

Acts 10-11:4,15-18

God's Generous Welcome

Introduction: Acts is the history of the earliest Christians; we've been following their story to see what they were all about and where they got their power. So far in our studies the gospel message has been for the Jews and those on the fringes of Judaism. Finally here in Acts 10 we see the Gospel coming to the Gentiles to include them in the family messiah as Gentiles and not as those who first converted to Judaism. From here on out the focus of Acts will be the mission to the Gentiles, as the gospel message spreads to the uttermost parts of the earth. (God's plan from the beginning, starting with Abraham - through you I will bless the nations.)

We've already seen in our studies in the book of Acts how God's Spirit is pushing the church outward toward those who are opposite of them, Whether The Hellenist (Greek cultured and speaking Jews), The Samaritans, or The Ethiopian eunuch or former persecutors of the Church; embracing those of other cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds. The church is continually being stretched in its understanding of who Jesus is and what his life, death, and resurrection have accomplished for every single man, woman and child.

1. Peter and his Cultural Exclusiveness

1. Peter though himself not living in the strictness of the law like the Pharisees (he is staying at the house of a tanner - which would make him ceremonially unclean), was still culturally very Jewish. Examples: The vision that God sends is refused by him 3 times as he insists that he has never eaten anything common or unclean. Afterwards he tells Cornelius and his company that even to enter the house of a Gentile is "unlawful". Because there is no command in the Law of Moses forbidding such interaction, the word must, and can mean taboo, culturally frowned upon. But here Peter is, against his better judgment, because God has orchestrated this whole thing, and continues to push him to understand the depths and lengths of the justifying and sanctifying work of Jesus.

2. It's easy for us to look back at this situation in our 21 century view of the world and see totally unfounded prejudice. No doubt there were prejudices on both sides.
3. But there were specific laws in the Law of Moses that commanded a strict kosher diet and other laws about cleanliness, taking Saturday as a day of rest, and all sorts of rules barring other Gentile activities, like the parties that went on around pagan temples, and the games that celebrated the gods and the Emperor - All of this made the Jewish people stand out, distinct, separate. - which was part of the point of these laws. If you look at the history of the Jews it was their neglect of these laws (and many others) that caused them to lose their distinction among the nations and led them into Idolatry and Apostasy, and eventually exile. -The fear was not ungrounded. But it also caused them to make up all sorts of other laws surrounding these laws, and all sorts of fear narratives about Gentiles to "keep their nation safe".
4. The point of these laws, as I just said, were that the Jews were to be God's distinct people among all the nations to show what God was really like, and eventually be the people through whom God would fulfill his promise to set the world free from the tyranny of Sin and bring them his kingdom of Peace. The problem was that the Jews forgot that the Law was a means to an end, that it had an expiration date, if you will, and that was the coming of Messiah - who would usher in God's kingdom where all kinds of people from the north, south, east and west would receive forgiveness and repentance and come and sit at the same table with the Patriarchs.
5. In this story through a vision of unclean animals God tells Peter to get up, kill and eat them, Peter of course refuses supposing it to be a sort of test. God responds and says literally - "Stop, doing what you have been doing - which is calling common what God has cleansed"...God does this 3 times with Peter. And then it has immediate application - "there are three men waiting for you at the door, go with them doubting nothing, for I have sent them."
6. We see even as in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch that God is the one who is orchestrating this whole thing pushing his Apostle to a place of total discomfort and unfamiliarity because of the inclusiveness of the Gospel.

1. And the good news of Jesus should do that for us. I remember hearing a preacher once say, If People are not asking, “Can we still go on sinning - because God’s grace is so much bigger than we ever realized... If people aren’t leaning that way then we haven’t truly preached the Gospel.
2. “We are justified freely, for Christ sake, by faith, without the exertion of our own strength, gaining of merit, or doing of works. To the age old question, “what shall I do to be saved?” the confessional answer is shocking: “nothing! Just be still; shut up and listen for once in your life to what God the Almighty, creator and redeemer is saying to his world and to you in the death and resurrection of his son! Listen and believe!” - Gerhard Forde

2. Against Pluralism (many ways to God)

1. As the story unfolds we find Peter being more and more open to what God is doing, he is most likely thinking and working through through the implications of what he later says, “Jesus is Lord of all. He invites these men into the house where he is staying, travels with them - all including the sharing of space and meals - becoming ceremonially unclean.. he even enters into the home of a Gentile Roman centurion - upon entering he says, **“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”**
 1. Cornelius then recounts the vision and message from the angel, and concludes - “So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”
 2. So Peter opens his mouth and begins to tell them the Good News concerning Jesus.
 3. **Jesus is Lord of All** is a statement Peter makes in the beginning of his message. Obviously this is a phrase that the early church had begun to believe and say about Jesus. Peter though is being challenged to understand this in a whole new way Peter is beginning to understand that this means that God welcomes people as they are, that gentiles do not have to become Jews first

to receive the forgiveness of sin and the blessings of being a part of the Messiah's people.

4. **Jesus is lord of All** - Who doesn't love and receive freely, without objection the inclusiveness of the message of the Gospel- Jesus is Lord of all! Anyone can come, all are welcome without distinction. But often what we do with a teaching or practice that has been abused in the past (Fundamentalism or Pharisaism-self righteousness) is then swing the pendulum too far in the other direction and think that it means that God simply makes no distinctions at all, and accepts and approves of everyone as they are; that God doesn't care about sin, unrighteous, or injustice. We have to be careful, good, and faithful students of both the word of God and the person of Jesus Christ so that we don't contradict and twist the message of the scripture.
 1. "It is not the case, then, that God simply 'accepts us as we are'. He invites us as we are; but responding to that invitation always involves the complete transformation which is acted out in repentance, forgiveness, baptism and receiving the Spirit." - NT Wright
5. Our problem with the statement Jesus is Lord is when we realize that this means that he is not a counselor, or consultant, he is not a means to an end. Jesus must be the end or nothing at all. Jesus is Lord means yes that he welcomes everyone, but it also means that Faith and repentance have taken place on our part. - as we said two weeks ago repentance is to forsake and renounce all that we were before, all that we were living for and getting our identity and worth from and now finding that in Jesus alone. - Then faith means that are trusting in him and in him alone
6. If I follow Jesus will I have to give up... will I have to pray, read my bible, give up sex, quit my Job. But here we are negotiating the cost rather than counting it. Usually we are willing to give up things, but we aren't willing to give up the right to decide what those things are. Like Peter and the other disciples, we may not have all the problems solved—the problems of following Jesus and saying yes to his teaching and his Lordship and his saving work. He may confuse us at times, and baffle us with things he says, and provoke us, and offend us. “

7. Yet your heart must say something like, I do not know all that you are going to ask of me, Lord. But I'll do whatever you say in your Word, whether I like it or not, and I'll accept patiently whatever you send into my life, whether I understand it or not." We cannot say to Jesus, you are my consultant, I will be happy to take your recommendations and I might even do some of them. No. if you want Jesus with you, you have to give up the right to self-determination." -Keller
2. Some see in this passage a wiping away of all distinctions and being tolerant of everyone. But if that's the case what is point of Cornelius having to bring Peter all the way from Joppa to hear "words by which he will be saved"?? If Cornelius was accepted by God in the state that he was in why did the angel appear at all?? Why not just stay as he was? It's ironic that people take from this passage that idea that the Bible teaches that all roads lead to God, which is funny because the point is the exact opposite - Salvation, peace, the forgiveness of sin is only through Jesus God's anointed messiah.
 1. It's quite clear from Peter's sermon that this isn't the case The good news of Peace through Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all
 2. How God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.
 3. Pluralism doesn't work because everyone of us are on under the tyranny of evil, suffering and the devil...The devil is also called "the Satan" which means accuser or adversary. The Bible describes him as being before God's throne (the courtroom of the universe) and accusing people, night and day, of the wrong that they are guilty of and the punishment that they deserve. The Bible never says that he is wrong in his accusations; in fact, quite the exact opposite. And I think that each one of us know this to be true. The Bible says that there is something deeply wrong with every single one of us -the Bible calls this wrong or disorder- Sin. It can be described in many ways but here are 3 ways the scripture describes it.
 1. **Iniquity - Self absorption - we are curved in on ourselves (iniquity means to be bent or twisted - the inner warp of the fallen nature)**

2. **Transgression - Self will (transgression refers to stubbornness and willfulness) we say, the heart wants, what the heart wants..bent on our own will, self determination..**
3. **Sin -Failure -the word “sin” means to miss the mark, to get “it” wrong. We are not what we should be. all of us are guilty of these and are conspirators in making the world a miserable place through our sin and selfishness.**
4. Peter says specifically though that Jesus came to heal all who were oppressed by the devil- all who are under this weight of sin and guilt - under his accusation.
 1. How does he do this? Peter records that Jesus was put to death by being hung on a tree - this is not a common way to refer to crucifixion but a very Jewish/Christian way to word it. The reference to hanging on a tree comes from The Mosaic Law where it says that “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”. What the Jewish Christians saw in Jesus’ death by crucifixion was this amazing truth that Jesus was not dying for his own sins - he had none, but instead he was bearing the curse for us (just as Isaiah the prophet foretold about the Christ). He became sin for us, he took on all the oppression of the devil, He bore all the accusations against us and he paid the full price for our sins, absorbing in his own body the full weight of God’s righteous judgment on sin... Not only that but Peter records that on the third day after this God raised him from the dead and has set Jesus - the one who absorbed all the judgment of God to be the Judge of all men at the end of time...It is only now through Jesus - **“for everyone who believes in him, that we can receive forgiveness, cleansing, and freedom from our sin, guilt and shame.”**
 2. See Pluralism doesn’t work because we are all under the tyranny of sin, guilt, and shame and only Jesus offers to set us free, to give us forgiveness and cleansing. And only Jesus, the final judge has the right to do this because he alone bore all our judgment.

Conclusion: As Peter is sharing this message we're told that the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles - As sign of God's favor and acceptance, and everyone of them was baptized. Just like it happened to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. They're was nothing needed except faith - trust that Jesus was who Peter's preaching said he was and that he had accomplished for us what the message of the gospel claims. Yes, God welcomes us as we are, the price of salvation has been fully paid, but we must repent and believe, we must submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord of All.

What does the receiving of the Holy Spirit mean?

Continual, unbroken fellowship with God - God's spirit comes into our hearts because our sin has been removed by the work of Jesus Christ. Now we have unbroken fellowship with God. Jesus says, to all his people - I am with you always, till the end of the age, I will never leave you or forsake you.

God's love being spread abroad in your heart - the knowledge and experience that you are a dearly loved, and fully accepted child of God, that now you can know and experience God as your loving heavenly father that is working all things for your good, and wants a determines to do good for you.

Justification -God's approval and judgment of you filling you up so now you are free in every other relationship in your life. As we saw in Acts 2 the giving of the Spirit brought a new freedom, because they had been filled up by God's love and approval they no longer had to seek it in personal accomplishments or human approval, but now they were truly free to be who they were, and to serve others without fear of rejection or hunger for approval.