

FPFWC Christian Development



Visions of Praise

November 2021

Fall Quarter

November 27, 2021

Lesson #4 – Good News for All

SCRIPTURE TEXT –Acts 10:34-47

Key Verse - Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.—Acts 10:34–35

ICE BREAKERS –

1. Should you prepare your testimony before you share it with others, or just speak as the context dictates and the Holy Spirit leads?

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's passage is an excerpt from a longer story that extends from Acts 10:1 to 11:18. The length of this account, which comprises more than 6 percent of the book of Acts, reflects its significance.

This turning point in history occurred after the Day of Pentecost, when the apostle Peter had declared in his gospel message that “the promise is unto you ... and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Given Peter's surprise in today's passage, he may have presumed that “all that are afar off” referred only to all *Jews* who were afar off (compare addressees in James 1:1).

Our lesson text has Peter standing before a Gentile audience, poised to share the gospel. This was a huge step for Peter. To observant Jews, Gentiles were unclean pagans, who might endanger the apostles' own religious and moral purity. Any sharing of faith beliefs by Jews to Gentiles would have been “clean” ones testifying to “unclean” ones.

But God was changing that mind-set. The correction began with two visions that occurred about 21 hours apart: the first to a Roman centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10:1–6) and the second to the apostle Peter (10:9–16). The respective locations were the cities of Caesarea Maritima and Joppa, about 30 miles apart, on the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

Cornelius was no ordinary Gentile. He had a track record of praying to Israel's God and modeling generosity to his neighbors (Acts 10:2). There is no indication, however, that Cornelius had fully converted to Judaism. Luke (the author of Acts) refers to individuals like Cornelius as fearing God and/or being “devout” (10:2; 13:16, 26; 17:4, 17). This was in contrast to “proselytes”—those who had converted to Judaism fully (2:10; 6:5; 13:43). Even so, God, recognizing the sincerity of Cornelius's faith, chose this man to be the starting point for extending the gospel to Gentiles.

God reached out to Cornelius by means of an angel, who instructed him to send for Peter (Acts 10:3–8). Next, God gave Peter a vision in which the apostle was

commanded repeatedly to eat food forbidden to Jews (10:9–16). This conveyed a message that what had been declared unclean was no longer so.

Immediately following Peter's vision, messengers from Cornelius arrived and invited Peter to the Gentile's house (Acts 10:17–23). Upon arriving, Cornelius and Peter shared their experiences (10:24–33). This takes us into today's text.

LESSON COMMENTARY

10:34–35. Because of the vision, Peter realized that God does not discriminate against people because of their ethnicity. This is not a new revelation—God's love for the nations is taught in the Hebrew Bible as well. The Abrahamic covenant was given to provide ultimate blessing to the nations (Gn 22:18); the prophet Jonah was sent to preach repentance to the wicked and rebellious people of Nineveh (Jnh 1:2); and God used Elisha to heal the Syrian officer Naaman (2Kg 5:14). The new discovery related to Peter's new understanding, not God's previous revelation.

These verses are often claimed to show that God will save people who fear Him and do what is right even if they do not believe in Jesus. If that were the case, then why was Peter directed by the Lord to preach Jesus to Cornelius? The answer is that despite his devotion, Cornelius was not yet saved. In Ac 11:13–14, the angel is said to have directed Cornelius to send for Peter that he might "speak words to you by which you will be saved." The point of Ac 10:34–35 is not that fearing God and doing good apart from faith in Jesus is salvific. Rather that, regardless of nationality, those who seek God are welcomed by Him and so God will, in His sovereignty, extend greater light to such people.

(2) The Body of the Message (10:36–42)

The body of Peter's message can be summarized by noting three points. In 10:36–39a, Peter rehearsed the bare facts of the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah. In 10:39b, Peter voiced the violent reaction of the Jewish leaders against Jesus' ministry and His crucifixion. In 10:40–43a, he emphasized the resurrection and that there were witnesses to it to whom was entrusted the proclamation of these mighty acts.

10:36–39a. By tradition, Peter was the source of Mark's gospel—and, significantly, this sermon follows the same outline as Mark.

10:39b–42. Peter began by announcing good news to Cornelius, the preaching of **peace through Jesus Christ**. In this context the gospel is good news because the promise for the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ is for everyone—both Jews and Gentiles. His message then included the baptism of John (10:37), Christ's ministry and works (10:38), Christ's death (10:39), Christ's resurrection (10:40a), His appearance to His chosen witnesses (10:40a–41), and Christ's commissioning of His witnesses (10:42). These actions by God were not a novelty, for they had their foundation in the Hebrew Scriptures (10:43a). The barrier of the law that separated Jew and Gentile was not a new development, it was anticipated by the prophets, though Peter did not refer to a specific passage.

The Conclusion of the Message: The Need for Faith (10:43)

10:43. Peter ended his message by saying that **everyone** who believes in Jesus **receives forgiveness of sins**. As Peter was speaking the events of the day of Pentecost were repeated, but this time served to bless *Gentile* people.

The Results of the Message (10:44–11:18)

(1) The Salvation of Cornelius's Household (10:44–48)

10:44. Peter's preaching was interrupted by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles who heard and believed the gospel

10:45. As at Pentecost, the Jews who were present were amazed, this time not because of the falling of the Holy Spirit in power, but because the Spirit had been given to the Gentiles. The giving of the Spirit directly to Gentiles was evidence that Gentiles did not need to convert to Judaism in order to become followers of Israel's Messiah.

10:46a. That those who received the Spirit were **speaking with tongues** as the Jewish people had on the day of Pentecost was evidence to Peter's Jewish companions that God's plan of salvation included Gentiles.

10:46b–47. As he did on the day of Pentecost, Peter took advantage of the situation to explain the unexpected pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles. He said now that the Gentiles had received the baptism of the Spirit, they could be **baptized with water** in the name of Jesus. For the early church the outward act of water baptism was evidence of the inner work of the Spirit in the conversion experience.

LESSON NUGGET – Peter did not get to finish his sermon. When he said, "Whosoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (v.43), they believed and were saved. What a great way to stop a sermon!

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Life Application notes, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary.*