

Acts 10: 1 - 23 // Jesus is greater than tradition

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[0 : 00] Taylor is too gracious to say that he taught me a lesson this week. Today we're going to be in Acts chapter 10 verses 1 to 23.

The lesson that I learned was that we can sometimes be stuck in a process of tradition where we need to choose Jesus over that tradition.

And I've realized this week that I too do that. I also do that. I get stuck in my own tradition. And in Calvary Chapel, the tribe that I've grown up in, that is one thing we do where it's like we take communion together and we do it at a certain time and it's all orderly and structured.

And I got used to that. I didn't even know why I got used to that. But you just get used to things even if you don't understand why. So in this conversation Taylor and I had, you know, he showed me that there's another way of doing it.

And it reminded me of times when, you know, what I would do in the church that I pastored in Vancouver, we'd have a lot of churches from the United States come up that wanted to do, you know, what I called the needle tour.

[1 : 20] And it was just simply to go where drug addicts are hanging out, to share the gospel, to show them what street ministry is like, and to introduce them to many of the missions that were down there.

And I'd always have their group do communion and do the service and stuff like that for that particular Sunday. And one thing I found is that every single one of them, I'm talking over a dozen groups, had a different way of doing communion.

And it was delightful. It was awesome. One of them had actually the table here, and you had to come up and get the emblems and then go back, you know, in your time. And the one thing that was a constant that Taylor reminded me of is that it just needs to bring reverence to God.

We need to focus on what we're focusing on, which is partaking in communion in the Lord's Supper. And however we get there, we should get there. And so what I found this morning is I'm actually communing.

I'm taking my time. I'm thanking the Lord for what he's done. And the worship just oddly dovetailed into that, that idea of surrendering ourselves to the Lord for the good works that he's done for us on our behalf.

[2 : 30] So we all need to learn lessons. Peter, in this portion of this chapter, learned a very valuable lesson. And it was just simply that we've got to be fat for Jesus.

Now, let me explain what I mean by that, okay? Because that could be a really cruel lead-in to this really awesome dessert social we're having, but that's not what I'm talking about. Fat just simply means faithful, available, and teachable.

We can be really faithful, super faithful, but we're not available. We can be available and faithful, but when God tells us to do something, we're like, no, I don't think so.

I don't like that. That doesn't sound like me, you know. Peter was confronted by that. He had to be fat. So we're going to go through that again. He had a narrow idea of how God worked.

And in this moment, Peter, a very good Jewish boy, believed he was fulfilling his Judaism by believing in Jesus. Because, of course, Jesus is the Messiah.

[3 : 35] So for him, he thought, I'm going to continue being a really good Jewish guy. Great. Except when tradition is confronted by Jesus.

And then there's a choice that has to be made. There had to be made. And I find it interesting that last week we talked about the conversion of Paul. I mean, a Jew among Jews, he would call himself.

Right? I mean, religious of the religious. And he met Jesus in a very dramatic way. And here, if I call this sermon anything, it's the conversion of Peter.

Which sounds a little funny after the day of Pentecost. It sounds a little funny after he's wandered with Jesus for three years. That Peter would be converted. And yet, I'm struggling to find out what else it could possibly be.

Because sometimes the greatest miracle that happens isn't the sinner saved. It's actually the old, crusty Christian in all of us, myself included, that learns to have a softer heart and be more open and welcoming and loving.

[4 : 40] And that's what happened with Peter. So let's start with verses 1-2. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius. A centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort.

A devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. Now, if I were to stop at verse 1, we'd have to realize that this guy was pretty high up in the Roman authority structure.

And you'd almost imagine that the Jewish people would probably hear the Star Wars Imperial March everywhere this guy went. If you don't know what that is, I'll play it for you sometime.

But it kind of just, you hear the music, and you recognize this is bad. This is evil, okay? And it was like that. And yet, he was a faithful man.

Now, Caesarea is a beautiful place right on the shore of the Mediterranean. There's an enormous aqueduct there. You could actually walk into the prison cell where Paul spent quite a bit of time.

[5 : 45] The walls are torn down now, of course. It's just like the square footings. But you can walk in there. And there's a part of you thinking, like, you know, it can't be that bad being locked up with the Mediterranean right there, and the nice sun, and all this kind of stuff.

But it was still prison. And you can walk in, and you can see where Paul spent his time. But Caesarea was a big, beautiful place. You know, amphitheater, little coliseum, all kinds of things like that.

It was the hub of Rome in the area. This is where Pontius Pilate would also have been. And now Cornelius is, too. So we have this Roman authority structure, and yet this guy loves God, which is astounding to me.

He was a devout man, prayed to God, give alms to those in need, and he would have grown up as a typical Roman, worshipping many gods. Yet he came to Judea, and something softened his heart.

But something, I believe the Holy Spirit, pointed him to the Lord, and this was it. He knew this was real. And he was confronted, too, by his upbringing and tradition, faced with the one true God.

[6 : 59] He found God, recognized him, and he was a God-fearer. Now, the Jewish folks had a term back then, you probably heard it before, called God-fearer.

And it was someone who worshipped God, respected Jewish customs, respected Judaism as a religion, but didn't go all the way to become Jewish.

Which means circumcision. I get it. I do. I get it. You know, you come, you're a man of a certain age, circumcision isn't exactly a good selling point.

So there was, like, this block where they just couldn't, okay, like, and Cornelius was like, look, I believe, I love this, but not that. I get it. So they called them God-fearers.

These people who respected them, loved them, worshipped the same God, but didn't become Jewish. So he was still considered a Gentile. And even though Cornelius loved them, looked after them, gave alms, prayed, they couldn't eat with him, they couldn't be in the same space with him, he was still considered common.

[8 : 12] He was still considered someone unclean in that sense. So there was still a rift there. And there's a difference, as we know, between kosher and unkosher.

And even though a God-fearer could eat kosher food, someone who only ate kosher food couldn't eat at that God-fearer's place because they would have had unclean food at some point.

And if it touched a dish, well, we can't eat there. If they used the same cooking implements as they would for unkosher food, well, we can't eat there. You know, Lord only knows who they had over for dinner last night.

We just can't go there. And you start to see where tradition is starting to build walls instead of break them down. He prayed, he gives, he looked for God, yet he was rejected.

Sad. Verses 3 to 6. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius.

[9 : 14] Which, by the way, if I could just stop there for a second, even though he was rejected, God knew him on a first-name basis. That does not escape me.

It wasn't, random Gentile, I choose to raise you up of your lowly station to help serve your God. No, it wasn't like that at all. It was Cornelius. He knew him by name. Even though tradition rejected him, God knew him by name.

And he stared at him in terror and said, what is it, Lord? And he said to him, your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon, who is called Peter.

He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. So we know from the later verses, which we'll get to next week, that Cornelius was praying about three in the afternoon.

It wasn't a dream, but it didn't happen in real time either. It was a vision, and it happened like in the mind's eye of Cornelius. He saw this. It was like a dream when you're still awake.

[10 : 17] If you've ever had anything like that, it's sort of what I imagine Cornelius had. An angel came, and he was afraid. And I think Cornelius had every right to be afraid.

If an angel suddenly shows up, and it doesn't drive fear into you, then maybe we need to really check and see what our definition of the spectacular is. He was afraid. And Cornelius was also ready, because he had a relationship with God.

He was fat, faithful, available, teachable, right? Cornelius was ready to go. He was ready for this next step, because he was in prayer.

He loved the Lord. So when the Lord called, he said, yes. We're going to read in a little bit how Peter said no, which is very Peter, but we'll get into that in a minute.

Cornelius is about to believe in the good news, but I'll get to that next week. It's a wonderful, awesome story about how Cornelius and his whole house came to Jesus in a new, fresh way, received the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 25] God didn't use an angel to bring the gospel to him. He used a human being. It isn't this just God's way. It would be far more effective to send an angel. Can you imagine if an angel just kind of came to Texoma and just, you know, did their thing and just said, Jesus is the only way.

People would be like, okay, right, yes. I agree with that. Yes, yes. Instead, he chooses to use us, which is always confusing to me, because I come with frailties and brokenness and difficulty.

I'm socially awkward at times, and there's moments where I'm like, Lord, why us? And, you know, the funny thing is is when you go through the book of Revelation, you'll see that God still uses people all the way to the very end and finally sends an angel right before his return.

He's finally done with humanity, but there's a long period of time between now and then. And when I say that, I mean, even if things were to roll out right now, there's this seven-year calendar that when the Lord, you know, raptures, returns, however you want to put that.

I'm going to get into that in later days, but when you put that into context, there's a seven-year period that we can read in the Bible, okay? And during that seven-year period, there's witnesses that go out.

[12 : 50] 144,000 Jewish guys, sealed, go out, preach the gospel. Millions and millions and millions of people come to Jesus in that time.

Millions of people, okay? Some of them, most of them are martyred. I'm getting way ahead of myself, but the point is, is that even after he's tried everything through us humans, then he sends an angel.

Here and now, it would have been easier to send an angel and instead he sends Peter, which is a good idea, but Peter is still Peter. Anyways, verses seven to ten.

And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him. And having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up to the housetop at about the sixth hour to pray, and he became hungry and wanted something to eat.

[13 : 48] But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance. So, as some of you know, a housetop is like a patio and they might have like a nice awning up there. It was like a little cooler to get away from the wife and the mother-in-law or whoever else to try to get away from sometimes.

You could just kind of be up there on your own, you know, and it was a nice space. It was a good place to go and pray, okay? Maybe I shouldn't have said that out loud. But anyways, then Peter gets hungry.

Human nature, right? I love the Bible for so many reasons, but the fact that it is so painfully human at times, like this, it wasn't, Peter was so spiritual, he was up there just drenched in the Lord.

No, he went up there, he's hungry, and it distracted him from praying. I don't know about you, but I've been there, especially through this last week of prayer and fasting. Part of me thought this was awesome, the other part of me thought this was a terrible idea.

Anyway, this is what Peter's doing. God could even use his hunger. Verses 11 to 14, and saw the heavens open and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

[14 : 59] In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

So there Peter is. He's hungry. Falls into a bit of a trance. Has that vision. Okay? Has that experience. He's still hungry. He's still hungry.

And then the Lord gives him a very direct thing. I can't help but think that Peter was a faithful Jew. I wonder if he wasn't thinking, This is a test. Lord, I know what you're doing. You know, you're testing me.

No, I'm not going to do it. I would never do that. I'm a good faithful boy. I can't help but think that Peter was going through that wrestle with his mind right now. And it also strikes me that to this point, Peter had never had bacon before.

Right? That's so sad. Like, And now Peter sees this big slab of bacon. No, this is a pig. This is a whole bunch of things. Okay? Now I'm hungry.

[16 : 03] And he hears this voice. Maybe he was being tested, he thought. Peter would have thought that God was testing. Peter would have thought, You know, I know what you're doing, Lord. I know. I know. But the thing is, it's so easy for those words to come off of his lips.

No, Lord. This is one of the things that makes me kind of glad in a way to know that even after we meet Jesus, we're still who we are. Changed, softer, a new way to live, new decisions to make.

But we're still the people we were. Just new. Different. Peter was still the same guy who wrestled with God, argued with God.

He did it a couple other times too. No, don't go to the cross, Lord. Right? No, don't wash my feet. This isn't the first time Peter said no. Hardheaded Peter.

But of course, none of us are like that, right? We've never do that. The thing is, is if Jesus is really our Lord, we'll say yes. That's what Cornelius did. Yes, Lord.

[17 : 10] Peter was saved, but he was still Peter. Verses 15 to 16. And the voice came to him again a second time. What God has made clean, do not call common.

This happened three times. And the thing was taken up at once into heaven. Three times. God had to talk to Peter. Three times. None of us are hard-headed like that, right?

I can tell you, I am. I've had moments where the Lord has been like, go and do this. No. Son, go and do this. No.

Until he boxes me in and then I realize, okay, you were right. I should have said yes the first time. And that happens far too often. And I think we're honest with ourselves, it happens to you too.

Go talk to that person. Nah, it feels weird. You know, invite them over for lunch. You know, I got some in the oven. It's only for two. How many times have we denied what God had told us to do because it was uncomfortable?

[18 : 16] Even worse, how many times have we denied what God wanted us to do because it didn't fit with our sense of tradition? You see, we come against this as Peter has come against this.

And we're going to get into this in a second. Where sometimes tradition and Jesus are in a collision course. You know you have to choose Jesus. We have to.

We have to choose Jesus every time. In the Old Testament, there was holy and there was common things. If you were a righteous person, so you're a nice person, went to church, did all those right things, you know, pretended to follow all of the laws even though it's impossible, you did all of that stuff.

And then you went and accidentally touched a dead body because somebody's lying in the road and you have to lift them off. You're now ceremonially unclean and considered common until you go and get ritually clean again.

So this is the thing, is that when something common comes in contact with something righteous, it becomes righteous. When something righteous comes in contact with something common, it becomes common.

[19 : 21] So this is where this language is coming from. God is saying to Peter that he's making things clean.

Do not call them common. Peter is going to go on to later say that this means people, not food. So just because someone is seen as common to us, well, you know, they don't really go to church, right?

They don't really fit with us. You know, we can have those attitudes. And the reason why I did something today was for this purpose. If it bothers you, I wear a t-shirt today.

That's exactly what I'm talking about. You should care more about that I'm teaching from the word of God, line by line, verse by verse, sweating through it all week, praying through it hours a day, as opposed to me wearing a t-shirt.

So if we say we're immune to tradition and that bothers you, let me dare say, hear me the rest of the way out. Because this challenged Peter too.

[20 : 33] Tradition and Jesus come together in a place where we have to choose Jesus every time. And it doesn't matter what people wear. It doesn't matter if they have a smoke break outside. It doesn't matter if they come from a messy life.

everyone can come to the cross and be saved. Everyone. I mean, we were allowed in. Right? Everyone comes to the cross and be saved.

Paul's conversion proves that. If Paul can be saved, anyone can. But even Peter, a devout man, can also be saved, just in a different way.

Saved from tradition. Saved from religion. Back then, this was a shocking idea. I mean, socially scandalous.

The Romans had their gods. The Jews had their god. The Egyptians had their gods. So it was like, everybody's got their gods, right? But Christianity comes along and says, there is one god.

[21 : 33] There is one way to heaven. And that is through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the only way. Doesn't matter what you believe over there. Jesus is the only way. This was socially shocking to the world.

It was shocking to the Jewish tradition. It was shocking to the Romans. Shocking to the Assyrians. Shocking to the Egyptians. To anybody else that was coming from any other part of the world. This was shocking.

It was a radical way. A radical idea. And he didn't get it right away. God had to tell him three times. Right? Three times. So, verses 17 to 20.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius having made inquiry for Simon's house stood at the gate and called out and asked whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging here.

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation for I have sent them.

[22 : 45] Peter's wondering what this is all about. I wonder if Peter's mind was kind of thinking, maybe it's Philip. Maybe it's John. I love these guys. Of course I'm going to go with them. You know, maybe he's like thinking on his head like so these friends, the disciples, the people he knows, the people he feels safe with.

Oh Lord, you're so good. Yes, I want to go with them. Maybe it was like that. Because a godly Jew like Peter would never associate with the Gentiles.

And yet here they show up at his door. It's like, it's like a, you know, a bar joke, right? Like a rabbi, a priest, a cop walk into a bar, you know, those kind of jokes, right? It's like that. This is so unusual for Peter to see.

I just can't wait in some ways to get to heaven and ask these questions like what was going through your mind, Peter? What did you first think? You didn't expect this, did you? You didn't expect them?

So Peter had some choices to make because I think God surprised Peter on purpose. Sometimes these lessons, these people come into our lives and we don't expect them and we're having to make a choice in that moment.

[23 : 53] Do you choose tradition or do you choose Jesus? Verses 21 to 23. And Peter went down to the men and said, I'm the one you're looking for.

What is the reason for your coming? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man who is well spoken by the whole Jewish nation was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

So he invited them to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. Let the movie run in your head for a moment.

Let it just play out of what we're seeing here. Peter is surprised and affronted by the Gentiles at the gate. He could have just said, I'll meet you guys out there.

There's a nice inn down the street. Right? We'll set you up. Could have said that. It wouldn't have been socially awkward either. Could have been like, yeah, sure. To be someone's guest in a Jewish home isn't just going to say, well, just throw your stuff in the car and you can sleep wherever.

[25 : 02] It's to bring them in to make sure their clothes are okay. To give them room in a bed. To give them food and care. To treat them with honor and respect.

This was a socially shocking thing for Peter to do. The warmth and the welcome that he gave these strangers, these Gentiles, went against everything he was raised to accept and believe.

Everything. And yet he still did it because he chose Jesus instead of tradition. Amazing.

If you were a reader of this, a Jewish reader in the first century, this would be scandalous. You'd almost think, maybe we just don't associate with that guy Peter anymore.

You'd go that far. He's just, you know, he's gone off the rails. He's one of those Jesus freaks now. Good for Peter. So you invite them to be his guests.

[26 : 05] The next day he rose and went away with them and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. Shocking. Shocking. Peter wasn't supposed to do this according tradition.

But Peter's heart was big enough to change. His heart was big enough to trust God. Lord, this is a roller coaster. I don't know what's going on.

I feel really uncomfortable. This is testing everything I know what Christianity and church is supposed to look like. But I trust you. This is Peter's heart enlarging.

And you know, the funny thing is, I close. I can't help but tie things together because the Bible is a beautiful, beautiful story about a father bringing his children home. And it's so interconnected that it's like one line shows another.

One line proves another. Old Testament and New Testament. You have to work hard to not see Jesus in the Old Testament. You really do. You have to work hard at it. And even then, you're going to fail because he's everywhere.

[27 : 11] This is a really interesting example here. Because centuries before, there was another Jewish man that was told to go, that was from Joppa, that was told to go and talk to the people.

And you know, just like Peter, he said, no, no. And he gets on a ship because he's willing to go to death to avoid the will of God in his life. They throw him on the edge.

Fish swallows him up, spits him out on the other side. You know what happens? He goes and preaches the gospel to the people of Joppa and they get saved. Jonah was like this. Jonah.

I mean, a few hundred years before this whole situation happened before, except he said no and God still had his way. This time, Peter said yes. So in closing, the question we have to ask ourselves, are we a Jonah or are we a Peter?

When we're confronted with our tradition and Jonah had a deep hatred for people who did his people wrong and he's saying, no, no, I'm not going to tell you, God. I'm not going to tell them about you because you're going to forgive them and they're going to become Christians, they're going to become saved, however you want to put it, right, and I just don't like that because I don't like them and God still had his way, Jonah still delivered the message and the people did repent and turn to God and instead of being happy about that, he kind of went and pouted underneath a tree.

[28 : 32] We can be like Jonah or we can be like Peter and even though Peter struggled, he went with these people. A little bit of a teaser for next week, you know what happens?

He walks into Cornelius' house and again, huge cultural shocker and he just simply asks questions like, why am I here? Why have you brought me?

And Cornelius tells the story of the gospel. Peter didn't come in like this kind of saving saint, you know, I'm going to set up a big tent and everyone's going to hear about Jesus and he came in here humbly as a servant and said, why did you bring me here?

And Cornelius is like, well, I want to learn about Jesus, I want to learn, I want to know about this, I want to know about that. And his whole family came to faith, his whole household came to faith. But that's a bookmark for next week.

So all I wanted to leave off with is, you have to ask yourself, myself included, are we a Jonah or are we a Peter? God will have his way either way, okay?

[29 : 34] God wins. And even if he has to win against the traditional people inside of us that struggle against what Jesus is doing. So, let's have open doors to the church, open hearts, and an openness to God where he can show us who we were meant to be in him.

And it's outside tradition, outside what the world tells us we should be. The kingdom of God is something awesome. And we need to choose Jesus over tradition.

We need to be a Peter instead of a Jonah. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.