



THE GENTILE PENTECOST  
ACTS 10:1-48

Open to Acts 10. Last week we looked at the conversion of a guy named Saul. The guy was really bad by our standards—he persecuted Christians even to their death. And God shows up on the road to Damascus and with his merciful muscular grace changes his heart and saves him. And so God saved someone who was really bad and this week in Acts 10 he's going to save someone who's really good. Remember we said that the person running from God doing bad things is just as lost the person who trying to get to God by doing good things. They're equally lost—even if they look different on the outside. Both need to be rescued by Jesus and this week we're going to see him rescue a guy named Cornelius.

And his name is Cornelius. What do we know about him? He was a Roman Centurion which meant he served in the army and was in charge of 100 soldiers. He was stationed in Caesarea named after Caesar Augustus which was one of the largest cities in the Roman empire. It was port city right on the Mediterranean coast. It was the center of government for the region of Judea. So there was lots of trade and politics. Happenin' place.

We also learn that he was a good religious man vs2 **“a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God.”** Pretty good resume there. And to top it off he had a great reputation vs22 says he was an **“upright and God-fearing man who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.”** So good resume good reputation but there's only one problem—He was a Gentile.

The problem was...he was a Gentile. And understanding his Gentileness over and against Peter's Jewishness is crucial for understanding the significance of the story we're about to read.

A Gentile was anyone who wasn't a Jew. Anyone who wasn't a part of the ethnic group that descended from the Abraham. In Gen. 12 God called Abram and told him that his offspring would be God's special people—they would become the nation of Israel or as they'd later be called, Jews. And God told Abraham that he was choosing Israel not to be in an exclusive relationship with them forever. From the beginning God's plan was to start with Israel and through them, rescue, and bless all the nations of the earth.

In the meantime in order distinguish and set Israel apart from the other nations, God gave them a set of instructions called the law **ROPE!** And part of the law prescribed customs and practices that would physically visually set them apart from every other people group on the planet. They couldn't wear certain clothes, they couldn't touch dead animals, couldn't eat certain foods—and they couldn't be around anyone who did. It would make them unclean.

Now God doesn't give them these rules because he's particular about his fashion or bc he's a picky eater, Israel physical set apartness was a living symbol of their spiritual set apartness. They were God's chosen special people. Why? Because God set is affection on them by sheer unconditional grace. And we've got to get this this.

The Bible goes out of its way to make sure we know God didn't choose Israel because they were better than any other nation. "Deut. 7:7-8, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers..."

Not only were they not better—they were just as bad. Mic. 5 says they worshipped other Gods and practiced witchcraft. Jer. 19:5 says Israel made altars to the Baals to sacrifice their children upon. God didn't look at all the people and choose because Israel was good and all the other nations were bad. God looked down and saw that every nation was bad that none desired him and chose by sheer unconditional grace to set his affection on one of them. That's what made Israel special and that's what all the symbolism pointed to was God's grace.

But they quickly lost sight of that. And the rituals and symbolism that was suppose to remind them of God's grace became a way to display their superiority to others. Somewhere along the way things went from, "We're special because God loves us" to "We're special because we're better" Better than who? Everyone else! Or in one word, Gentiles. And Jewish superiority was intense. They referred to Gentiles as dogs. And made sure to stay separate from those filthy people whose lives were marked by strict dietary laws and clothing laws. "They eat unclean foods, they touch unclean things, they wear unclean things—if a Gentile cast a shadow on me I'd want to take a shower. I'm so glad I live on this side of the street." Feel this intense "us and them" mentality.

Now, Cornelius is one of "them" a dirty Gentile. And an angel appears to him in a vision and tells him that his prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God and to go get a guy named Peter. Apparently Peter has something to say to this Gentile and his family. So he sends some men to Joppa to go retrieve Peter.

Meanwhile Peter has a vision, he's gone up on the roof of the place he's staying to spend some time in prayer. And he gets hungry and before the food's ready he falls into a trance and vs 11, "and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

So God presents hungry Peter with some food but it's unclean—it's off limits for a Jew—and Peter trying to be a good Jew says I'm not eating that—that's unclean. And God says what I have made clean, don't call common. I said it's clean—don't say it's off limits. Now it would obviously be confusing for a Jew who for their whole life had intentionally avoided these foods to suddenly hear that they're no longer off limits. But the vision is about more than just food it's about people—specifically those unclean Gentiles who through Christ are no longer unclean—there's no more us and them.

And God's been preparing him for this. Now if you flip back to chapter 8 you can see that Peter is beginning to be open to God's blessing extending beyond Jews. He places his hands on some half-breeds called Samaritans and they receive the Spirit—so that's new territory. On top of that, Peter vs. 6 says he's staying at the house of a tanner—someone who turn hides into leather—this proximity to dead animals would have made him unclean.

And it's as if the dominoes are beginning to fall for Peter and the distinctions between unclean people and foods and animals are beginning to dissolve. And as he's sorting this out, the guys that Cornelius had sent show up. Vs 19-20 And God says hey three guys (Gentiles) are here to see you—accompany them without hesitation. He says why yall here? And they tell Peter how Cornelius was vss 22 “directed by an angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say. **So he invited them into be his guests!!!”**

He's finally starting to get it. **ROPE.** He and 6 guys go with the men and they arrive in Caesarea where Cornelius had assembled a crowd of relatives and close friends to hear what Peter was going. Vs 25 “When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, “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.” Vs 34 “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” He finally gets it. This is how it was always meant to be. **God didn't change his mind about the Gentiles.** This Jewish set apartness was simply the first step in his plan to set part people from all nations for himself. He's not contradicting his former strategy. One commentator says it well:

“Imagine a mother seeing her child at the other side of the street, about to cross a busy road. ‘Stand still’ she shouts urgently. Then a minute later, seeing that the traffic has come to a stop at the light, she shouts again, ‘Walk across’. She hasn't contradicted herself. The initial command was the right one for the time. Indeed it is because she wanted the child to walk across in the end that she told him to stand still for the moment.” (Wright, Acts, 163) God's presence with one as a short-term arrangement in a long-term goal of blessing all nations.

We like this but think of the identity crisis this would bring for a Jew. You're whole life you've found your identity in not being like those people. God's plan isn't to let Gentiles come across **the line** his plan all along was to eliminate **it** completely. **Pick Up Rope.** What makes me special? The things that's always made your special—that God has set his affection on your in covenant commitment. This is where we're supposed to find our sense of value and our identity. You've heard that, right?

But this is so hard for us. In our society we build our identities on what makes us distinct from others—what sets us apart from others. So you tell people God loves them and that doesn't help because he loves millions of people. We want to find our identity and value in something that makes us distinct. You are something other people are not—rich/poor, successful/unsuccessful, good parent bad parent. The most valuable thing about you is not unique to you. It's something that millions of other people have—the love of God I covenant relationship. Your value isn't found in what makes you distinct from the people in this room but rather what you have in common with them.

And so when he says vs. 33 “Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” This is a big moment for Peter. Captive audience! The presence of God that made the Jews distinct from everyone else, is about to go to everyone else starting with these Gentiles...

And in 34-43 Peter preaches the Gospel to them. He hits the highlights, vs38 God anointed Jesus who then ministered in powerful ways vs 39 they crucified him vs 40 but God raised him vs 42 commanded us

to tell the world about it, and finishes with vs. 43 “to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” And he doesn’t even get to finish talking. Right in the middle of it vs 44 says the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard. Vs 45 says Peter’s friends were stunned because the Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles and the proof was that they were speaking in tongues just like the Jews had at Pentecost.

There was no denying it. And so Peter said, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.” Jesus had told his disciples in Acts 1:8 that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And here that prophecy is fulfilled. The promise God made to Abram in Genesis 12 has now been come true as God’s covenant presence extends to the nations. Feel it!!

Rev 7:9-10 “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

The trans-ethnic trans-linguistic picture global redemption is coming into focus here in Acts 10. This is why Christ came. This is why we exist. To see God’s kingdom come and his glory worshipped by every people group on the planet. We could spend hours breaking this passage down but I want to close with 3 implications of this passage. In many ways three reminders for us as we participate in God’s plan to redeem all things...

### **No one is saved apart from hearing the Gospel.**

If there was anyone who was a candidate to be saved apart from hearing the Gospel it was Cornelius. The text says he was an upright, devout God-fearing man who gave to the poor and prayed continually. That’s really good. It even says this guy feared God. And all this is said about him before he hears the Gospel. Surely is there was ever an example of someone who’s saved—forgiven of their sin—apart from hearing about Jesus it’s this guy. But he’s not saved. He’s not forgiven. We know that because in Acts 11 when Peter is telling this story to the church in Jerusalem he quotes the angel as saying in vs 13, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.”

He already fears God, what saving news could Peter possibly tell him that he didn’t already know...43 “to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” On this side of the cross forgiveness comes not through the name of God in general but through the name of Jesus—no one comes to the Father except through him. The only God who saves, is the God who has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth. The only way to be saved is to hear about and believe the Gospel of Jesus which leads us to our second implication...

### **Believers are called to preach the Gospel personally, plainly and indiscriminately.**

Personally: This angel shows up in a vision to Cornelius, he tells him to send for Peter—Peter has something to tell them. But don’t miss what the angel doesn’t tell Cornelius—the Gospel! Angel appears to Cornelius and tells that someone else has something to tell him. A believer is going to come and deliver the truth he and his household need to hear. Why?

Because God has designed for his people to announce the gospel. God still works this way. There are thousands of stories of people—particularly in unreached or difficult contexts—who have experienced dreams and visions where God has communicated something about his existence or the need to seek him. But God doesn't use dreams and visions so that we don't have to go and preach the Gospel—he gives us them to prepare people's hearts to receive the Gospel when we do. They are preparatory they are not sufficient in themselves.

Merida example—classmate ministering to Muslims in DC. Muslim asks, “Who is I Am...I keep seeing I Am in my dreams.” He gave him a bible and told him to read John. The man comes to faith and says, “Many of the ‘I Am’ statements in John I heard first in my dreams.” This is one of thousands of stories where God works through dreams not to announce the Gospel but to prepare someone to receive it when it's preached to them. We have to preach the Gospel personally.

Plainly: vs. 34-43. Jesus is Lord, came ministered, crucified, raised, forgiveness comes through repentance and faith in him. Not a slick presentation. This is basic. You can do this. God's not looking for scholarly masterpieces as if the Gospel is only as powerful as how well you present it. He's called you to be a witness not a poet. Just say the Gospel and let the Spirit work. And as you witness to Christ, make sure to do it indiscriminately...

Indiscriminately: Jesus came precisely to tear down racial barriers so He could have a multi-lingual multi-ethnic community of worshippers. Which means that any form of racism is completely antithetical to the Gospel. It's important that when God tells Peter to accompany the Gentiles who come to his house, he tells him to do it “without hesitation”. Peter lapses later on and Paul rebukes him!

When it comes to having people in our homes, going to others homes, and certainly when it comes to preaching the Gospel, we do it indiscriminately realizing that God has adopted people into his family every nation language tribe and tongue. Which means I have more in common with a turban wearing believer from Afghanistan than an unbelieving middle-class white American. I hope the way you live reflects that that's true.

### **Believers lives are characterized by Spirit and water baptism.**

In chapter 11, Peter returns to Jerusalem and he tells everyone what happened. And when he gets to the part about the Spirit falling on the Gentiles he says he remembered the words of Jesus, vs16 **“John baptized you with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”** Now this idea of Spirit baptism is mentioned 7 times in the NT. One in each Gospel, twice in Acts, and once in 1 Cor. 12:13 gives us the most clear picture of what that is, **“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”** (1 Cor. 12:13) So Spirit baptism happens at conversion. At the moment of repentance and faith the Holy Spirit indwells us and joins us to Christ's body.

Now there are some—mainly our Pentecostal Friends—who would put Spirit baptism in a different category. They would say that while you do receive the Spirit at conversion, baptism in the Spirit happens sometime after that where the Spirit comes upon you, you speak in tongues, and then on you're able to live on a higher spiritual plane bc you now enjoy an abiding spiritual anointing. But as 1 Cor. 12:13 teaches us, Spirit baptism happens at conversion when we become part of Christ's body. Not only that but if Spirit baptism happened sometime after conversion that would mean we have two-tiered church. Two kinds of

Christians—Christians who've been empowered via Spirit baptism and those who haven't. But that seems to be the opposite of what Paul is teaching when he says in one Spirit all of us were baptized into one body. And so the Spirit indwells us at our conversion, but in saying that we're not saying that the Spirit doesn't offer us unique power on certain occasions for ministry purposes:

Acts 9:17 “..the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 13:9, “But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him...”

If he's already filled with the Spirit what can this mean? It means that while the Spirit indwelt Paul at his conversion, he subsequently empowers Paul on certain occasions to speak or do something for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus told us to expect this, Mt 10 “When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Mt. 10:19-20) That's why it says Acts 4 Peter filled with the Holy Spirit testified to the Jerusalem council. Stephen in Acts 7 before getting stoned.

So while we shouldn't wait around for the Spirit to baptize us and in a moment into a second tier of spiritual life, we also should expect that the Spirit will show up and empower us when we're witnessing for Christ. I want this church to hope in rely on and be filled with the Spirit. Too many are allergic.

If the Spirit disappeared from your life would it really change? We won't be dangerous without the Spirit.

Close: Water baptism!