

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

Sermon Title: Week 3: God is God, I am not! Scripture: Acts 10:23-29

Date: 02-14-21

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- ***Have you ever had an experience- a turn of events, something or things happened- that left you, well, deeply unsettled. Maybe disturbed. A time when things seemed to be going in the complete opposite direction of what you thought was best, right.***
- ***As a result, you found yourself frustrated, angry, afraid.***
  
- ***My friends, many of you are living that experience RIGHT NOW. You're looking at the world around you- political issues, cultural issues, everything related to the COVID pandemic, perhaps even details much closer, in your own personal world.... And you are daily confronted with things that are leaving you frustrated, angry, and afraid.***
  
- ***IF SO, you may be asking yourself- and others- wrestling with the question- As a follower of Christ- as a person who looks to God, and scripture as your source of truth and guidance...***
  - ***What should I THINK about all this***
  - ***How should I FEEL?***
  - ***WHAT SHOULD I DO?***
  
- ***TODAY we are continuing in our journey through the book of Acts, taking the next step in the story of Peter and Cornelius.***
  
- ***LAST WEEK we saw God open wide the door of the Gospel to ALL PEOPLE- both Jews and Gentiles, when God revealed to Peter that as far as the Gospel was concerned- God's plan and desire for people to be brought back into a relationship with Him- THE BARRIER OF THE OLD COVENANT LAW was done. God had removed it, and there were now NO UNCLEAN PEOPLE. (IF YOU MISSED IT, WATCH IT! KEY!)***
  
- ***Today, we will travel with Peter back to Caesarea where he will meet Cornelius, a man who according to Peter's tradition, teaching, and understanding of everything up to the previous day- should have been Peter's adversary. But God had other plans.***
  
- ***When Peter meets Cornelius in person he will make a confession showing a profound change beginning to happen in Peter's heart.***
  
- ***FOR US, Peter's confession is a principle- a truth- that speaks powerfully into our life situation RIGHT NOW... in this time in which we live.***
  
- ***BUT FIRST! TODAY IS SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14<sup>th</sup>, T.O./ P.E., - BIBLE/NOTES***

**Acts 10:23-29** *The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.*

<sup>24</sup> *The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.* <sup>25</sup> *As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.* <sup>26</sup> *But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."* <sup>27</sup> *While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.* <sup>28</sup> *He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.* <sup>29</sup> *So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"*

- ***OK... Let's try to unpack this from Peter's perspective. Just two days ago, his understanding of the world was turned upside down. NOW he is heading to Caesarea with***

*three gentile men he doesn't know, at least one is a roman soldier. We're told the journey takes about a day and a half, so he has some time to think.*

- *I can imagine Peter's traveling companions- the other Jewish believers that came with him, asking him... PETER- what are we doing again? We don't even know who this Cornelius guy is! What if this is a setup by the Roman authorities? Are you sure this is right?*
- *Peter may have answered... I don't know! I just know that God gave me the vision I described to you- then the Spirit told me three men would arrive and that I should not hesitate to go with them. So I'm not hesitating! God is doing something here I don't understand- doesn't make sense to me, but guys, we are going with God on this!*
- *WHEN PETER ARRIVES, things got even stranger. He realizes the house is full of people- almost certainly all gentiles. Then Cornelius- this man who should have been Peter's natural enemy, and who had great authority over Peter- Cornelius arrives and falls to his knees in reverence in front of Peter, worshipping him! WAIT, WHAT?*
- *RIGHT HERE, STAGE IS SET for Peter's confession that shows he has indeed connected the dots about what God is doing. It's easy to pass by what Peter says, but it's incredibly significant.*

#### ✠ Peter's Confession

*<sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." <sup>27</sup> While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup> He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup> So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"*

- **FIRST, Peter tells Cornelius to stand up, saying "I am only a man myself." Essentially, Peter says "I AM NOT GOD".**
- *How do try and claim to be God? Not by a delusion that we actually are GOD... you know, ETHAN ALMIGHTY.... No, we try to be God by being in CONTROL. We want things to be the way we want them to be, the way we think they should be... and sometimes we exhaust ourselves mentally and emotionally- maybe physically- trying to make things the way we want them.*
- **PETERS CONFESSON HERE IS HUGE. To say "I am only a man/human being"... is to realize that IT IS NOT GIVEN TO US TO BE IN CONTROL. As much as we want them, WE HAVE NO RIGHTS CONCERNING THE OUTCOME OF A SITUATION.**
- *This is a big lesson for Peter, because we know him to be a guy who liked things to go his way. Just two days ago, his first response to God in his vision was to say NO GOD! I can't do what you're asking, to eat anything unclean ISN'T RIGHT!*
- *But think to an earlier experience, one I have to think was echoing in Peter's heart as he traveled to Caesarea. We find this in Matthew 16. NOW, right before this scene, Peter had made his famous confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. If I SAID THAT, I would hope I would also think that Jesus, being the Son of the Living God... that HE IS IN CHARGE. That what he says is what we do! Picking up in verse 21...*

**Matthew 16:21** *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. <sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he*

said. "This shall never happen to you!"<sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

- **Think of that! Peter says.. "Jesus! I know I just said you are the Messiah, the son of God, and I keep calling you LORD, but I DON'T LIKE YOUR PLAN! THIS CAN'T HAPPEN! Peter is FRUSTRATED, ANGRY, AFRAID!**
- **And in that moment, Jesus calls out what was happening in Peter's heart... "Get behind me Satan, you are a stumbling block... you aren't seeing things from God' perspective, only from a human perspective, where you are trying to be in control".**
- **Now, Peter tells Cornelius... Get up. I'm not God. I'm just a man who is learning to Trust God.**
- **SECOND.. Peter says to the room full of people... "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean."**
- **Think of this... Peter has realized that GOD IS BIGGER THAN HIS OWN BIAS.**
- **Peter acknowledges his bias- he owns it. Now, he came by his bias honestly! It is from THE MOSIAC LAW, the teaching/perspective he has known all of his life. But like the religious rulers Jesus regularly confronted, Peter had to learn that God's purpose of the law, ultimately, was not to keep the Jews separate from the world, but to bring all of the world to GOD, through Christ.**
- **If anyone could justify being set in their way of thinking, it was a first century devout Jew. But while Peter acknowledges the way he has always thought, he is allowing God to change the way he thinks! HE IS ALLOWING GOD TO SHOW HIM A BIGGER PERSPECTIVE.**

**Isaiah 55:8-9** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- **As Paul would write years later, Peter is BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF HIS MIND.**
- **THIRD.. Against his natural instinct, and setting aside his bias, PETER CHOSE TO TRUST GOD. "So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection."**
- **GUYS! BEFORE, ONE OF PETER'S CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS WAS TO RAISE OBJECTIONS. He was known for getting angry, frustrated, and being afraid. But not here. By the work of the Holy Spirit in His life, Peter is CHANGING. Now, it's going to take him YEARS to fully grasp what is happening, but he is beginning to LET GO OF HIS NEED TO CONTROL... by FAITH, he is starting to release to God his bent toward anger, frustration, and fear... "I would never have chosen this myself, not sure I'm happy about it, but I am going to trust God. I am trusting God... and so Cornelius, against all odds, here I am."**
- **Lastly, by faith, Peter is ready to take the NEXT STEP. "Here I am Cornelius... Why have you sent for me?"**

- *Peter’s question is not rhetorical. He doesn’t know what happens next! “God has brought me this far, but why am I here?”*
- *In the midst of completely unexpected, and very possibly undesired set of circumstances, Peter’s heart is open, expectant, for how God will lead him next. Of all the apostles, the man most known for walking by his flesh- his own strength and wisdom- is learning to walk by the SPIRIT.*

– **BRING TO US. WHAT’S our connection?**

- *Right now, there are so many things that disturb us. Honest- so many sincere followers of Christ are finding themselves angry, frustrated, and afraid. Let me be direct...*
  - *Politics. Government policy. If you are on the political right, you may fear encroaching socialism. You are upset about the election- probably the outcome, but even more, how the election happened. You may be reading LOTS about this on the internet.*
  - *Cultural and moral issues. Redefinition of human sexuality. Moral decline in general. Censorship, cancel culture, and the silencing of dissent. Big social and moral issues like abortion.*
  - *The handling of the covid pandemic. The origins of the virus. MASKS! The nature of the vaccine. Is this a giant conspiracy to steal our freedom, control our actions, force a cure with a hidden purpose and enrich the elite while making us completely dependent on the government?*
- *CHURCH- Hear me- I say this with all love and respect. There are MANY THINGS that should concern us. Issues in what I just described that are REAL, troubling, and need to be engaged by informed thoughtful citizens who value freedom, human life, and moral truth.*
- *BUT THERE ARE ALSO MANY THINGS that trouble some of us that are NOT WORTHY of disturbing our hearts and destroying our peace! There are many things troubling many people that are NOT REAL. As I said in FT, things that could be described with a word rooted in the agricultural heritage of our country, but I can’t say!*
- *There is a person in my life, not here, that texts me several times a week. A few weeks ago, the long text proclaimed that the election was stolen so Biden and Harris could transfer the power of the US Government to the Chinese, and within one year we would be a fully socialist country and our organs were going to be harvested. And the first goal of the Chinese, in league with the environmental left, is to reduce global population, which in partnership with Bill Gates they will accomplish by forcing a genocidal vaccine that will cause sterilization in a large part of the population.*
- *THAT IS DELUSIONAL. THAT IS NOT WORTHY OF OUR ANGER, FRUSTRATION, AND FEAR. If you find yourself being pulled into emotional distress because of what you read on the internet, from Q-anon to Covid to whatever... I urge you to take a step back and consider what you are allowing to be your focus- where you are setting your mind.*
- *IN NEXT FEW MONTHS- I’m looking for ways to address some of the specific issues of our day, including how we protect ourselves from misinformation and conspiracy theories that would distract us from the REAL issues we should engage as informed thoughtful citizens who value freedom, human life, and moral truth. Don’t yet know what that will look like.*
- *THAT SAID, lets assume for a moment that the things concerning and disturbing you the most are completely real and accurate. IN TIMES SUCH AS THIS, as people who look to*

**God, to scripture for truth and guidance, and people who through Christ have been brought from DEATH TO LIFE and are indwelt by the very presence of God... HOW SHOULD WE THINK, FEEL, and ACT?**

- **Church, a very freeing, but also humbling answer from Scripture is that LED BY THE SPIRIT, we will not respond with anger, frustration, and fear.** These are NOT OF GOD, they are NOT of the Holy Spirit. If I am miserable because how I feel about the world around me, I must start at this foundational level.
- **When we look at Peter's experience with Cornelius, let us learn from his confession- remembering that Peter was also living in a time of great societal instability, pending persecution, injustice, and when everything he had thought was being turned on its head.**
- **FIRST- REMEMBER, I AM NOT GOD.** We are only human, and we must release to God our desire- and our right- to have things go the way we want. We are called to be people of influence, thoughtful, wise, led by the spirit- but we have no control. If I find myself fearful and miserable because of what I see around me, - and I'm honest with myself- I just may be trying to be God... and I am not.
- **SECOND- GOD IS BIGGER THAN MY BIAS.** God's thoughts and ways are higher than my thoughts and ways, and He is working to show me a view of this world that is centered in HIS SOVERIEGNTY AND HIS PURPOSES- not in my bias and my fears. IS MY HEART OPEN to learn from God and His word, instead of trying to use his word to confirm my preconceived notions about the way things should be.
- **THIRD- God calls me to TRUST HIM.** To be active, engaged, but from a place of peace and the foundation of TRUST. One of the greatest defense's against being deceived is to not live in fear, and fear is driven away when our hope, our trust, is in the goodness and sovereignty of God.
- **Lastly- Where we are RIGHT NOW- in our circle of influence with living, breathing human beings whom we KNOW and RELATE TO... am I ready and willing to take the next step. Is my heart preoccupied by things I cannot control, or am I a person of hope- willing and expectant to be used by God in the place of influence He has granted me.**
- **LET ME CLOSE WITH THIS.** Years after his meeting with Cornelius, Peter would write a letter to the church- we know it as the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, where he captures these lessons being taught to him by God. (Turn with me)... 1 Peter 3:8ff. **IN A TIME SUCH AS THIS, HOW SHOULD WE LIVE? Consider the Word of God, written by a man who had learned to trust God...**

1 Peter 3:8.. Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." <sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

- **BUT IN YOUR HEARTS REVERE CHRIST AS LORD.** My friends, whatever may be, and whatever may come.... If in our hearts we increasingly learn to REVERE CHRIST AS LORD-

*to look to Him, experience the FRUIT of living by His Spirit... we will not be people who are dominated by anger, frustration, and fear. Even if we suffer for what is right, we will be blessed.*