

True Inclusion

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[0 : 0 0] We still have some scripture journals, although this will be the last Sunday in Acts for some time. If you have one of these scripture journals, please turn to Acts chapter 10, and it will be on page 58.

So we're going to look at the entirety of the chapter. We won't read every last verse. It is a long chapter, but you'll understand because the flow, in a sense, it's one story, and to break it up would be a bit difficult.

But before we get into Acts chapter 10, as a way of a bit of an introduction, I really enjoy sports movies, although I haven't watched a good one in some time.

I was talking recently about how good Rudy was. I've always been a big fan of Rudy and Hoosiers. A good soundtrack on a good sports movie really helps as well.

Gets me excited. But one of the movies I really think is fantastic is Remember the Titans. It's a fairly newer movie compared to Rudy or Hoosiers, but it's an old story.

[1 : 0 6] Even though it takes place in the 70s, it's really an age-old story. It's a story, in this case, of a football team in Virginia that experiences a lot of barriers to success, the biggest of which is racial segregation.

Half the team is white, half the team is black, and their biggest opponent seems to be themselves. And there's something wonderful about Remember the Titans, not just simply because it's based on a true story and it's very inspiring, but it sees segregation dissolving in a way that speaks to something that is truly transcendent, something that is almost impossible to see come about on earth if it not for the spirit and the gospel of Christ.

There's this wonderful scene in it where the two leaders on the team, one white, one black, come together at this one play, and it seems like this is the beginning of redemption.

So we come to Acts 10, and a section of Acts that is incredibly crucial for the rest of the narrative, but really the rest of the history of the gospel for the next 2,000 years and into the future.

We see the gospel transition from primarily, almost entirely, a Jewish gospel, Jewish-centric, to moving towards the Gentiles.

[2 : 4 8] Cornelius will be the first Gentile to receive the gospel, and he is not just any ordinary Gentile. Gentile is one who is not a Jew, but he is a Roman soldier and part of the occupying force.

Maybe it would be a bit easier to have the gospel, in a sense, go to a Gentile who is not as offensive to Jewish sensibilities in the first century.

But here we have Cornelius, a Roman soldier, being the first person that the gospel spreads to that isn't Jewish. So our text will help us to see how the gospel, in a sense, isn't just good news for the unbeliever, but we'll also see how in this the gospel is good news for the believer.

It's not simply that we accept the gospel and move on to bigger and better things, but the gospel comes to flavor every aspect of our lives. We come to faith, we have a conversion, we hear the gospel, but then afterwards, as Christians, we have a number of other conversions, so to speak.

Not conversions from being an unbeliever to a believer, but conversions of ways of thinking from a wrong worldview to a right worldview. Thinking like a secularist, a modernist to thinking like a Christian.

[4 : 16] So we see these two kinds of conversions in our story today, and on its, on its, the very kind of, the surface level, we see a Gentile converting, but really we're going to see Peter converting as well.

So, we'll see that with conversions, we'll see, again, three, I guess in a sense, principles.

The first is that God takes the initiative to draw people to himself. The second is that God confronts false ways of life in those he calls. And then finally, God transforms all who are in him by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit.

So the first point, God takes the initiative to draw people to himself. Acts 10, it begins with a centurion named Cornelius. He's a centurion, which simply means that he's in charge of 100 soldiers.

I saw some conflicting things in my studies this week, but he would be maybe similar to a major. I don't know if it's exactly apples to apples, but in today's armed forces, he'd be like a major.

[5 : 25] So, not necessarily the highest of high, but certainly not just some regular soldier. He's an important man. Israel, as you remember, is occupied by the Romans.

He is a part of that occupying force. And he lives in Caesarea, which is along the coast, if you can kind of picture ancient Israel. Peter is at Joppa, which is Jaffa.

It's kind of on the southern coastal tip. Caesarea is about 60 kilometers north, still on the coast. And Caesarea, it's a fairly new city in this time.

And it was the bureaucratic headquarters, so to speak, of Rome in Judea. So, this man is, in a sense, an occupier.

He is living in a city that really, in some ways, shouldn't exist. It represents everything that the Jewish population hates about being occupied by Rome.

[6 : 29] And we see that this man, Cornelius, has begun to worship this Jewish god. It's a bit of a remarkable story, if we understand the backdrop.

So, Cornelius begins to worship this Jewish god. And he seems to be a really good family man, for he leads his family to do the same. And we come to find out that even though he was pursuing God, in a sense, God was drawing him, even in a greater way.

So, look with me, verses 1 to 8. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household.

He gave alms generously to the people and prayed continuously to God. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly, in a vision, an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius.

And he stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord? It's interesting that his reaction was terror. This is kind of the classic reaction to some kind of angelic visit throughout the Bible.

[7 : 37] It is not like, hey, there's an angel, that's cool. It is dread. People turn white. They fall down dead. There's anxiety and panic and fear. And this is what Cornelius is experiencing here.

Verse 5. Verse 4. 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. When the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius 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. God is getting his attention. God is drawing this man to himself.

In the same way that Saul encounters God, so too does Cornelius have this supernatural encounter with this angelic being, or this, in the case of Paul, this God himself, Christ himself.

[8 : 43] On one hand, Cornelius is doing religious things. He is doing things that are pleasing to God. But in a sense, he is still an outsider. He's still outside the covenant community.

We'll see in a little bit that he still has, he's still prone to worship things or people that aren't the God of the Bible. It's also very likely that if he is in a full convert, he is worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Hebrew God.

But at the same time, he would undoubtedly, especially as a Roman soldier, he would be worshipping the cult of Caesar at the very least. Caesar, who fashioned himself as a God-man, required worship.

Maybe he also worshipped Jupiter, or Minerva, or Mars, some of the Roman pantheon. But he is still, he is moving, he is trending towards the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And more importantly, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is moving towards him. Some of us have come to faith as adults, or have returned to the faith of our youth.

[9 : 55] This process may have seemed like a long and winding journey of thinking and reading and wrestling, and surely it has been that. But a text like this tells us that as much as you are pursuing God and wrestling through difficulty, that God is at work in your life drawing you to himself.

He has taken initiative not because you are a special person, or because you look a certain way, or come from a specific family, or speak a specific language.

Because he is choosing to draw you to himself. God makes the initiative. And although it looks like we are the one finding God, God is allowing himself, in a sense, to be discovered.

Because he wants to be discovered. He wants to be found. He wants us to know him. And he has gone to great lengths. And he is eager for you to find him.

Cornelius, he is seeking God, even though he isn't doing it necessarily perfectly. But God sees what is happening.

[11 : 05] And he is, in a sense, invading his life. He is drawing Cornelius to himself. Cornelius was seeking God, but God had orchestrated an encounter with Peter.

For as Cornelius' messengers were approaching Joppa, God would be drawing another person's heart towards himself, Peter, in a very similar way.

This leads us to our second point, that God confronts false ways of life in those he calls. That God, in a sense, sanctifies us, opens our eyes, helps us to walk in obedience towards him.

So let's continue reading verses 9 to 16. The next day, as they were on their journey approaching the city, that is, the two servants and the devout soldier that Cornelius sent, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

So this is about 21 hours later, the next day. And Peter became hungry and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

[12 : 18] 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.

And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has made clean, do not call common. Verse 16, This happened three times and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

This is a very perplexing vision that Peter has. But to really grasp its significance, we must understand the reality of Jewish-Gentile relations in the first century.

So in the first century, Jews did not mix with Gentiles. It just didn't happen. It's not that they were mortal enemies. It's not like this is a millennia-old example of the Hadfields and McCoys or the Montagues and the Capulets.

There were real prejudices that existed, but they're more so along religious lines. Now, it's not to say that there wasn't ethnic prejudices as well, but primarily there were religious prohibitions within the Jewish camp against anybody who were non-Jews.

[13 : 44] There's some big problems with assimilation, where Jews would, in a sense, adopt a lot of Roman or Greek customs, but even then there was some uneasiness about that.

That wasn't the standard practice. We see some of that, actually, in Acts chapter 2 as well. So there were biblical injunctions against Jews mixing, in a sense, with Gentiles, but it never went beyond, in a sense, religious or biblical prohibitions.

It was always, in a sense, on religious grounds in relationship to fidelity to God. So a lot of the dietary restrictions, so to speak, they weren't necessarily given because, you know, pigs will mess you up and change your DNA if you eat them.

It wasn't some kind of physiological thing, but it was, in a sense, a symbol of God's people being set apart from the other nations. It was an issue of cleanliness.

Cleanliness, not in the sense where one is made dirty just by being a certain ethnicity or speaking a certain language, but an uncleanness that, in a sense, is on a spectrum where holiness, God himself, is over here, and every degree away from God is just not clean.

[15 : 18] This is the language that was used. It was unclean. But the problem is, by the first century, this biblical command was expanded to no longer be dynamic, so that in the Bible, one could be unclean, but they could then do things to become clean again.

But by the time the first century comes around, if you weren't Jewish, you were just unclean. You were a problem. I mean, maybe not a problem to yourself, but certainly a problem to the people of God.

This is not what God wanted. And it's not just Peter, in a sense, having this vision of these unclean animals that are, in a sense, symbolically pointing towards how the Gentiles are actually not unclean, but clean.

But it is going to try him and try his sensibilities because that mentality of expanding the biblical injunction to completely prohibit Gentiles had seeped into the church.

And now the church, who is primarily Jewish, yeah, God is the God of all people, but really he's still the God of us. Jesus is the Messiah of the whole world, but really just for us.

[16 : 43] And God was challenging Peter in this thinking. This is one of, in a sense, the conversions that Peter has. That no longer can he think in ethnic superiority, in terms of ethnic superiority, but now all of these boundaries that, in a sense, have their root in the Bible, but have been expanded to mean so much more and go against what God had envisioned, all of that is getting completely shattered.

Peter's hungry. God speaks to him in a way that will get his attention. And he sees all the various animals in the world, all unclean animals, and he's commanded to eat them.

Snakes, various kinds of carrion, all sorts of scaleless fish, octopi, things that Jews would never touch with a 10-foot pole.

Peter, you pious Jew, get up, kill, eat. The dread that would have fallen on him. Am I thinking this in my own head?

Maybe I'm being attacked by some kind of demonic force. And yet three times it is said, and Peter seems to have been spoken to by God in a way that he least expected.

[18 : 03] And he begins to go through, in a sense, a type of conversion, a change of his thinking. A bit later on, we will see that Peter gets the message loud and clear in verse 27, 28, and 29.

But to really understand how scandalous this would have been, is to really, I mean, it's hard for us to really grasp this in Ottawa in 2024.

But real, true, ethnic prejudice was extended towards the Gentiles from the Jewish nation. In the Gospel, Peter learns, and we learn, that all people are clean, and therefore have an equal footing with one another in Christ Jesus.

That God is the God of all people. Cornelius could be worshipping Jupiter, and Minerva, and Mars, and Caesar, and whoever else, or whatever else. But when he comes to faith in Christ, he is made clean.

He is transformed. And Peter needs to understand that. He needs to grasp that. Because God has not made two separate, adjacent churches.

[19 : 23] There is one church. And it doesn't matter if you are Jew or Greek. Now, that does not mean that those categories are erased. Peter doesn't cease to be a Jew.

Cornelius doesn't cease to be a Roman. But they are one in Christ. So, Cornelius sends his people.

Peter, he is warned that these people are going to come. He has them into his house, which is the beginning of this transformation with Peter. To have in his, at least the lodging that he's staying with, the lodging that he's staying in, to host non-Jews would be scandalous and unclean.

He has them in. The next day, him, Cornelius' guys, and six others, so there's ten total, they'll go to Caesarea.

It would have been a day's journey. And then, Cornelius reiterates the timeline. And then we find ourselves at verse 34.

[20 : 30] This is what Peter says. Understanding now the full extent of that vision and what God's purpose are for, what God's purpose is rather for the non-Jews.

And this is what he says. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

That's the crux of the story right there, verse 34 and 35. And it's the beauty of the gospel. God is no respecter of people. God, what God does is not contingent upon you or me.

And that's a bit of a big deal. God is above us. He is, in a sense, perfect will. He is not swayed. He is not convinced to do one thing or the other that is against his will.

He will do his will. Favoritism is out the door. He calls who he wants to call regardless of who they are.

[21 : 34] And this is truly wonderful news for us because it means that God will save fully. And apart from who we are or what we will do, he, if he chooses to save, he will save.

This means that evildoers will not go unpunished because God perverts justice by showing partiality. Nobody, in a sense, has God in their pocket.

He shows no partiality. But on the flip side, no one needs to fear God's rejection out of partiality against them. What does this mean?

It means that God is perfect in his justice. And if he chooses to save, he will. And we can take him at his word. Anyone from anywhere who comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ begins to live out a life obedient to his rule and reign and no longer are under judgment but are acceptable to him.

Verse 35. We become Christians. The gospel continually corrects our false thinking and confused worldview and we grow in joyful obedience.

[22 : 44] That is that next step, that sanctifying work, that purifying work that God does in us. He changes our thinking. But, this confronting of a false belief system only begins, in a sense, before we come, or that it does begin before we come to the Lord.

And we'll look at Cornelius here in verse 23 to 25. This is what it says. The next day, he rose and went away with them.

This is Peter and his group. And some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day, they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them that it called together his relatives and close friends.

Verse 25. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up saying, Stand up. I too am a man.

I mentioned at the beginning that Cornelius almost certainly worshipped other gods. Almost certainly was not monotheistic. Yet, in a sense, the truth of the matter is God was still at work with him because Cornelius was looking, in a sense, to the only God that exists.

[24 : 07] And this helps us to understand that even before and even after we come to faith, we struggle with the worship of other gods, other things.

We put our faith and trust in things that are not God, that do not lead to God. We do not look to the gospel for salvation. We look to other things. We do not live infidelity to the triune God immediately after we come to faith.

But as the gospel takes hold in our lives, the reality of being members of the kingdom of God begins to take root and we grow in our obedience and our devotion to Christ, he exposes gently but very vividly our false and curated religions that we have lived by, our ethos, the very thing, the worldview that informs our coming and our going.

This is not easy but it's necessary. God, he is no respecter of people but he is also a jealous God. He will not share the throne with anybody else.

Contrary to much of modern thought, we don't actually live in a truly secular age. We live in a very religious age. Not necessarily in the classic categories of religion but we are inundated with truth claims and in a sense religious claims, belief structures that oftentimes are antithetical to the gospel.

[25 : 50] We have a misguided view of what it looks like to be humans made in God's image of what the good life is, what salvation is and God as he saves us he desperately wants to change this mentality to give us in a sense another conversion.

We must grow in our allegiance to Christ and he is patient as we gradually bend the knee to Christ in all areas of our lives.

But if you've been a Christian for some time this isn't something that is easy and it takes great strength and determination and even then you fail. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can make this change and this leads to the third point that God transforms all who are in him by the outpouring of the Spirit.

So with a captive audience verse 34 Peter begins proclaiming to the Gentiles the gospel for the first time and this is what he says.

So Peter opened his mouth and said truly I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

[27 : 03] As for the word that he sent to Israel preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ he is Lord of all you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed and how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed literally tyrannized by the devil for God was with him 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 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses literally eyewitnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead 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 to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name notice that Peter is clear that the gospel cannot be separated from the literal life death and resurrection of Christ

I mean there's a lot in there but he goes to great extent to talk about how from the Galilee after the baptism of John into Jerusalem that Jesus lived that he died he was crucified he was buried three days later he rose we saw him we ate with him we drank with him he stayed with us Peter is saying that the gospel can't be divorced from the literal person of Christ or the literal resurrection of Christ the time that Jesus stayed with the disciples afterwards until he ascended into heaven Jesus truly came and there are eyewitnesses not just one not just two not even twelve but Jesus appeared to many and many people it's not one lone prophet in a cave in Arabia who gets a revelation from God it is not one man in New York in the 1800s who gets a private revelation from God it's not some guru who has a series of enlightenment by himself and then tells everybody it is a real literal resurrection that is witnessed by many people remember this is spoken to

Cornelius who very well could have heard that this other insurrectionist Jesus of Nazareth was hung on the tree it's not like this is some idea for Cornelius it was a real person that he would have heard about Peter is saying I've seen him and there are others and I can I can show you other people or get other people to testify on on my behalf it's not just me who has seen him but other people and look at verse 43 this is what he ends with he says to him all the prophets bear witness and here it is that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name that if you believe in Christ that he rose from the grave that he literally came to live to die to rise again for our sins your sins are no more there's a bit here where he says that he was hung on a tree he doesn't necessarily

I mean he's alluding to the cross but he doesn't say he was crucified to hang on the tree in Deuteronomy 21 is to be cursed and Jesus Peter is saying takes your curse upon himself and he becomes cursed so that you could be free or put another way Jesus takes your uncleanness and puts it upon himself so that you would be made clean holy connected with God in the very presence of God himself and what happens afterwards in verse 44 and on is again with all the background of Jewish Gentile relations it's incredible and this is what it says while Peter was still saying these things the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers from among the circumcised that is the Jewish people who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles for they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God a pause there mid-sermon the Holy Spirit falls mid-sermon it is as if

God is I don't want to necessarily attribute human attributes to God but it's almost as if God is too eager to give them himself that he's not even going to wait until the end of the sermon and just pours out the spirit on these people and these people are so eager to receive God that they've heard enough in a sense and they are extolling God they are praising God they have put faith in God and God responds in kind Peter has recognized this and he is in a sense saying listen if God has saved these people who are we to withhold baptism as a sign of entryway into the church and here not since Pentecost in chapter 2 do we hear anything about tongues for whatever the tongues are and I try to tackle this in the Sunday follow-up I send out midweek I think it's back in September or October whatever but it's there whatever tongues is referring to here

[32 : 51] Luke has recorded it in a way to say that this is a second Pentecost that it is not just that the Jews had their coming to faith this new covenant where the Holy Spirit was poured onto them and that the Holy Spirit came into their lives and in their hearts and they were new creations but what happened with the Gentiles it was kind of like salvation light it was kind of like Holy Spirit light what Luke is trying to tell us is that this is the same thing that happened to the Jewish people in Acts chapter 2 because the Gentiles are 100% legitimate members of the church of God why because of Christ not because of who they are but because who Christ is so the spirit is given to them in the same kind way that it is given to the Jewish believers in Acts chapter 2 the Gentiles are full and true members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church catholic meaning that it is for all people apostolic meaning that it is the gospel of

Christ that is proclaimed by the apostles only the spirit of God through the gospel of God can bring together such diverse people into the church wrapping things up the mutual recognition of the Jews to the Gentiles and the Gentiles to the Jews is at the heart of this chapter it's at the heart of the gospel that in Christ people are united in a way that that transcends the things that we can do or try or the programs we try to try to launch but it is rooted in the immutable Christ the unchanging one the salvation one on the cross prejudice between various groups are not new it's age old but only Christ can unite such diverse and broken people this is why this move within our secular society our secular society of diversity inclusion equity all these programs they at their core will not work because the issue is a sin issue and an evil issue and a brokenness issue it's a supernatural issue and the only way to fix a supernatural issue is by a supernatural savior not through natural means and the great irony in trying to fix a supernatural issue by natural means is that it only perpetuates the problem just this week two stories about universities rolling out various

DEI campaigns have proved this one in Waterloo it's a black only time to swim how does that bring people together how does that unite people how does that take differences not ignore them but say listen we are going to unite around something greater and bigger it doesn't similarly on the campus of York University a Jewish group was told well they weren't told but they were discouraged from meeting because it would in a sense cause uncomfortableness to people of Palestinian dissents not an Israel group a Jewish group obviously there's overlap but they're separate a separate aspect of that as well again the desire to unite because of a supernatural issue by natural means only perpetuates the problem only in the gospel do we have true inclusivity true equity even in the face of diversity great diversity

Jew Gentile diversity because the only true immutable reality in the universe is that Christ is a true savior and that we are true sinners all who put their faith and hope in Christ have forgiveness and their sins are washed clean no longer unclean people but clean people no longer common people but are holy people for God transforms all who are in Christ Jesus by his Holy Spirit this is the hope of the gospel this is the truth of Acts 10 and this is what ought to mark a church like ours we come from some similar backgrounds of course but we also come from different backgrounds so what unites us is because we have the same sports favorite sports teams or hobbies or likes for cuisine or interests all very great stuff important stuff can't be the thing that unites us we are united around the banner of Christ

Christ Christian forgiveness of sins made clean by the blood of the lamb this is what unites us that's the only thing that can truly unite us amen let us pray father thank you for doing something that only you could do but that we so desperately needed lord not just to convert us from unbelief to belief but to convert our wrong thinking from thinking in categories of this world of in a sense of having us on our on our own thrones rather than you on our own thrones and converting that thinking to seeing our great need for you and how you and only you can solve the issues and problems and brokenness and separation alienation that we experience lord we thank you for this and we thank you that it's by your spirit that you do this and lord we thank you that as we saw in acts chapter 10 great joy accompanied salvation and that two opposing groups became one in christ lord let us always look to you to strive by your strength to see those that are different than us as brothers and sisters because you see us as your children and we are the brothers and sisters of our big brother christ so lord we ask by your spirit that you would help us to grow in this reality and truth in christ's name we pray amen amen for jim Düts miracles we we do we know know you we we you think that kind of oh