

Acts 10:1-23

“Putting Away Prejudice”

The story is told of how a school bus that carried a load of boys, whites and aborigines was just plagued with fighting. One day out in the country the bus driver stopped the bus, pulled over, and said to the white boys, “What color are you?” They said, “White.” He said, “No you’re green. Anyone who rides in my bus is green. Now, what color are you?” and A white boy answered “Green.” and After having all the white boys identify themselves as green, he went to the aborigines and said, “What color are you?” They said, “Black.” He said, “No, you are green. Anyone who rides in my bus is green.” So in like fashion all the aborigines answered that they were green. So the bus driver commenced to driving the bus, several miles down the road he hears from the back of the bus, “All right, light green on this side; dark green on that side.”

Some people just have a real problem with prejudice, but in Christ all that stuff is put away, the bible teaches, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Gal 3:26-28 As we come to ch 10 of the book of Acts, Peter hadn’t yet come to that place. Jesus tried to teach His disciples of God’s love for *all* mankind when He uttered things like, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” John 3:16 “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*” John 7:37 “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Matt 11:28 There’s nothing exclusive about God’s offer to mankind of salvation through Jesus Christ Now salvation is *of* the Jews there’s no question there, the bible teaches that, salvation came through the Jews in that Jesus Christ was a Jew as far as His ethnicity was concerned. But though salvation was *of* the Jews, it was never meant to be exclusively *for* the Jews. But there were plenty of the nation of Israel who weren’t too far removed from believing just that, and that in order for a Gentile to be saved, he’d 1st have to become a proselyte, or go through the rituals necessary to be considered a Jew himself (dietary laws, circumcision etc.) than he could be saved. Peter found himself in that place, as did the other church leaders.

Now according to those who calculate such things its been some 8-10 yrs at this point since Jesus uttered the words found in Acts 1:8, “*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” We’ve watched in our study of the book of Acts how that the gospel has gone forth into each of those places with the exception of one. They’ve witnessed in Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria, but 10 yrs later, they’re still not taking the gospel beyond the borders of the Jew, even though Samaria was a stretch, they could palate the fact that they were at least half Jew and had a desire to be in compliance with the Law of Moses.

But God's Word made it clear that from the very beginning His intention was to use the nation of Israel to testify of Him *to the world*. But somewhere down the line that became distorted in their understanding and instead they began to believe that the nation of Israel had exclusive access to God. and If you weren't a Jew you weren't good for much of anything except to stoke the fires of hell, so generally speaking a good Jew would avoid Gentiles at any cost. They were considered unclean, and what it boiled down to was a prejudice, they thought of themselves as somehow above anyone who wasn't a Jew.

That's what makes ch 10 of the book of Acts such a pivoting point in church history, we've seen a couple of them so far with Stephen's martyr, Saul's salvation, and now we have Cornelius coming to Christ, the Gentiles being accepted on par with the Jews apart from becoming a proselyte. and Again I'm not so sure that the miracle of this ch isn't what is wrought in the heart of Cornelius and his friends as it is what's wrought in the heart of *Peter* and *his* friends as they learn to put away prejudice and begin to see mankind in general through the eyes of God who loved them and gave Himself for them, when Jesus said, "God so loved the world" that's an all-inclusive statement; there are no exceptions to it. If you're apart of this world, God loves you, desires to forgive you and wants to save you through the finished work of the cross. and The cross of Christ has broken down that middle wall of separation that was formerly there between Jew and Gentile and ch 10 of the book of Acts portrays Peter getting a grip on that reality.

Vs1-2

So here we have sort of this thumbnail sketch of Cornelius, who he is, what he was about. and The 1st thing we're told is that he was a Centurion of the Roman army of the Italian regiment. Which already speaks a couple of strikes against him with regard to how most Jews would do all that they could to avoid him. Because 1st of all he's a Gentile, but to add insult to injury he's a master sergeant kind of a fella in the army of the oppressors of Israel. The Roman army was divided into Legions of 6,000, which were broken down into 6 cohorts, or regiments of 600, which had 6 Centurions ascribed to each Regiment, each with 100 men under his authority. and These guys had some fairly stringent protocol that they had to meet in order to ascend to the rank of Centurion. They generally weren't expected to live to finish out their 20yr commitment to the army but they were paid about 15x the amount of a regular foot soldier. But they were men of high character, they were never to back down in the face of trouble, if they were in a battle and their men began to be out #ed, they couldn't retreat, they had to stand and fight until they fell by the sword. They weren't to go looking for trouble, but if trouble should find them, they were to meet it with unrelenting courage and never back down.

But as I said, generally speaking they were men of nobility, and character, whenever we see mention of a Centurion in the NT it always seems to speak of them favorably. You remember the one Centurion that Jesus met in Capernaum, and he said to Jesus, “Could you please heal my servant, he’s lying at home paralyzed and dreadfully tormented.” Jesus said, “I’ll come heal him.” and You remember he said, “Lord I’m not worthy that you should come under my roof, besides I understand authority, have guys over me, and guys under me. Say to this one ‘Come’ and he comes, to that one ‘Go’ and he goes, so I know that all you have to do is speak the word, and my servant will be healed.” and He was consenting to the fact that he knew that Jesus had the authority to cause whatever He desired, to happen. That if by His authority He commanded healing to his servant, than whatever it was that needed to happen for that to take place would fall in line. and We read, *“When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”* Matt 8:10-12

So that even then Jesus was prophesying of the fact of Israel’s rejection of Him and the Gentiles acceptance of Him. and It’s interesting that the 1st Gentile that the gospel goes out to who has no real ties to Judaism is a Centurion.

Now Vs 2 tells us a few things about him that are worth mentioning, you probably noted them in your mind as we passed over them. We read 1st of all that he was a *devout man*. Meaning that he had devoted himself to God, no doubt living there in the region he’d come to realize the emptiness of all the pagan myths he heard all of his life, and had become convinced that the God of Israel was the One True Living God. I’m sure he visited the designated areas of the synagogues that the Gentiles had access to and there learned what little he knew of God and sought to live his life in a manner that was pleasing to God accordingly.

But we read that he was a devout man, he feared God, gave alms, and that he was a man of prayer. Now when I thought about that I was almost embarrassed for a significant portion of the body of Christ. I thought, “This guy leads a more godly life than probably a good majority of Christians today, and he doesn’t even know Christ yet!” Luke broadens for us just a bit even regarding each of these attributes in that he tells us that he feared God “with all his household.” Not only was he a God fearer, meaning that he sought to lead a holy and righteous life to the best of his understanding with the light he’d been given. But he was the leader of his household as well; he brought them along with him in his pursuit of God.

Now men how are you doing, what’s the spiritual fiber of your home, are you setting a godly precedent? Cornelius did, he also gave alms (meaning that he not only gave financially with liberality, but he did good deeds for the people) but notice the commentary, he did it *generously*. It wasn’t a “Well, if I have to in order to fall in line with what God desires I will” type constraint, no, this guy gave out of a willing and glad heart.

The bible says, “*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*” 2 Cor 9:6-8 How are you doing in *this* category? We don’t generally make it a point to bring up finances around here, but believe me when I say that doesn’t negate the biblical aspect of our 1st fruits responsibility to God. Now with Cornelius he went above and beyond the 1st fruits, he gave alms generously to the people, looked for opportunities to be a blessing, out of a simple love and devotion towards God.

But then we also read that he prayed to God always. Not just at convenient times, not only when he was in a bind, but it was his common/consistent practice to be before God in prayer. How’s your prayer life been, the bible says that we’re to be, “*...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*” Eph 6:18 We read in the book of Romans, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*” Rom 12:10-13 Sounds to me like Cornelius was hitting the nail right on the head. He was devout, which demonstrated itself in the fact that he feared God, set his house in order in like manner, he distributed to the needs of the saints, was kindly affectionate and continued steadfastly in prayer.

Think about that, he doesn’t even know Jesus yet! Yet what an example he is to so many of us who’ve walked with Christ for years, it’s almost shameful really. Now I wouldn’t say that he didn’t have any relationship with God, it’s evident that he did. He had faith, feared God, gave alms generously, and was a man of prayer, but he wasn’t “saved” with regard to our NT understanding because he’d never heard the gospel. I would place him in an OT type relationship *with* God, walking in the light that he’d be given with regards to God. and God’s going to honor that, don’t make the mistake of thinking he was in the “any path will do ya” mentality just thinking sincerity was sufficient. He was very specifically seeking the Lord, desiring to be pleasing *to* the Lord, therefore he’s about to be saved by the Lord. He was walking in the light that he’d been given, and it’s so important that we walk in the light that we’ve been given. Jesus said, “*...to whom much is given, from him much will be required;*” Luke 12:48 We are always held accountable to walk in the light that we’ve been given. When we walk in the light that we do possess it follows suit that God will give to us more light, and more understanding. It seems that so many are worried about that native in the heart of Brazil or Africa somewhere, but God knows where he’s at, and if he should begin to seek after God, God will seek him out, draw near to God and God will draw near to you. When we walk in the light that we have, God will give to us greater light. But if we won’t walk in the light that we have now, why should God give us more? Cornelius was obedient to the light he’d been given, now God’s about to give him more, notice.

Couple things quickly #1 back in vs 4, what an awesome thing to realize that the time you spend in prayer *before* the Lord, and the things that you give willingly as *unto* the Lord, is taken into account *by* the Lord. You even wonder how your memorial before God looks? How it represents itself, the generosity of your heart, and your time spent in prayer, when it comes before God? Now don't get me wrong, anytime you spend time seeking the Lord, or giving as unto the Lord, it's a blessing to the heart of God. But I think of my prayers, my giving coming up as a memorial before God, I want it to represent my love for God above and beyond my love for anything else. I don't want it to reflect not much time in prayer because I had places I needed to be, or that I didn't give too much because there were things I'd rather have. But rather that my passion and my pursuit in life is to know and honor God above and beyond all else. That's the picture we have here in Cornelius, and because his vertical relationship with God was right, his horizontal relationship with man was right. and That's always the way it is, in that order, his prayers speaking of the outpouring of his soul to God, and his giving of alms speaking of the practical outpouring of himself to man as the overflow of his love for, and desire to be pleasing to God.

#2 Why didn't the angel just tell him the gospel? Because generally speaking God has ordained to use man to share the love and grace of Jesus Christ and the message of Him crucified and resurrected for the sin of the world. God could've just thundered the gospel from Heaven if He'd have wanted to, but He wants to use you, to have a relationship with you, where by He speaks to you, and you speak on His behalf to those in need of Christ around you. What a privilege that God would use the likes of us to carry the message of salvation to a dying world around us, the angel says call for Peter, he'll tell you what you need to do. and Notice that he was quick to obey, he didn't delay, didn't make up excuses as to why it wasn't convenient right now, he was given a direction and got right on it. What do you do when God speaks to your heart? Procrastinate, put it off, place it in the file of "to do at a more convenient time?" Cornelius was quick to obey

Vs9-12

God's getting ready to speak to his heart, and prepare his heart for this Gentile encounter. Now He already spoken in a vision to Cornelius, now He's about to speak in a vision to Peter, this is sort of like the Saul/Ananias situation, it's a double vision sort of a thing whereby God is working on both ends at the same time to bring about His desired result. and Therein lies a principle that we do well to see and understand, and that is that God will *always* work on both ends of a certain situation to bring about what it is that He's wanting to do. He's prepared Cornelius for Peter, now He's getting ready to prepare Peter for Cornelius, and that's the way God works. If He's wanting to do something in your life He'll let you know, He knows where you live, now and then you might have someone come to you and tell you that God has spoken to them about you, and what He wants for your life.

I'm always leery of that guy, used to have a fella that ran around here, and he was always hearing from the Lord for me and several other people. But if God wants to speak to me

regarding a certain situation believe me He's quite capable. If you gals have some guy tell you that God told them that you're to marry them, just run as fast as you can. Because God's not going to tell them something but that He hasn't spoke to your heart as well. Now if someone comes to me with a word they believe to be from God, I'll certainly pray over it and be willing to hear from God on it, but God is able to get your attention. and He will always prepare both sides for His will in a situation.

The way God opts to speak to Peter's heart is out of his own hunger. Peter's hungry, it's noon, so they prepare dinner, perhaps it's wafting up onto the roof where he's trying to pray. (Roof equivalent to our back porch or something) and As he smells it cooking, he falls into a trance, just slips from his senses so to speak. Perhaps you're there now. But as he's there in a trance, distracted by his hunger, all of the sudden he sees heaven open up and a great sheet bundled up coming down to the earth. and In it are all these animals, creeping things, various birds (he's hungry right?) But the law was very specific in what he could and couldn't eat, only what chewed the cud and had cloven hooves. But in this sheet like thing were all kinds of unclean animals to.

Vs13-14

Stop right there, now you've maybe heard this before but we have to point out Peter's inconsistency. Because "Not so" and "Lord" stand in direct antithesis one to another. Because if He's Lord, than "Not so" isn't an option for an answer, only "Yes Lord" really works. But if you say, "Not so" than He can't be your Lord. You can say, "Not so, friend" or "Not so buddy" or whatever, but you can't say, "Not so, Lord" Yet that's so often our very inconsistency, God challenges us in a certain area and we're all, "Lord, I can't do that." "There's no way I'm going to do that Lord." But Jesus said, "*...why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?*" Luke 6:46

That's where Peter's at here, and I take heart in this because God was using Peter in phenomenal ways, filled with the Spirit, healing the sick, raising the dead, leading thousands to Christ, but he was still Peter. He still had areas of growth that needed dealt with. God wants to use your life, He knows there's still areas that needs work, but He's willing to use imperfect people like you and me to accomplish His perfect will if we'll but avail ourselves to Him. If we'll remain open, flexible, yielded and teachable, He'll use our lives. God gave Peter this vision 3x, and 3x he couldn't bring himself to go against the grain of his personal persuasion even though God Himself was the One telling Him to do it. Now, it'll take him all of about (less than a day) to catch on, but right now he doesn't get it. He's never taken in anything unclean, and it's not computing for him now what that means.

Vs15-16

Peter was no stranger to a 3-fold repetition, this is the 3rd time he's directly stood in opposition to the Lord's direction and been rebuked accordingly. Remember when Jesus was telling them that He was headed to Jerusalem and there He would be crucified and all? Peter took Him aside, began to rebuke Him, "Far be it from You Lord, it'll never happen, not on my watch!" Jesus said, "Get thee behind Me Satan, you're an offense to Me, for you aren't mindful of the things of God, but the things of man." Jesus was preparing to wash the disciples feet at the Last supper, Peter said, "You'll never wash my feet Lord." Jesus said, "Than you have no part of Me." Here, "I'm not going to eat what's unclean Lord, I've never done that before, and I have no intention of doing it now." "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." He'd denied Jesus 3x, was able to confess his love for Jesus 3x, and now here he is needing to have this vision emphasized 3x. What a difference between Him the apostle Peter, and Cornelius the Gentile! Cornelius, quick to comply, You only need to tell me once, kind of a fella. and Peter, uncertain in his obedience here, not wanting to flex with God's word. But God was preparing his heart, notice

Vs17-20

You see Peter still doesn't have it all figured out, he's wondering about the vision. Probably thinking about what it meant for him to eat that which would've been unclean according to the law (of course in that culture eating and intimate fellowship were closely related). Trying to figure out why that which was unclean was on the same platform as the clean and how they were all taken to Heaven the same way.

While he's wondering about this vision that came 3 times about the unclean being made clean by God, what do you know, 3 Gentiles holler from the gate. But the Spirit doesn't tell him that they're Gentiles, why? Because Peter's not connecting the dots yet, so before he even knows whose down there the Spirit says, "I've sent them, go with them, doubt nothing."

Vs21-23

Peter's now beginning to put the pieces together and he puts away his prejudice. It was unheard of for a Jew to invite a Gentile into his house, but here when it speaks of "lodging" them it means to "entertain" like a guest. The walls are coming down and God is getting ready to do an awesome work. What are the walls that need to come down in your life that God might do an awesome thing with you? Walls of bitterness? Perhaps pride, or even prejudice in someway, the world sets up walls, but in Christ those walls come down, the Holy Spirit through Paul the apostle said, "*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*" Eph 2:14-18

You see Christ died for all, which means all are unclean in the sight of God, there's not one group that's a little better before God than the other. You're either in one of 2 categories

before God, clean, or unclean, desecrated, or consecrated, condemnation, or salvation. You're either in Christ, or you're not. and The only thing that determines which category you're found in, is you. Submit yourself to God today, let Him have His will, done His way, in your life.

Prayer points: Help us to be open, yielded, flexible, and teachable before You. Thank You God that You're willing to use imperfect people like us, help us to be open to Your challenging us, provoking us unto righteousness. May our memorial before You of our time spent with You, giving as unto You, be well pleasing to You.

He desires reconcile you unto Himself, and the way He does that is through the cross of Jesus Christ You can have peace with God through Jesus Christ but there's no other way, crucified, raised from the dead on the 3rd day that you might be justified in His sight by faith in Him for whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.