importance of it.² That the Gospel is meant for Gentiles too, for all nations. In Acts 11, Peter tells the story to the church in Jerusalem. This was a decisive issue for the church. Not a decision made by the church, but a message from God to the church. The Gospel is meant for every person; regardless of race, country, or station in life.

I can imagine Peter saying what he said next with tears in his eyes. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all – the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name” (Acts 10:38-43, NLT).

“Now I understand that Jesus is for everyone!” Peter, realized that God’s love and grace was for every person in the world, not just for Jews. And Cornelius realized that God’s love and grace was for him; a Gentile, a Roman.

Paul described the Gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16, NAS).³ He said, “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus ... You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, 26, NLT). Imagine what it was like for Peter, a Jew, to realize this. Imagine what it was like for Cornelius, a Gentile, to hear this.

I’ve had to the privilege of preaching the Gospel on five continents. And no matter what people look like, the color of their skin, or the language they speak, the saying is true. You will never lock eyes with anyone in the world whom God does not love. “For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son” (John 3:16).

Look at these faces.

- God loves this little girl from Nepal.
- He loves this redhead from Ireland.
- He loves this black guy from Detroit.
- He loves this blonde from Sweden.
- He loves this Mursi tribesman from Ethiopia.
- He loves this Chinese university student.
- He loves this young Russian soldier standing guard outside the Kremlin.
- He loves this woman whose eyes peer through her burka.
- He loves this mother from Sudan with two hungry children.
- He loves this camel rancher in India.
- He loves this old man from China.
- He loves this Montana cowboy.
- He loves this New York model.
- He loves this toothless, old woman from Ecuador.
- And God loves this little girl who lives in the Wakhan Valley in Afghanistan.

“Red and yellow, black and white ... They are precious in His sight ... Jesus loves the little children of the world.” The Gospel is for every person in the world.

OUR MISSION

Therefore, if the Gospel is meant for every person in the world, then we are responsible to take the Gospel to every person in the world! If God loved the world enough to sacrifice Jesus, then we should love the world enough to share Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it's up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV). “And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV). “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The purpose of a hospital is to heal the sick. The purpose of a school is to educate children. The purpose of a grocery store is to provide food. The purpose of a church is ...? Stop and think about that. What, in reality, has the purpose of the church in America become today? Is the church a merely a classroom where we pride ourselves in studying the Bible? Is the church a place to inspire people to be nice and kind and loving? Is the church the place we go to teach our children to be good, to help us have a happier marriages, and to give us friends who believe and act just like we do. What is the purpose of the church? The purpose of the New Testament is the mission. ***To take the gospel across the street and around the world.***

When it comes to the massive global mission, what are we to do? Three things.

- PRAY. Pray for the world, especially for the places and people that move your heart. And pray for places we support – India, Czech Republic, and East Asia.
- GIVE. Give financially to support our church’s efforts in missions around the world.
- GO. Go on one of our cross-cultural or international trips. Go and allow God to use you to take the Gospel to someone who has never heard it.

And, walk across the street, walk across the room, walk across the campus. Remember the lessons we learned from Philip, from Acts 8? Make up your mind to live on mission. Respond to the Spirit’s leading. Look for opportunities, and look for the person God is guiding you to talk to. Just get to know people and care about people. Ask questions. Listen to their story before you tell them your story. And some point, tell them about Jesus.

Friendships are the pathway to so many people coming to Christ. Jesus befriended Andrew. And Andrew told Peter about Jesus. Peter told Cornelius. Ananias told Saul/Paul. Philip told an Ethiopian. The Ethiopian told his queen. Pantaenus told Clement. Justin told Tatian. Felix told Octavius. Origen told Gregory. And someone told you. And it’s your responsibility to tell someone else. Who are you going to tell?

CONCLUSION

If the Gospel is meant for every person in the world, we are responsible to take the Gospel to every person in the world! If God loved the world enough to sacrifice Jesus, then we should love the world enough to share Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

I want to end with this. When the Apostle John was an old man, he was allowed a peek into heaven, a preview of the future. He wrote down what he saw. “I looked and before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ ” (Revelation 7:9-10, NIV).

Heaven will be filled with people from every nation, every color, and every language. All singing, “Worthy is the Lamb!” And when we sing, we join the diversity of heaven singing the chorus of heaven.

NOTES

¹ Isaiah 42:6.

² I. Howard, Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), page 181.

³ See also Romans 3:22, Romans 3:29, Galatians 3:8, Ephesians 2:12-16.