

Series Title: FOR ALL PEOPLE: A Journey through the Book of Acts, Part 6.

Sermon Title: Week 2: It's a brand new day! Scripture: Acts 10:1-23

Date: 02-07-21

- **Have you ever had an experience where something in your life changed, so radically, so dramatically, that it shook you to your core? Realization of truth that fundamentally changed the way you thought about yourself, your situation in life, your worldview. SO SIGNIFICANT that it took you time to even believe it, come to terms with the implications of what has been revealed, of what has changed?**
- **My favorite such story is from the life of Martin Luther, almost 500 years ago, when God opened his eyes to the miracle of God's grace, through a single phrase in Romans 1**

For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand as 'active righteousness', with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner... Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience... I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners...

At last, by the mercy of God... I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates... And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.

- **Luther's eyes were opened to God's Truth in Romans 1, and everything changed.**
- **Today we enter Acts chapter 10, where God will give Peter a revelation – a command- that is so startling, Peter tells God he cannot obey, because to obey would cause him to disobey one of his most fundamental understandings about God and His plan.**
- **Today's story is one of the great turning points in Acts, and by extension, in the history of God's work to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to humanity. Today we take the result of this story for granted, but for Peter- and this first generation of Jewish believers centered in Jerusalem- this revelation stood their understanding of God's plan on its head, and took them around 10 years to really process and embrace.**
- **About 16 years later, the Apostle Paul would write the church in Rome, proclaiming**

Romans 3:21-24 *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

- **Today's story is when God moved to make that promise a reality, opening the Gospel- and full inclusion in His Family- to all who would believe- regardless of their ethnicity, culture, gender, or anything about their life. AND THE STORY BEGINS in the city of Caesarea, with an official in the occupying Roman military- a centurion by the name of CORNELIUS.**

10:1 *At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

- **Cornelius was a gentile in every way. His name likely came from Cornelius Sullah, the Roman Consul who freed over 10,000 slaves in 82 BC, and he could have been a grandson of one of these freedmen. Caesarea was a center of Roman activity in Israel, with a large gentile population. Cornelius' identity as a centurion tells us he was a respected leader, and a man of great influence, as well as generosity and kindness.**
- **WITH ALL THAT, he also 'feared God'. This is an interested description, meaning he had not converted to Judaism, but had grown to deeply respect the God of Israel.**
- **Luke tells us that Cornelius prayed to God regularly, which probably means according to the traditional prayer times of the Jewish people. This would have been unusual for a Roman leader of his standing, but it's even more significant because throughout the Book of Acts, Luke often associates the activity of prayer with God's activity, which is the case here.**

³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" ⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

- **Key observation- throughout this story, we see the Holy Spirit very specifically directing the events. God is not distant here, he is the central moving force.**
- **Also important, we are reminded of Peter's whereabouts. He is where we left him at end of Chapter 9, In Joppa with Simon the Tanner. THIS WAS UNUSUAL, because Simon's trade – and his household- would have been considered UNCLEAN. It is remarkable that Peter is there, especially given what is about to happen.**

⁹ About noon the following 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 the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

- **Don't want to belabor this, but it's a fascinating detail. A meal is being prepared for Peter, by either Simon's family or servants. Peter is an observant Jew, and for him to eat this meal, it would need to be what we would call 'kosher', or prepared according to the dietary law of Moses. The problem is this would be very difficult in Simon's home, given his profession. Luke does not explore this, and so we should not read too much into it, but there's a tension between Peter's traditional beliefs and the direction God is taking Him. This tension that comes fully to the surface....trance...**

¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

- **OK... we've got to camp on this a minute, because it's easy to miss just how mind blowing, and disturbing, this would have been to Peter.**
- **What just happened is that God told Peter to disobey the dietary law of Moses, violate the law regarding not contacting that which was UNCLEAN. Where did that law come from? It came from GOD. For Peter, this would be like God telling him to do something which his faith, scripture, and tradition taught him was immoral, sinful, and disobedient to God.**
- **You see, the OT dietary law wasn't just about being healthy, although that was part of it. Rather, through observance of the Law the Hebrews understood that they were SET**

APART to God, that they were different from the surrounding Pagan cultures. To violate the dietary law wasn't just to eat something forbidden, it was to violate the very concept that you were part of God's Chosen People.

Leviticus 11... ⁴⁴ *I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy (set apart), because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground.* ⁴⁵ *I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.* ⁴⁶ *“These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves about in the water and every creature that moves along the ground.* ⁴⁷ *You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.”*

- **In Deuteronomy 14, Moses ends a similar statement by saying “You are a people Holy- set apart- to the Lord your God.”**
- **For Peter and all the apostles and Jewish believers up to that point, to obey God's command here was unthinkable, contradicting your very identity as devout Jew. This is evident in Peter's immediate response.**

¹⁴ *“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”*

- **We need to be honest! God has put Peter into an impossible situation here. His response is self-contradicting.. “NO WAY LORD”... if you confess a person is your LORD, then by definition, your answer to them will always be YES. But Peter doesn't just say NO- in the Greek he uses a double negative, which gives extreme emphasis. NEVER! NO WAY! BY NO MEANS!**
- **Peter adds “I've never eaten anything unclean”... meaning not only would obeying God here violate his understanding of the Law, but it would violate his own personal piety- his own convictions of what is right and wrong. This impacts Peter at the level of his IDENTITY. And then, GOD'S REPLY...**

¹⁵ *The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”*

¹⁶ *This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.*

- **Try and put yourselves in Peter's shoes. He is dumbstruck. The NASB says Peter was ‘GREATLY PERPLEXED IN HIS MIND’ about the vision... literally, he didn't know what to think. Then, Picking up in verse 17, we see the Spirits leadership continue...**

⁹ *While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you.*

²⁰ *So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”*

- **Peter is blown away, but he still listens to the Spirit's prompting...**

²¹ *Peter went down and said to the men, “I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?”*

²² *The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”* ²³ *Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.*

- **Again- Imagine Peter's thoughts. Luke's narration is compressed, and it can seem like Peter invited them in, no big deal, be my guest! But this was a big deal. (I can see Peter at the table... speechless... trying to process what was happening)...**

- He is an observant, devout Jew. From where he sits, being a disciple of Christ has done NOTHING to change his identity as a Jewish man- indeed, Christ came as a fulfillment of all the OT prophecies, so if anything, his Jewish identity is stronger than it was prior to meeting Jesus.
- Remember when we began Acts- with great commission- we discussed how for the Apostles, the great commandment meant “share the gospel with all of the JEWS in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, end of the earth”. Nowhere in the Apostles mind at this point was there thinking that Jesus’ words to Nicodemus “whosoever will believe” meant people who were not also Jewish.
- AND YET, (imagine Peter looking around), here he sat in the home of a TANNER- an unclean profession- he just invited into the home three gentile men- also a violation of the law- who themselves had been sent not just by a gentile, but by a leader in the occupying Roman military! Unclean, unclean, hated and unclean!
- AND YET, ringing in his heart and ears are the words of God.... “DO NOT CALL ANYTHING IMPURE/UNCLEAN/COMMON/IMPURE that God has made clean”. I WONDER IF THERE IS A CONNECTION HERE!?
- As story continues we will see Peter connect the dots. God wasn’t just showing him there was no longer anything such as unclean food. This is part of the revelation, but not the main point. NO- God’s message to Peter was there was no longer any such thing as UNCLEAN PEOPLE.
- As I said when we started, this is one of great hinge points in history of Christianity, and I want us to look at it from three perspectives.
- FIRST, Peter’s vision forever changed the scope of the GOSPEL. THIS is the manifest purpose of Peter’s revelation and this story. The Gospel- the Good News of NEW LIFE IN CHRIST- is now available to ALL PEOPLE- Jew and Gentile alike. NOW, it will take some time – about 10 years- for the Apostolic leadership in Jerusalem to fully embrace this truth. The Jerusalem church did not begin to send out missionaries to the Gentiles- God would accomplish this through Paul, Barnabas, and others. BUT THIS IS WHERE THE DOOR IS OPENED, and it is opened WIDE.
- As Paul would say in Romans 10:12-13...

¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- Think again of what God showed Peter. The animals he saw were unclean – or common- not because of something they did, but their very nature. They were to be avoided always. As a gentile, that you were ‘unclean’ meant you could not enter into the presence of God, because of who you were- it wasn’t even an option. BUT NOW, God is showing Peter that it is a BRAND NEW DAY. Through Christ, there is no longer any difference- ALL are invited to enter into the presence of God.
- SECOND. Peter’s vision forever changed the way we view the LAW.
- By law, we mean two things. Specifically, the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, by which God promised Israel His blessing if they would obey. SECOND, the ‘law’ refers to the system by which our righteousness- our rightness before God, before each other, and our ability to be in relationship with God, is based upon our MORAL PERFORMANCE.

- **Peter’s vision is one of the most graphic descriptions of the consistent New Testament theme that IN CHRIST... in the NEW COVENANT... the role of the law between followers of Christ and God has been REMOVED. It has been demolished, and with it, the barriers of separation we erect between ourselves and others based upon our concepts such as ethnicity, gender, social status.**
- **In Galatians 3, Paul is speaking to the purpose of the Law, and the reality that the New Covenant has rendered it obsolete for those who are IN CHRIST.**

Galatians 3:23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- **THIRD, Peter’s vision forever changed the way we view other PEOPLE.**
- **When God said ““Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” He was saying that what makes a person acceptable and unacceptable is HIS PEROGATIVE, not ours. It was NOT Peter’s place- nor ours- to decide that any person is unwelcome before God- and by extension, unwelcome to us.**
- **So the question becomes, are we ever tempted.. or guilty.. of treating people as if they are unwelcome to God? Unworthy to joining with us in our worship of God? NOW, INTELLECTUALLY, we could quote from Roman’s three, and sincerely confess that ALL OF US are separated from God by our sin, and is ONLY by the Grace of God that each of us has entered into this New Life of God’s Grace. THERE IS NO SIN SO GREAT THAT IT WOULD CAUSE A PERSON TO BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE GOSPEL. THIS IS BASIC SOLID DOCTRINE- we should know this.**
- **BUT, church... we all need to be alert to the subtle temptation to turn away from people because they fall into some category our own sense of scruples, politics, or even morality would define as undesirable.**
- **Hear. Any time we would diminish a person’s inherent value or worth to God- and to society- because they belong to some class or distinction we don’t like, don’t agree with, or just don’t want to be around... any time we would do this, we stand against the nature and work of God expressed in the vision given to Peter that day.**
- **There are deceived people. There are sinful people. There are people who need to hear, see, and understand their great need of God and His gift to them...**
- **But there are no unclean people. There are NO unclean people.**
- **I’ll leave us with Paul’s words from Galatians 2, as he speaks about God’s miraculous work to take two groups- the ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’, those who would otherwise be hostile to one another... and bring them together through Christ.**

Galatians 2:11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth... ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the

promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.... ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.