

Good News for All

Acts 10:34-47

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. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

⁴⁴ 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?”

Theme Statement

God brings the Gentile Cornelius and the disciple Peter together, making it clear that God shows no partiality but desires all people and nations to be saved. This barrier-breaking good news of grace calls the church to worldwide mission.

Exploring the Word

The vision that comes to Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, combined with the vision of the apostle Peter, sets the stage for our study text. God is the main actor bringing the two men together. Peter breaks a barrier by entering the “unclean” Cornelius’s home in order to preach Christ. God surprises everyone by sending the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles gathered there. Peter calls for their baptism, and a new mission to the Gentiles is born.

Acts 10:34-38 God shows no partiality

Acts 10:1—11:18 is the pivotal point in the entire book of Acts. Peter’s declaration in verse 34 is the radical statement at its center. God shows no favoritism and makes no distinction between peoples or persons. All are accountable to God and are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (v. 36). Peter’s groundbreaking insight announces a whole new mission that reaches Gentiles and the whole earth (1:8). This mission proclaims Jesus Christ and calls everyone to “fear” (honor) God as the one who rules and saves creation. The mission also calls every person to do “what is right,” which means to do as the Gentile Cornelius does: honor God, pray, and give alms (10:1-2).

God's gift of peace through Jesus Christ pervades this session's text. God sent Jesus to make peace as Lord of all (v. 36) and peace between God and human beings through forgiveness (v. 43). At peace with God, human beings find peace with one another through Jesus Christ.

God's gift of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism empowered Jesus' ministry (v. 38). Led by God, Jesus' ministry was "doing good" (being a benefactor) in God's world. *Benefactor* was a Roman term used to describe a king, a god, a physician, or a hero. As a benefactor, Jesus did heroic, healing, and saving work for all humanity. Jesus could only do this because "God was with him" (v. 38).

Acts 10:39-43 Witnesses to Jesus Christ

The witness of Peter and all early Christians is key in Acts. Crucial to this witness is the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection (vv. 39-41). Jesus' manner of death implied he was cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). But Jesus' resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus' ministry and Lordship and a gift of grace to the world that had crucified him. Forgiveness and new life reign through Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43). This is the good news that Peter and others have witnessed and so proclaim (v. 41). The resurrected Jesus had commanded them to preach this good news (Luke 24:46-48). Now in this encounter with Cornelius, it becomes clear that this good news is meant for Jews and Gentiles alike. The early church plays a vital role in bringing the gospel of Christ beyond the borders of Israel and into the entire world. Peter calls Jesus the "judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). This means he rules over *all* people and has God-given authority over life and death. Jesus Christ is the way of salvation, the one who can be trusted to bring God's salvation to the whole creation.

Acts 10:44-47, [48] God confirms Peter's message

While Peter is still preaching, the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius, his family, and even his neighbors. These Gentiles receive God's gift of the Spirit just as the Jews had earlier in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Utterly amazing (v. 45)! Gentiles had been regarded as unclean, but now God says otherwise. The preached word of Christ creates faith, and now these Gentiles share equally in the gift of the Spirit and in fellowship (v. 48). Peter sees what God is about and immediately calls for baptism (vv. 47-48). God leads God's people in a new direction of mission and saving work.

The Word Today

Perhaps you have a story of surprise, repentance, or transformation in your own life, your family's experience, or the ministry of your congregation. Think about the ways and times in which God has been or is at work changing us and the world. In Acts people change, repent, rejoice, and serve. Think about the examples below, and ask yourself which one relates to your own experience.

First, there is Pentecost in Acts 2:14-42, when Jews from inside and outside Jerusalem were surprised by the fire of the Holy Spirit and the powerful preaching of Peter. They were "cut to the heart" (v. 37), then welcomed the message, and their lives were changed. How does the word of Christ change you?

Second, there is the conversion of Paul in Acts 9:1-31. Paul was an enemy of Jesus, presided over the murder of Stephen, and had to be jolted by Jesus' light and voice. God directed the humble and courageous Ananias to meet with Paul and nourish his faith. Is there an Ananias or Paul in your faith journey?

Third, there is the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48. They are separated by tradition and prejudice. But God brought them together, step by step, through visions, the preaching of Christ, and the gift of acceptance and equality in the name of Jesus. How has the gospel of Christ helped break down barriers between you and others?

There is plenty of good news for us in the book of Acts. God's gift of Christ is for all people, everywhere. We all have the vocation, or calling, to share the good news of Christ with our friends, our neighbors, and the world. This need not be a burden. The Christian life is not all up to us or by our own power. It is God through the Spirit who will call, gather, and enlighten us. It is God who will lead us step by step, as God did Peter and Cornelius. It is God who has given us a community of believers to support, encourage, and grow with us as we study the scriptures and do godly work. Take heart and celebrate God's gifts of the love of Christ, of the power of the Holy Spirit, and of serving together in mission!

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. Complete this statement: I sometimes feel uncomfortable in a group of people who are different from me in terms of their _____. (Examples: wealth, nationality, education)

Exploring the Word

1. What is Peter's radical declaration in Acts 10:34? Does Romans 3:29-30 agree?
2. How does Jesus, who is Lord of all, bring peace?

3. Why are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ crucial to Peter's and the church's preaching and witness?
4. What does Peter mean when he calls Christ the "judge of the living and the dead"?
5. What is the role of the Spirit in leading Peter and the church in a new direction?

The Word Today

1. Which account in Acts (Pentecost in Jerusalem, Paul's conversion, or Peter and Cornelius) speaks the most to you, your congregation, or your community? Why?
2. Complete this sentence: The good news I take away from Peter's sermon is _____.
3. On the basis of the entire study "Celebrating God," I can say these three things about God and my call to worship and serve:
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)

Closing Prayer

Lord of all, open our eyes and hearts to the surprises you have in store for us as your disciples. Give us faith and courage to go in your direction of forgiveness, acceptance, equality, and love. Amen.

Further Study

Acts 11:1-18; Ephesians 2:11-22

Daily Readings

M. Genesis 20:1-7, 14-16

F. Luke 7:1-10

T. Acts 10:1-8

S. Acts 10:23-33

W. Acts 10:9-22

S. Acts 10:34-47

T. 1 Kings 10:1-9

Memorization

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."