

# God's Inclusion of Gentiles

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[ 0 : 00 ] RECOVER CH ■■■■■ nad yon wei von ■u heer, Und ai hun heer, die s Stall HR CREAM THE END.

Take the sea, the Lord, this truth, who's lost in heaven's land.

O dear Lord, you live with me, you will not be of heaven.

We're going to look this evening at the book of Acts chapter 10, but before we come to look at that in particular, over this weekend, the theme of our sermons has been one of love.

God willing, we hope to continue that theme this evening as we look to the book of Acts. We've looked at the love of God in his covenant commitment to his people in the book of Deuteronomy.

[ 1 : 34 ] As the children of Israel were about to go on into the promised land, the Lord committed himself to them. And he said to them, you will be my people and I will be your God.

God remembered them in love. And this morning we were looking at the love of God in Christ Jesus. When we were thinking of the Lord Jesus going to the cross, we looked at it in John 15, where we have these great words of the Lord himself.

Greater love hath no one than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends. And so we come this evening to the book of Acts chapter 10.

Perhaps you're saying to yourself this evening, where do we find love in this chapter? Where do we see love mentioned? We don't really see it mentioned as clearly as in other passages we've looked at.

But we know ourselves maybe in our lives that there is more to love than just words. Love is seen in action. Really as you're looking through the whole of the book of Acts, you are seeing the love of God in action.

[ 2 : 52 ] You are seeing God pouring out his love upon many different people, in many different places, and in many different ways.

The Acts of the Apostles remind us of just how the Spirit moved in those days and continues to move this very day.

As we come to chapter 10 in the book of Acts, we find this meeting that took place between Peter and Cornelius.

Maybe when you think about it at first, you think to yourself, well maybe this is nothing too spectacular. Maybe there's not so much of real great importance in this meeting.

The more you look at it and the more you realise just what is taking place in this account, you realise how important it is for ourselves here this night.

[ 3 : 52 ] The meeting between Peter and Cornelius took place maybe around 2,000 years ago. Here we are in the congregation of Knock, the Sunday evening of the 3rd of November, 2013.

We think to ourselves, well, where is the connection between the two? How can we marry these two meetings together? The meeting of Peter and Cornelius, and our own gathering here this night.

Well, we can say about both these things, that they have been appointed by God. That they have been appointed by God with a very great purpose.

And we see the purpose of the meeting of Peter and Cornelius. And when you see it, it is really quite marvellous what has taken place. Because here we begin to see that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is not just something that is going to be confined among one people or one nation, but something that is for all people in all nations.

Here we see God by his mercy, by his grace, by his love, beginning the spread of the gospel to all nations.

[ 5 : 22 ] That without maybe this meeting having taken place, we wouldn't be gathered here this night as we are. Can you imagine if the gospel had never come to point?

Can you imagine if the gospel had never come to our island? Never come to our nation? Where would we be? What would we be doing?

We would be lost. We would be in darkness. And for all those who say that they want rid of the gospel, where would we be without it?

Because we see the love of God in the gospel that reminds us that we need God. That we need the Lord Jesus Christ. That without him, we are lost for all eternity.

But with him, we are richly blessed. There is the love of the gospel here in this chapter.

[ 6 : 24 ] And I want us just to read a few verses together before we go on. And it's at verse 33 of chapter 10. This is Peter and Cornelius meeting.

And Cornelius is now telling Peter why he has come. 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.

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.

Now therefore, we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

Doesn't that ring true? For the very reason that we are joined together here this evening. It's almost as if Cornelius, who had earlier on invited his friends and relatives to gather together in one room.

[ 7 : 43 ] You read that in verse 24. The following day, they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

They were all together in one place. Cornelius has gathered them in. And it's almost as if he's locked the door. He's locked them in. And he's saying to Peter, Look, we are here together in the presence of God to hear all that you have commanded.

Now don't worry, the doors are not locked here this evening. But we are still all together here in the presence of God. And we are here to hear the good news of the gospel.

We are here to see the love of God through Christ Jesus. We are here in the presence of God. And it is a meeting that has been appointed by God.

God has appointed this night. This night for us all to be gathered in his presence to hear his word.

[ 8 : 59 ] I want us to look at three things in this passage. First of all, it is the fact that this is God's appointed time. It's God's appointed time for Peter and Cornelius to meet.

When you look at chapter 10, they are the main characters, if you like. These two men, Peter and Cornelius. When you look at who they are and where they come from, you see that they are really from opposite ends of the spectrum.

They are really, you could say, two worlds colliding. They are coming from very different places. With very different understandings of their own beliefs.

We have Cornelius on one hand, who we have introduced to us in the opening verses. There was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius. He was a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort. A Roman centurion. One who was a leader in the Roman army. And a Gentile at that as well.

[ 10 : 11 ] And on the other hand, you have Peter. One of the apostles. And a devoted Jew. They were not likely to mix.

And indeed, had it been left to themselves, then they probably would not have come together to meet. And you see that in verse 28.

And this is Peter's own words to Cornelius. 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. What has made the difference for Peter?

How is it that a man, Cornelius, a Roman soldier, a Gentile, can come together to meet with Peter, a devout Jew?

[ 11 : 12 ] Well, we see that this has all been appointed by God. Because God, first of all, appears to Cornelius here.

Cornelius, in the early verses, sees a vision of an angel of God come to say to him. A vision. And the angel speaks to him to say, Send for this Peter.

It is the doing of God. And at the same time, on the other end of the spectrum, there is Peter himself who is up on his housetop, praying at the sixth hour.

And he too, receives this vision, a very strange vision, of this sheet descending to earth. And he is so confused.

What does this mean? What is this about common and unclean things? You see it in verse 15, What God has made clean, do not call common.

[12:14] The Lord is speaking to Peter, but he doesn't quite understand what is happening. Because God is in the midst of it all.

And truly we can say, God works in mysterious ways. God works, as it were, behind the scenes, moving in ways that maybe at times we just don't seem to understand.

Cornelius and Peter were probably left with many different questions about what had just taken place. What did this mean? What is happening here?

But God is moving in the midst of it all. You wonder what kind of questions they might have asked of each other. What sort of comments, comments they have made about each other.

What would Cornelius have said about Peter? You know, probably looked at Peter and said, Well, there is a legalistic kind of man. They have all these laws of do's and don'ts.

[13:17] They look down upon us Gentiles as if they are much better, much higher than us. We just can't mix with that kind of people.

What about Peter of Cornelius? How would Peter maybe have viewed Cornelius himself? Peter would probably have said, as it sort of comes across in the passage, why would we go to the Gentiles?

Why would we go to a Roman centurion? One who is so against us as a people. One who has done so much against us. One who hates us.

Peter would not have wanted anything naturally to do with them. They were opposites. And yet, by the grace of God, they come together.

Doesn't that remind us of the kind of attitudes that we can have in our own lives as well? And this is true for the Christian and for those who are not Christians here this evening.

[14:26] Even as Christians, you can probably look back in your own experience and remember the kind of views you maybe had of the church. The kind of thoughts that you had towards the people of God.

Maybe the kind of views that Cornelius would have had of Peter. They're just so legalistic. They want to just control my life.

They've just got a list of do's and don'ts. Can I not just worship God in my own way? I've got nothing in common with these people in the church.

But then, by the grace of God, you soon realize that godly people have an interest in those who are not Christian.

And that God, by His grace, can transform all our views. that God, by His grace and love towards us, can bring us to have a complete change of heart.

[15:35] But even as Christians, we sometimes have to guard against having the same kind of attitude as Peter. You see, that when Peter comes to meet with Cornelius, he's quite open about the fact that he didn't really want to be there.

It was unlawful for a Jew to associate with anyone else. They would almost go out of their way to stay away. But the grace of God transforms Peter as well to be one who goes to preach to the Gentiles.

Sometimes, as Christians, we need to examine our own hearts as to how we look at others. That we don't see ourselves as holier than thou.

That we don't see ourselves as above those who are not Christians. We would guard against having a heart that won't go and share the gospel with a certain people.

or speak to a certain person. We see here, God appointing this meeting. And when he appoints it, he overcomes all the barriers.

[16:54] He overcomes everything that would stand in the way of the gospel spreading. He overcomes man-made barriers. We're good at putting up man-made barriers.

We're experts at putting up barriers when it comes to spreading the gospel. Or when it comes to believing the gospel. We're experts at making ourselves turn away from it.

But by the grace of God, he can come in and transform our hearts. God appointed this time for them to come together and broke down all the barriers that were in their way.

This was no chance meeting. This was no just they were walking along the street one day and bumped into each other and said, how are you doing?

This was God at work in a very special way. And God continues to work in these ways as well. Our lives are not filled with chance happenings.

[ 18 : 06 ] Our lives are not filled with things that have taken place and we wonder well that was quite amazing how that happened and we forget that well God was in that. Our lives are filled with God's providence.

It's been quite interesting speaking to a number of people over this weekend and just stories about what's going on in their lives or the lives of others and how they were able to say well God was looking after me or that person in that situation.

And we recognize that no it wasn't just chance that that happened it was God's work God's appointed time. And in our own lives we can maybe think about that what does that mean for yourself tonight.

It was not a chance event that you first heard the word of God. It was not a chance event that maybe many years ago you heard the word of God preached and it left an impact in you.

It may have even only been a week ago that you heard the word preached and you thought to yourself there is something in that. chance. It's not chance it's the Lord speaking to you and he speaks to you in every area of your life.

[ 19 : 26 ] It's not a chance event that you met someone in your life who would become a lifelong friend or even a husband or wife. God has appointed these things.

It's not a chance event that you got a certain job or even lost a job. it's not chance it's God at work. We often wonder why these things happen.

It's not a chance event that maybe we've gone through great times of joy in our life or even great times of grief in our life. God is at work in all these things.

The more we ask why certain things happen, the more we wonder about it, the more we need to look to the word and see God has appointed this time.

God has appointed this cup for me now. Even this week I was speaking to someone who's gone through Bremen recently and he was able to say this is my cup.

[ 20 : 33 ] It's hard but it's God's appointment. And it's only if we are trusting in God that we are able to fully appreciate these things.

Recognize that God is at work even in strange ways. And it's not chance that you're here tonight either. Perhaps somebody invited you this evening.

Perhaps you came out of curiosity. Perhaps you came because it's quite common for people to come to a Sunday evening of a communion service.

Or perhaps you came because you always come on a Sunday evening. But we are all here.

Whatever the reasons we might think we are here, we are all here because God has appointed this time.

And just as Cornelius said when Peter came and met with them, Cornelius said, Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

[ 21 : 39 ] That was the reason for their meeting. Because God had appointed it that they would hear the word of the Lord in the presence of God. And in the same way we should remember that we too are here this evening because God has appointed it and we are here to hear the word of God.

God's appointed time. The second thing is God's appointed word. If God has appointed the time for Cornelius and Peter to come together, he has also appointed the very purpose for their coming together.

And the purpose was as we have seen there in verse 33, that they are gathered in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. All that God has to say.

The purpose is to hear the word of God. Did Peter have to stop and think about what he would say to them?

Did he have to stop and wonder, well what am I going to tell these people? What am I going to say to them? He didn't have to think for a moment.

[ 22 : 58 ] He knew straight away what he was going to say to them because God had appointed the word. What Peter does is he delivers the word of God to them.

He brings them to the gospel. He brings them to all that has been done for them in Christ Jesus. The good news of the gospel that brings peace.

In verse 36 we see these words, as for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all.

The word for peace there can also mean salvation. The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Is there any better message that Peter could bring to them than the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

There is no better news for ourselves together here this night. We are here for a purpose. We are here for this appointed time. But we have the appointed words here before us.

[ 24 : 16 ] The good news of peace through Jesus Christ. What a wonderful message that is. In all of our troubles in this life, in all of our anxieties, in all of our worries, here we have the word before us this evening, the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.

Why would we look anywhere else when everything that we need is here before us? That is what we need to hear. The word appointed by God is scriptures, the word that is able to save.

What is quite interesting about it is that as Peter begins to preach, this was a word not just for those who Cornelius had invited, it was a word for Cornelius himself as well.

It was God's appointed word of salvation. salvation. You maybe say to yourself, well what about Cornelius? Was he not saved already?

You read about Cornelius in the opening verses there, verse 2. Cornelius was a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

[ 25 : 42 ] he sounds like a good man. When you see the picture of him there, you think to yourself, this man is saved.

But the word says differently. This was a word for Cornelius himself as well. That is made clearer for us in the next chapter.

In chapter 11 at verse 14, it is quite interesting if you can read this again maybe. Peter goes on to report back to the church. Peter has brought the gospel to the Gentiles, but his rulers, his leaders, aren't impressed that he has done this.

They challenge him as to why he would do this in the first place. And he has to explain his actions to his leaders. If you look at verse 14, or verse 13, first of all, he told us how he had seen an angel. This is Peter talking about Cornelius. He told us how he had seen an angel stand in his house and say, send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter. He will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.

[ 26 : 59 ] believe that's quite a revealing verse about Cornelius. At first glance you might think to yourself, Cornelius was saved before this account, before this event.

But all it seems to tell us is that Cornelius was a good man. And there are many people who can think to themselves, well, I'm a good person.

I'm a good person. I'm a devout man. I fear God, I believe in God, I give generously to the cause, I maybe even pray to God.

But does that make us saved? Is that enough for us? When you look at Cornelius you realise that that was not enough.

He had to hear the appointed word of God, he had to hear the gospel. Peter is saying here that fearing him, doing what is right, it makes you acceptable as he goes on to say in verse 35.

[ 28 : 15 ] He doesn't want to put down on Cornelius. But in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. He doesn't want to just put down on them straight away, but he goes on from there to remind them of the gospel, the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.

Why? Because that is what they are missing. That is the key to what they are missing. What they are doing makes them acceptable, but it is only by coming to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ that they will be accepted.

And there is a big difference. There is a big difference between the two. We can be acceptable in God's eyes, but not be accepted.

And to be accepted, we need to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And that is the word that Peter brings to Cornelius and all who are gathered.

And maybe you feel tonight that you are a good person. Maybe you feel like you are doing what God asks of you. The most important question tonight is, are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ

for your salvation?

[ 29 : 41 ] We look in so many places, to find happiness. We look in so many places to make ourselves feel good.

We justify ourselves by maybe giving some of our time to the church, some of our money to the church, even maybe the odd prayer that we offer up. But are we truly believing in the Lord Jesus Christ?

That is the word we are appointed to hear this night. C.S. Lewis once said that God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from himself because it is not there.

There is no such thing. Happiness and peace without God just don't exist. As we are looking at this morning, the Lord Jesus spoke words to his disciples before he went to the cross, reminding them of all that he was doing.

and he said to them, I have said these things for your joy, that your joy might be complete. Joy can only be found in the truth of the gospel, the good news appointed by God himself, the appointed word, the good news of peace through Jesus Christ because he is Lord of all.

[ 31 : 05 ] God's appointed word. There is one final thing I want us to consider this evening. In the message that Peter brought to Cornelius and to the Gentiles and has continued to be preached to this very day, it is one of an appointed judge.

God's appointed judge. And we see that in verse 42 at the end of that section. Peter said that he has 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.

The Lord Jesus is the one appointed as judge. We have to ask ourselves some really heart-searching questions. When we consider our life in this world, how short it is, the Bible is honest in what it tells us.

It says that our lives here are just like the grass. We flourish in a moment and then we're blown away. We're here, but for a moment. And since our lives are so short and uncertain, and eternity is forever, the most important question anyone can answer is, how can I be saved?

How can I know for certain that I am right with God? How can I approach the day of judgment and stand before the one who is appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead?

[ 32 : 49 ] How can I stand before him and know that I am saved? it is only by trusting in him.

Verse 43 goes on to reveal that to us. To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

You know there are many places in this world that we go. Many maybe meetings we have to go into or places we have to go and we just want to get out of that place.

Might be a meeting at work where things are tense and people's tempers are starting to rise and you are saying to yourself just get me out of this place.

Perhaps it is in a school or college and you are sitting on an exam and you are finding yourself just tearing your hair out because the questions are too difficult. it is not what you have studied for.

[ 33 : 55 ] It is not what you had hoped had come up and you are saying to yourself just get me out of this place. The Bible when it comes to describing the day of judgment it says about those who are not saved that they will just want to get out of that place.

the Bible describes it as them calling for the mountains to fall down and just swallow them up. But there is no avoiding that appointment.

We all have to stand before the judge appointed by God the Lord Jesus Christ. And what Peter leaves Cornelius and his friends with and what makes a difference in their lives is the fact that they see that the only way to know forgiveness for sins is through his name.

Through the name of Jesus. How can we know that? How can we know that we can have forgiveness of sins through his name?

Well it is by faith that we can know that. What we have done here today in the morning was remember the Lord's death till he comes. This do in remembrance of me it says.

[ 35 : 23 ] What did he do? He gave his life. He laid down his life for his friends. There is a story told from America and the days of the pioneers.

The days when the United States was beginning to open up and many people were travelling out to what was probably called the wild west in those days. And you can picture the scenes from maybe films you have seen before.

It is one of these wagons rolling through the prairie lands. Drawn by the oxen that were going to help them set up their homes in the new wilderness and new territories that they were going to. one such procession of wagons was making their way out into a new area to begin a new life. They were going through these large areas of prairie land.

You know the kind of place where the grass grows long. It is almost like a desert which is very dry, very hot. They were making their way through the prairie land and suddenly they noticed in the distance over the whole horizon they were seeing this cloud coming towards them.

[ 36 : 39 ] They recognized that what was taking place was that the grass had caught fire. The fields were burning and fast approaching them. The wind was blowing it in the very direction towards them.

And they were only making slow progress. They couldn't avoid what was coming towards them. And this fire was causing terror in their midst. Then one man seemed to understand what had to be done.

What he did was he gave the command to set fire to the grass that was behind them. To many it seemed just a bizarre thing to do.

This man was obviously out of his mind. Why, if they are trying to run from fire, would they set another fire? But the man knew what he was doing. And they said, fire to the grass that was behind them.

And because of the way the wind was blowing, it went away from them and burnt a large area of ground. Suddenly it began to dawn on people just what he was doing.

[ 37 : 50 ] And they began to move their wagons onto the large area now that had been burnt already. And there they stopped, they set up their camp, and they watched the fire approaching in the distance.

And there was one young girl there in their midst who was terrified about what was happening. And the little girl cried out in terror, are you sure we shall not all be burnt up?

And the man who had organized what they had done said, my child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been.

And sure enough, because they were standing where the fire had been, the fire swept around them, and they were untouched. What a picture that is for the believer.

If you are looking to be safe this night, if you are looking to know for sure that you are safe in the arms of Jesus, you must go to him.

[ 38 : 58 ] because he is the one who has gone into the fire. We can stand on him because he has borne all our sins, because through him we are forgiven.

We are safe in Christ. That is how we will know. Not by what we have done, but what we have said. Whether we believe we are good people or not, it is by believing in him and trusting in the one who has stood in our place. The one who went to the cross.

The one who bore our sins. The one who paid the ransom that none of us could pay. Are you concerned for your soul tonight?

Are you afraid of what eternity will mean? it is a terrifying thought. I know myself I was scared of what eternity would bring to me.

[ 40 : 05 ] When I was given a tract many years ago in the streets of Stornway, the words on the tract rang in my ears. Where will you spend eternity?

It is a question we all have to consider and probably have considered maybe many times in our lives. But we can be safe with Christ.

I know the love of God in my life. And because I know that love of the gospel, the love of Jesus Christ, the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, because of that, I can read the words of Romans 8.

And they mean so much. The last verse is there, verse 38. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us if we are believing in him. Can you say that this night? Can you look on these words and say to yourself, Lord, thank you that you went in my place.

[ 41 : 44 ] Well, the hope of the gospel is that God has appointed a time. He has appointed a word and he has appointed a judge.

But when that day comes, we too can know salvation through him because that is the love of the gospel. As it says in verse 43, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

It is the name above every name. It is the name before which everyone will bow the knee and say that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Is he your Lord? Is he your hope? Is he your salvation? If not, then look to him, believe in him, and you will have everlasting life.

May God bless these thoughts to us. We bow our heads in a word of prayer. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you that you have gone where we could not.

[ 42 : 59 ] That you have done for us, Lord, something that was impossible for us. That you bore our sins on the cross at Calvary. we thank you, Lord, and you this night that there is still that good news of the gospel.

That you show us that great love that the gospel has spread from the days of Peter's meeting with Cornelius to our very day meeting here this night.

That you have appointed a time for us to hear the gospel. And may it be a time of repentance for us.

May we turn to you and be saved. May we come to trust in you for now and for eternity.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.