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 Return to Church

Expect to be Changed!
Acts 10: 1-16, 24-35, 44-48

*In Caesarea there was a man named **Cornelius**, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, ... ² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³ One afternoon at about **three** o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ .." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸ and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.*

*⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, **Peter went up on the roof to pray.** ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "**By no means, Lord;** for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.*

While Peter was having this vision, Cornelius' men arrived and explained why they had come...

*The next day Peter got up and went with them, and some of the believers^[c] from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was **expecting them** and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that **many** had assembled; ²⁸ and he said to them,*

*“You yourselves know that it is **unlawful** for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me **that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.** ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”*

³⁰ *Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, **at three o’clock**, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me.*

³¹ *He said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; ... ³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”*

Gentiles Hear the Good News

³⁴ *Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that **God shows no partiality,** ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—**he is Lord of all.***

*While Peter was still speaking, the **Holy Spirit** fell upon all who heard the word.*

⁴⁵ *The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.*

So let’s talk about what just happened.

It all starts with this Roman centurion.

A Gentile, named **Cornelius**.

Who loves God, prays, and gives generously to the poor!

And at **3 o’clock** in the afternoon he has a vision

Why 3pm?

Remember that last week’s healing happened at 3pm also?

What’s might be special about that time of day?

Well, it may just be the Bible's way of saying—
this happened in the middle of the day, for all to see.
Not under the cover of darkness, but right in the daytime.

So **at 3pm he has a vision from God**—an angel, who commends him for his faith and generosity, and tells him to go find Peter.
So, being a leader, he sends some of his faithful men, including a devout soldier, to find Peter in Joppa.

At noon the next day, Peter is waiting for lunch when he has a **VISION**—
and this one is a **doozy**.
He basically sees every kind of creature,
and God says go ahead and eat!
But it's not kosher food—it's every kind of creature,
Including all the foods Jews were forbidden to eat!
Eating these things would be **against God's law, and literally make you unclean!**

Now to really understand this—think of **foods you would never consider worthy**
of eating--I'm thinking right now about bugs covered in chocolate.
That definitely doesn't seem right....
Now, take it a step further,
and think about the kind of **PEOPLE you would never want to eat with!**
Or associate with!
Because that's where God is going with this story, right?
That's the point, isn't it?

While he's having his vision, Cornelius' men arrive, then they explain to Peter what has happened, and the next day they take Peter and some other believers to Cornelius' home in Caesarea.

Cornelius is **waiting in faith for them at what time?**

3pm. Probably not a coincidence!

in fact, Cornelius has called together **all of his relatives and friends**
to hear what Peter has to say!

Which is a bold move of faith, isn't it?

He's trusting that Peter is coming, and with an important message!

This is so **RADICAL**, because Jews and Gentiles were not friends— they were sworn enemies, with different customs and beliefs to say the least. And here Peter and Cornelius are showing one another
Radical hospitality and welcome!

Peter reminds them **how STRANGE it all is**: *“You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.*

Did you notice what he said?

He isn't just talking about all foods being ok, he already understands that God is talking about more than food.

God is talking about people.

Different kinds of people, especially those considered to be 'unclean'.

Cornelius responds by re-telling his story and vision, and saying—

All of us have gathered to hear what you have to say.

In other words, we're ready for you to **preach it, Peter!**

Which is exactly what Peter does.

He shares the Good News of Jesus Christ--new life, forgiveness of sins, by starting with this amazing statement of faith:

*“I truly understand that **God shows no partiality,**³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right **is acceptable** to him.³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is **Lord of all.***

While Peter is still speaking, **the Holy Spirit shows up,** and falls upon all who are listening.

The Jewish Christians are amazed that the Gentiles are receiving a gift they thought was only for them!

It's like **another Pentecost, this time for Gentiles,**

because all of them are speaking in tongues and praising God!

Peter acknowledges that they have received the Spirit,

and proceeds to baptize them in the name of Jesus,

then he stays with his new friends for several days!

A lot happens in this story—but the central message is clear.

Jesus is Lord of ALL—not just the Jews.

Jesus' forgiveness is for ALL, and the ***gift of the Holy Spirit is for ALL!***

This is life-changing, isn't it?

So let's think about ***HOW people hear this message.***

Did Cornelius get up after his vision and go by himself to find Peter?

No, he sends his men, so that he can gather friends and family for their return and Peter's sermon!

Peter doesn't go by himself either, he brings other believers along, which will help them all explain what has happened, to other believers! People receive this message of welcome and no partiality---***TOGETHER!***

And, it's such a powerful story because the ***Holy Spirit is changing everyone***—not just this Gentile Cornelius.

Not just Peter.

But everyone around them!

What does that say to YOU today?

What does it say to our CHURCH?

What if it's a powerful reminder that we should always ***bring*** people along, ***invite*** others, ***welcome*** people into the family of faith, and be willing to ***acknowledge what God is doing*** in their midst?

Not just with "us"!

What if this is a reminder that we are ***to live out the message of Acts 10***---that God does ***not show any favoritism?***

What does that mean to you? To us?

Who do we need to welcome, into the family of faith?

This is more than a question, right?

God expects ***ACTION*** on our part.

So how does God change us, to help us live out this radical welcome and hospitality that we see in Acts 10?

Well, I believe people still have visions, and dreams, and words directly from God. When have you known something was from God?

I also believe that we have something they did not have.
 We have the **Word of God**—our Holy Book, the Bible.
 When we are wondering what God is saying, we have this unbelievable resource,
 that any of us can read and learn from, at any time,
 And in the company of other believers.

And just like Cornelius and Peter, our lives
 Can be **literally transformed by what God is saying and doing** in our midst!
 Through visions, or thoughts from God,
 And through the Word of God.

And what about **OTHER ways God speaks to us** today?
 How does God get through to us? To you?
 What about through the wise counsel of other believers?
 Or worship?
 What about through a Zoom class or webinar?
 A YouTube service?

What about through **good BOOKS**?
 This is especially important, because we are **people of the Book**.
 If we believe that our lives can be changed by this Book,
 isn't it possible that our lives can be changed by other good books,
 where God might be speaking to us?

How many of you have been changed through books?

I know I sure have, and it's been really powerful and profound during COVID,
 because I am reading so much more!

When I was studying this passage I was thinking about its central message:

That God shows no favoritism, or partiality.

Isn't that an important message TODAY?

While we find ourselves in the middle of a social justice crisis?

So, how can we live out the **radical welcome and hospitality** of Acts 10,
 that is not only the **RIGHT** thing to do—
 it is what **Jesus Christ** would have us do?

Friends, hear this truth, the ***Good News of the Gospel:***

Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

God shows no partiality between different kinds of people.

And if Jesus welcomes all, may we do the same,

And as we ask for Holy Spirit's help to do that,

Let all God's people say, Amen.