

The Gospel Comes to the Gentiles.
Acts 10

Romans 8:1-17

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Responsive Psalm 34:1-10

This morning we will be going through chapter 10 of the book of Acts. I know it is a rather large section to take all at once but the entire chapter is one account and it just seemed best to take it all at once this morning to really get a feel for the context of what is going on here in this passage. But before we dive into that this morning, I just want to take a few moments to sort of summarize what has been going on here, for the account that we will be looking at this morning has to do with a pretty big, and at the time controversial event. The gospel, and the holy spirit comes upon the gentiles. We today don't not fully grasp how astounding that statement truly is, for we are now so far removed for that time. The Jews were God's chosen people, it is through them that he revealed himself, it is through them that the prophets foretold of the Messiah and coming redemption, and it is through the lineage of Abraham and David that the Messiah came. But they rejected him, and instead clung to their traditions, and looked to the law for their righteousness.

They saw themselves as God's special chosen people...and yes in many ways they are, but in their arrogance and pride they missed the point of God's redemptive work, and the spreading of the gospel and belief to the Gentiles, which was always God's plan from the beginning. As Paul wrote in Roman's chapter 9, He was grieved by the blindness of his people. And he says, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren and countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, their service of God and the promise, of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God." The Israelites had every advantage, they had the prophets, the covenants, the law, and God's promises....yet they rejected their fulfillment which is in Christ. But then look what Paul says in verse 6. "It is not that the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel."

Just because they were physical descendants of Abraham did not make them the redeemed and holy people that they believed that they were, and he doubles down on this in verse 7, "nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but, in Isaac your seed shall be called, that is, those who are the children of the flesh, the physical descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel....are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." And this is exactly what we will be seeing in our text this morning...the holy spirit and belief coming to the Gentiles, because it isn't about physical hereditary...but it is through the spirit. Paul goes on to quote Hosea when he says, Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only but also of the gentiles, for as he says in Hosea, "I will call them my people, who were not my people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, you are not my people, there they shall be called sons of the living God." That's right, the salvation of the gentiles was foretold in Hosea, and Paul ends by saying, "what shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because it did not seek it by faith, but as it were by the works of the la, For they stumbled at that stumbling stone, as it is written, behold I law in Zion and stumbling stone and and a rock of offense. And who ever believes on him will not be put to shame."

And that brings us to our passage this morning, the word of God goes out to the Gentiles, and the holy spirit and the new birth is given. As we have been going through the book of Acts, we have been following how God has caused his message to spread across the land, fulfilling what he told his disciples that they shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. We have seen how the gospel has spread, how God has used persecution to drive the gospel outward from Jerusalem into the surrounding areas....and now he sends Peter to be a witness and to bring the gospel of Christ to a Roman Centurion and his family. So let us go ahead and read our passage this morning. I know it's a long reading, but bear with me for I think it is best to take this section in one large chunk. (read Acts 10)

Caesarea, where Cornelius resided was the capital of Judea, and the official location of the Roman Procurator, that is the leader of the guards who could possibly serve as a governor of the area. This area of Judea, albeit firmly within the Jewish society, was occupied by the Roman gentiles, and being the location of the Roman Procurator, it would have been sort of central to the Roman occupation in that area. Cornelius, was a Roman guard, who was at the fringes of Judaism. He being a Gentile could not fully be accepted into the Jewish faith or community, he appears to be sort of a bridge between Judaism, and paganism, living in a city full of gentiles yet still in the Holy Land. We could almost see in Cornelius this sort of nominal Christian, and upon reading this account which shows that by all outward appearance of his actions, and claims that he was a Jew, worshipping, believing, and acting out his faith. But despite that, it was still not enough, there is more to this faith than ritualistic practice of worship and good works.

I see in Cornelius a sort of mirror to what we see in our own churches today. Cornelius, an outsider, a gentile, one who was considered to be unclean by the Jews, had the appearance of one who had faith, he had a basic knowledge of the truth, he strived to be a good example, but was still lacking the new birth. As you all know, because I have said this many times now....the church today is just as much a mission field as streets of Holland, or Grand Rapids, or any foreign country. There seems to be many Cornelius' within the church, nominal Christians, acting out the part but yet still having a nagging emptiness within. But we should not be discouraged by this, for as we see in our passage this morning, God is about the business of seeking out his people and drawing them to himself. Both Peter and Cornelius receive visions, preparing them for what is to come. For Peter, it is the acceptance of the unclean into the family of God, and for Cornelius, it is a call for true belief, the Holy Spirit's guidance to bring about not just a nominal belief, but true faith.

Again we see that salvation is of the Lord. It is God who orchestrated this event, it was God who through the holy spirit brought these 2 men together, so that many may hear the gospel. This account mirrors that of the previous account with the Eunuch, here you have a Gentile who is praying, reading, studying and learning about God....much like with the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was studying the scriptures, and had come to Jerusalem to worship. We see a vision came upon Peter instructing him to go with these men, to the house of this gentile. Much like we saw with Philip who got instruction to go into the desert to which he found the Eunuch. In both of these accounts we see God's orchestration of events which brings about the salvation of these 2 men, who were prominent and well respected within their own societies, who I am sure would be instrumental in bringing the gospel to their own areas. We see that Cornelius gathered in his household those who were close to him, his friends and his family to hear what Peter would have to say, and I am sure likewise the Ethiopian Eunuch when he arrived back home had much to say as well.

While in these 2 accounts we see the recording of these men all receiving visions guiding them in their actions, that is not to say that the holy spirit is any less active or powerful today. God is still going about changing hearts, calling his people to himself, and it is still through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that one comes to believe. Though this work of the spirit may not be fully visible to us as it once was, it is still never the less as active and powerful today. The spirit not only worked in Cornelius, and the Eunuch in bringing about faith, but also within Peter and Philip as well in the sharing of the gospel. In the case of Peter there was a lesson to be learned, and some growth that needed to be done as well. The issue at hand, I don't think was whether or not the gospel was for the Gentiles or not, but rather how it pertained to the Christian community at large. Jews were forbidden to to even share a meal with a gentile, let alone stay or visit their household. This of course would bring about an issue of factions within the faith, converted Jews, and converted Gentiles and neither of them really mixing. Much like Cornelius practicing the Jewish faith, but not being fully accepted as a Jew since he was by nature and lineage a gentile.

But that is not God's intended purpose, for we are united as one in God, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, if we are God's then we are one together in him. There is no distinction, there is no separation, but rather we have become one big adopted family. This was the lesson that Peter had to learn, and is one that I think is one that is needed today, that is the proper understanding of God's grace, and mercy toward all people. By that, I mean all types of people, from every race, creed, and walk of life. It is trendy today to talk about identity politics, and racism, churches have been distracted from the gospel, and the main point of scripture to go chasing after secular psychological trends. Trying to push for a system of societal normalcy that is unbiblical, and a perversion of what God has said. Paul, speaking of the people of Christ, lays out the biblical distinction, you are either Gods, or you are of Satan...and for those who are the children of God, through faith in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ, and if we are Christ's, then we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What Paul is saying here, in the book of Galatians is that the Jews were not Abraham's seed, they were not truly the promised offspring of Abraham...why yes, they were the physical offspring of Abraham, and there was a sense of a promise in that, but God meant it for so much more. For those who have faith, are the heirs of the promise, those who are have faith at the offspring of Abraham, those who are Christ, have inherited the promised land and everlasting life. So really, there is your biblical distinction....belief, and unbelief. Your background, your nationality, your race has little to no effect in the broader christian society. In a day and age now where there are many who are trying to create hierarchy's based on race, and perceived privilege...it is all meaningless in the family of God. Peter, being a Jew had to learn this lesson...his lineage, and nationality did not make him any better then this Roman Centurion as far as the new birth is concerned.....Paul even talked of such, saying that he was the chief of sinners, he himself was not a special, nor privileged man, in fact he was chosen by God to suffer for the sake of the ministry, as it says in chapter 9, speaking of Paul after his conversion, "The Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear my name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. "

Paul was a sinner saved by grace just as we who follow Christ all are. salvation of God was not only for the Jews, but God's redemption is for all of mankind. And with that there is a second less talked about side to this vision that Peter received. Luke writes, that a large sheet, held by the four corners was lowered down from heaven and in it was all kinds of animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds. Then a voice came, saying to Kill and eat. But Peter being a devote Jew responded...Not so, Lord...for I have never eaten any such things, have kept your dietary laws, and no unclean, nor common thing has ever entered my body. But a voice came, a second time.. saying What God has cleansed you must not call common. The second less talked about side of this vision is that it is God who is calling the unclean, clean. This was something that was symbolized within the Jewish practices of eating certain foods, and their restrictions for eating, and lodging with Gentiles. But God is not saying here, that Peter must take such restrictions and bring the Gentiles under them. That is, God has made he unclean to be clean..for his purpose, for his will, and by his own mercy and grace. But he doesn't do so to bring them under the umbrella of Judaism. He has come, and by his blood sanctified the unclean...both Jew, and Gentile.

It was never really about the food, just as the promise to Abraham wasn't really about the genealogy, but it was about Christ, it was about God..and his work to reconcile all these things to himself. To make for himself out of a broken, sinful people, a nation of priests, a holy nation made up of the faithful from all nations. As David Peterson wrote in his commentary on Acts about this vision that Peter had, he said.. “A second divine command then explains the significance of the first, which was Rise, kill and eat.. he now says, Do not call anything impure that God has made clean, or in other words, what God has cleansed, you do not defile. Peter must now acknowledge God's right to determine what is clean and to redefine the boundaries for the gospel era. This message was so important, it was given to Peter three times, Peter must not treat any of the creatures in the vision as profane, since God has declared them to be clean. Such previsions and distinction between the clean, and unclean in the law were temporary, designed to keep Israel a holy and distinct people, until the time when Jews and Gentiles could receive the forgiveness of sins and sanctification on the same basis, through faith in Christ. And the coming of the holy spirit upon Cornelious and his household further make it clear that the Gentiles do not have to become Jewish proselytes in order to benefit from the messianic salvation.”

That was the issue that Paul was dealing with in Galatians, a group of Jewish men had come to the churches in Galatia and had begun to tell them to truly be one of God's they must now after having accepted God, return again to the law and traditions. To which Paul replied in Chapter 3, verse 1. “O Foolish Galatians! Who had bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you; Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect in the flesh? Therefor he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”

This was the lesson that Peter was to learn, the message of the salvation of God was to come to the Gentiles, to those who were considered to be unclean, and it was God who would declare them to be clean, for all those who are of faith, whether Jew or Gentile, are the offspring of Abraham. Heirs to the promise, partakers of the grace and mercy of God, the redeemed people of God, and a Holy Nation of priests.

The proof we have within the text, that indeed the spirit has come upon the gentiles is in verse 44. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word, and those of the circumcision, that is the Jews that came with Peter, were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out among the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and magnify God.” The word of God has come to the Gentiles, and the Spirit was given so that they may believe. Praise God for his mercy and grace that he has shown toward us, that while we were yet sinners, while we were the unclean, he loved us, he died for us, and by his grace has claimed us who are of faith, who are washed by the blood of this lamb, to be declared clean, righteous, and holy. Not by our merits, not by our actions, but wholly and solely by the sovereign will and mercy of God. To be justified by his sacrifice, and to be sanctified by his grace and the holy spirit working within us, to be grafted in to the true vine, to be called the holy nation of God, the true Israel, and heir's to the promises given to Abraham.

What more can we do then to lift up praise to the Holy Father, like Cornelius and his household, after hearing the words that Peter spoke, they magnified God, for his salvation had come to them, those who were afar off, have now been brought in, to be one in the family of God. So to it is with each and every one of us who believe, whether Jew, or Gentile, male, or female, rich or poor, in God there is no partiality, but only faith, and love, grace, mercy, and peace.