

# The gospel is for all peoples

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Littlebourne - 26th February 2023 - Acts 10:23b-48

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We've seen over these first 10 chapters of Acts the expanding reach of the gospel.

Back in Acts 1:8, Jesus tells the Apostles:

*8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

So far in Acts, we've seen this in Pentecost in Jerusalem, we've seen the spread to the surrounding areas, Judea and Samaria. Now we're seeing the expansion a little farther afield, to gentile lands, and later in Acts, we continue into the ends of what would have been the known world for the Apostles.

We also see the spread in terms of the types of people that receive the Holy Spirit - first it was the Apostles and those close to them, then as they went public, more people, then we read of Hellenistic Jews, that is, Jews that were foreign to Jerusalem and more culturally Greek, then the Samaritans, who were these sort of quasi Jewish people - they had the Old Testament, like the Jews, but weren't ethnically Jewish. So the groups of people that receive the Holy Spirit are growing - from the very Jewish centre of things in Jerusalem outwards both geographically and ethnically, and today we see the Holy Spirit comes to the next group of people - gentiles.

You'll remember that in last week's passage, we saw Cornelius had his vision of an angel, who told him to send for Peter. He sends off his servants to fetch Peter, and as they are on the way, Peter has the vision of a sheet with all the unclean animals. The message is to no longer call things unclean that God has called clean.

As Peter is pondering this vision, the servants turn up in Joppa, and the Holy Spirit tells Peter to see them. He invites them in - he invites these probably gentile servants of Cornelius in to the house to stay. He does what moments before was probably to him unthinkable.

Now, we see Peter, Cornelius' servants and some of the other believers from Joppa travel to Caesarea.

## **v23b-26**

*The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man."*

So it's the next day and they travel to Caesarea. It's around 30 miles distance, and when they get to Cornelius, he says his vision was four days earlier, so nobody is hanging about, this all happens quite quickly.

Cornelius was obviously confident that Peter would come, and come quickly - he's got the welcome party ready, with his family and friends gathered. Cornelius is also expecting a great man - when Peter arrives, he falls at Peter's feet, in reverence or worship. But Peter in some sense is just the messenger - he makes clear that he's not to be worshipped, but that he and Cornelius are on the same level.

Peter makes clear that it's not him that is important, but rather God is at work.

## **v27-29**

*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. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."*

Peter explains why he's there - despite the way in which Peter has acted his whole life up until now, not associating with gentiles, God has shown him that the Jews and gentiles are no longer separate.

No person is now unclean by virtue of their ethnicity. No person is common in contrast to those 'superior' to them on the basis of their ancestry. Peter has come to the conclusion that the gentiles are no longer to be treated with derision, no longer to be avoided, no longer treated as second class citizens.

## v30-33

*30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and 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. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."*

Cornelius tells Peter about what he saw - an angel, a messenger from God, who gives him detailed information about Peter's situation many miles away.

As we've seen, Cornelius has got together those close to him in order to hear Peter as soon as he arrived - Cornelius obviously took this vision very seriously. I suppose we don't know if Cornelius knew he was sending for a Jew to come talk to him, or whether in ordinary circumstances, he would have thought this ridiculous to ask, knowing what Jewish attitudes were to the gentiles. However, this vision from an angel was something to be listened to.

He's eager to hear what Peter has to say.

## v34-43

*34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I 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 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

So Peter tells them all they need to know.

First, that God offers salvation to all people - not just a particular group, but every nation. It seems obvious to us, we might think of for example the great commission - Matthew 24:18-20:

*18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

As often happens, the disciples heard Jesus saying this very thing, but it took them a long time to understand - Jesus told them to make disciples of all nations, but somehow this went over Peter's head, until now.

Peter goes on to detail what these gentiles need to know. They need to know Jesus and what he has done. Peter packs in a lot of detail in these few verses.

First, it's the word first sent to Israel - now sent beyond Israel - "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ". Christ is identified as 'Lord of all' - He is God incarnate, He's the ruler of all things, because He is the creator.

Peter tells us that Jesus was foretold, came and lived a perfect life, performed miracles, died, rose again, appeared to many after His resurrection, will come to judge the living and the dead, and commands us to witness to Him. Forgiveness is through His name.

Peter's message is reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ - God came to earth to save us.

## **v44-48**

*44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.*

As Peter is talking, explaining the gospel, the Holy Spirit comes in power.

We saw the Holy Spirit come in power at Pentecost, and we've seen Him filling people subsequently in Samaria, chapter 8. As the gospel goes outwards, to each group there is this confirming act of the pouring out of the Spirit - a confirmation that yes, they really are indisputably just as much saved as anyone. We saw at Samaria this confirmation, now we see the gentiles confirmed to be part of God's plan of salvation. As this speaking in tongues was the Holy Spirit's confirmation at Pentecost, so here, it's the confirmation. Both Jews and gentiles are given this gift of speaking in tongues.

This amazes the Jewish believers that had accompanied Peter - they hadn't seen Peter's vision, maybe they were sceptical of what Peter was claiming - they didn't expect this, but how can they argue with what God is so clearly doing?

Next, Peter encourages them to be baptised. When we saw the similar situation in Samaria, the people were baptised and then given this outward sign of the Spirit - the order is not the important thing, both are outward signs of inward transformation.

## Conclusion

The message is clear - salvation is for Jew and gentile alike. You'd think that Peter would have understood this before this experience, but he's human and he had his own suppositions, and a lifetime of separation from gentiles. This was probably one of those things that all fell in place once it was clear to Peter - just as we saw Saul preaching Christ from the Old Testament, when not long beforehand he would have used the Old Testament as a stick to beat the Christians with, so Peter might have viewed the Old Testament a bit differently after his vision and his seeing the gentiles receive the Holy Spirit.

The idea that God would save gentiles is not something exclusive to the New Testament - this was the plan all along.

To start with, Genesis 12 (verse 1-3):

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

The promise to Abraham is that through him, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. Not just his own offspring, but all the families of the earth. It's reiterated in Genesis 18:17-18:

*The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"*

Isaiah 49:6:

*he says:  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;  
I will make you as a light for the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

Psalms 22:27:

*All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.*

Isaiah 56:3-7:

*Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say,  
"The Lord will surely separate me from his people";  
and let not the eunuch say,  
"Behold, I am a dry tree."  
4 For thus says the Lord:  
"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,  
5 I will give in my house and within my walls  
a monument and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that shall not be cut off.*

6 *“And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants,  
everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,  
and holds fast my covenant—  
7 these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.”*

Zechariah 2:11:

*And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.*

Paul quotes several more in Romans 15:8-12:

*8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,*

*“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,  
and sing to your name.”*

*10 And again it is said,*

*“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”*

*11 And again,*

*“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples extol him.”*

*12 And again Isaiah says,*

*“The root of Jesse will come,  
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him will the Gentiles hope.”*

He's quoted 2 Samuel 22:50, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:1.

This expansion of the gospel outwards that we see in Acts was always the plan, it's just as Jesus told the disciples to do in the great commission, what he said they would do in Acts 1 and what had been foretold for centuries before. This is the good news that Peter then takes back to the church in Jerusalem, as we see next week.