

# Acts 10:44-11:18

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[0:00] Let us pray as we stand. Father, thank you for the riches of your mercy this morning. That you are mighty and sovereign over our lives and yet deeply acquainted with us, knowing every need and every trouble we bring.

! So we bring them to you now and we ask by your word you would speak to the depths of our hearts and the corners of our minds. And you bring truth and life and grace and peace. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.

You may have a seat. If some of you are still trickling in after running a marathon, well done. You look really good. I passed by a church, a Catholic church on Canby Street on my way in this morning that had a billboard.

It quoted Isaiah 40 and said, they shall run and not grow weary. And I thought to myself, somebody is so proud of themselves today. Somebody is so proud of themselves.

Just amazing. Amazing. I don't like running, so I'm here preaching. And we're going to jump into Acts chapter 10 and 11. If you want to open your Bible there again.

[1:12] If I were to give this sermon a title this morning, it would be, When God's expansive plan meets our entrenched prejudice. It's a story about the conversion of Cornelius.

But even more, it's a story about the ongoing conversion of Peter. And fascinating that Luke records this story twice for us. So you get in chapter 10, Luke gives us the big picture view of what God's doing.

We can call that the Google Earth perspective. And then in chapter 11, we get the on the ground lived experience. What it was like for Peter to go through this work of God.

We can call this the street view perspective. Do you all know what I'm talking about, Google Earth and street view? Is that going to work for us this morning? Okay, let's roll with it. If you have a better idea, please tell me after the service for the 6 a.m. sermon.

Google Earth. Google Earth. Chapter 10. This moment in Acts is massive. It's one of those pivot moments in the history of God's saving work in the world.

[2:21] And Luke wants us to get a Google Earth, a big picture view of what God is doing in moving the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

So in chapter 8, he told us about the conversion of an Ethiopian. In chapter 9, he told us about the conversion of Saul. Saul who became Paul and became the missionary to the Gentiles.

And then here in chapter 10, he tells us about the conversion of a Roman soldier named Cornelius. In other words, Luke is trying to say big picture, chapters 9, 10, and 11.

In chapter 10, God is moving the gospel to the ends of the earth. That's the Google Earth view. And every step of the way, Luke is trying to remind us that it's not because of the church's cleverness, but it's God's power and impetus that is moving things forward at every moment.

When the word is spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit, things happen. And in Acts chapter 10, God providentially orchestrates a missionary encounter between two people.

[3:25] A missionary encounter between Cornelius on the one hand and Peter on the other hand. Between a Gentile seeker on the one hand and between a Jewish believer on the other hand. Between a representative of the world on the one hand and a representative of the church on the one hand.

And this missionary encounter transforms both of them. This is how it works. So first, God prepares Cornelius. And we see this in chapter 10 in the first eight verses.

We're told that Cornelius is a God-fearer. He's seeking God. He's praying to God. He's caring for the poor. He's trying to live the best life he can live. And yet he doesn't know Jesus.

There's still something missing in his life. And so an angel of the Lord comes to him in a vision. Tells him that God has heard his prayers. Tells him to send some servants and a soldier to Joppa to get Simon Peter.

Because Simon Peter has the message that he does not have. What he needs to hear from the Lord is something Simon needs to tell him. And so God in the first eight verses is preparing Cornelius to receive the gospel of Jesus.

[ 4 : 30 ] And then in verses 9 through 23, God is preparing Peter to share the gospel of Jesus. So the greatest challenge, interestingly, in chapter 10 of Acts is not Cornelius' resistance to the gospel.

The greatest challenge in chapter 10 of Acts is Peter's prejudice towards Cornelius. Three times Peter needs to have a vision shown to him from God. And six times he needs to hear God speak directly from heaven, meaning his heart was slow to change.

And God needed to do something in Peter's heart in order to make Peter ready as a Jewish leader of a predominantly Jewish church at that time. To make him ready to lead the church in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

And so as God is preparing Cornelius to receive the gospel, he's doing a work in Peter, preparing Peter to be ready to share the gospel with Cornelius. And then these two come to a head.

Preparation becomes the moment. It comes to the moment of preaching and outpouring. And this is in verses 23 to 48. There is like a mini Gentile Pentecost.

[ 5 : 41 ] Just like the one in Jerusalem in chapter 2. As Peter is preaching about Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes upon Cornelius and his family and his servants and the people in his house.

People start speaking in tongues and praising God and everybody around them are stunned and amazed. And Peter tells us in verse 47, Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

Do you see what he said there? He said, God, what God has done for us, God is now doing for them. How can we withhold baptism? And then in verse 48, he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and he remained there for some days.

So the main point of chapter 10, this Google Earth perspective, is simply this. The gospel is for all people. I know it sounds obvious, but it wasn't then. I know it sounds obvious now, but it's not everywhere in the world.

The gospel is for all people. And here we see that God is making sure that the gospel gets to all people. And he's not letting anything get in the way, even the chief leader of the church at the time, Peter.

[ 6 : 57 ] So God's purpose is expansive. He wants all people to know Jesus because all people need Jesus. Whoever they are and wherever they are and in whatever state they find themselves, God wants them to know about Jesus.

And here we discover that God doesn't play favorites. No one is off limits to God. No one is so unclean that the grace of God is not for them.

See, this is a message that our world has needed century after century after century. I mean, think. This is the message that the Tutsi of Rwanda needed to hear. This is the message that the untouchables of India needed to hear.

This is the message that the young trafficked children of Cambodia continue to need to hear on a daily basis. And this is the message that many refugees and immigrants on our own doorsteps need to hear on a continual basis.

God wants all people to know Jesus. And no one is so unclean that the grace of God is not for them. That's the big picture. That's the Google Earth perspective. That's what God is doing in Acts chapter 10.

[ 8 : 06 ] And as we come to Acts chapter 11, it's as if we go from Google Earth and now we go to street perspective. Street view. Any of you have done that before? You look at a house that you can't afford.

And you're like, what's this neighborhood look like? What would it be like to be there? The word has spread in Acts chapter 11, we're told. That the Gentiles have received the word of God.

And so Peter goes up to Jerusalem to talk it over with the Christians there because he assumes they're going to have trouble swallowing this pill. And the Jewish church, he discovers when he arrives, is not happy with Peter.

And so he is asked to give an account for what happened. They're basically saying, Peter, explain yourself. To give you a sense of what I imagine the feeling in the room was like, as Peter was there in Jerusalem with the leaders, it's like when I served in Southern California at a church in Southern California, I really quickly discovered that there was great animosity between Orange County and Los Angeles.

Two counties right next to each other, and there's something called the Orange Curtain. People in Los Angeles almost never wanted to drive into Orange County because they thought those are the, you know, those are kind of the, those are the white snooty people.

[ 9 : 18 ] Let's put it that way. And then the people in Orange County never wanted to drive into Los Angeles because they're like, maybe I'll die. Who knows what's going to happen up there? It's crazy. It's the wild, wild west. And so it's like me saying to the church that I served in Orange County, there's been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the center of downtown Los Angeles.

Or maybe a little closer to home, it's like saying to a church in Shaughnessy that there's been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the downtown east side. Or maybe a touch closer to home, it's like saying to a church that happens to meet in Oak Ridge Adventist Church that there's been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Davie Village downtown.

People would have been on edge, just like you are right now. What's the issue? Why is the church in Jerusalem so upset with Peter is the question.

And interestingly, it's not because they doubt the genuineness of Cornelius' conversion or faith. And also, interestingly, it's not because Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles.

They don't take issue with that. What they take issue with is the fact that Peter ate with the Gentiles. Verse 1 of chapter 11.

[ 10 : 32 ] Now, the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party, in other words, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, criticized him saying, verse 3, You went to uncircumcised men, to Gentiles, and ate with them.

You see, in the ancient world, who you ate with was a big deal. It was a sign of solidarity and belonging. Food was a form of fellowship and friendship. That's why Jesus, do you remember, was constantly criticized for eating with the wrong crowd.

He was constantly eating with tax collectors and sinners. And people thought, that is way too close of an association, Jesus. You're sullyng your good name. Those are not the sort of people you should be hanging out with.

So food was a significant symbol of solidarity and belonging and fellowship and friendship. And this is part of the reason why Paul was so upset with Peter years after this event.

Because after this event, you thought Peter would have learned his lesson, but he didn't. Years later, we're told in Galatians 2, that Paul opposes Peter to his face. Confronts him. Why does he confront Peter?

[ 11 : 44 ] Because Peter has stopped eating with Gentile Christians again. And he's only eating with Jewish Christians. And Paul saw that as a complete denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why? Because the gospel of Jesus, we're discovering, is for all people equally. It's irrespective of a culture and custom and the color of your skin or your class.

And if you are not willing to eat with somebody who believes in the name of Jesus and has been baptized into the name of Jesus, then Paul says your conduct is out of step with the truth of the gospel.

Because you're saying that something about you or that other person, something about your culture or your custom or your color or your class, is more fundamental and important to you than the grace of Jesus Christ that you have both received.

So according to the Bible, who you eat with says a lot about what you believe. And so the Jewish Christians are essentially saying to Peter, you know, Peter, we're cool with you preaching the gospel.

[ 12 : 45 ] That's fine. You know, Peter, we're cool with God doing a mini Gentile Pentecost thing again. That's fine. But why in the world are you hanging out with him and eating with him? These are not the sort of people that we associate with.

In other words, I think the major issue here is what we would call ethnic prejudice or racial pride. Are you with me?

I wonder if some of you are not convinced by that. Let me press this a little further. I can imagine some of us thinking, well, isn't Peter just obeying the Old Testament laws that God himself gave? Because in Leviticus chapter 11, it gives a whole list of food laws about like, eat these things, don't eat these things. Eat these things, don't eat these things. And a lot of the things that you're not supposed to eat are precisely the things that the Gentiles eat.

And so doesn't it seem that Peter is just obeying God's word here and he's doing what's told him in the Old Testament law in Leviticus chapter 11? So what's the big deal with that? Well, yes and no. [13:52] Interestingly, if you go back to Leviticus 11, it talks about two things, not one thing. It talks about food and it talks about carcasses. In other words, don't eat these animals and don't go anywhere near their dead bodies.

Now, why is that important? Where was Peter when he received the vision from God about unclean foods? Where was he? He was in the house of Simon.

And what was Simon's occupation? He was a tanner. He was a tanner. Now, what is a tanner? A tanner is a craftsman who processes animal hides into leather.

So a tanner is somebody who is constantly in touch with dead animal carcasses. And Jews thought this was one of the most unclean occupations that you could possibly have in the ancient world.

So unclean, in fact, that any instrument or person that touched these dead carcasses, if you touched that thing, you would become unclean just by association with the thing that touched the carcass. So unclean was it.

[14:58] And yet, Peter is happy to live in a Jewish tanner's unclean house. But he is not happy to eat with a Gentile in their unclean house.

In other words, there's a deep irony here. Peter's obedience to God's law is selective, and it is selective for racial reasons. Peter's prejudice is on full display. And as their leader, he sets the tone for all the other Jewish Christians.

So this is a big problem. It's the big problem at the heart of Acts chapter 10 and 11. How is the mission of the gospel going to go forward? How is the church going to be united in that mission? If this prejudice remains in the heart of its chief leader? So the primary question of Acts chapter 10 and 11 isn't just how is God going to get the gospel to Cornelius.

It's how is God going to deal with what's in Peter's heart so that he's ready to share it with Cornelius and share a meal with him afterwards. So the question that Peter seeks to answer in verse 4 and following is, how did God change my heart?

[16:15] How did God get rid of my prejudice against the Gentiles? How did God soften this part of my hard heart? And remember the sermon title, when God's expansive plan meets our entrenched prejudice.

Pick up with me in verse 4. But Peter began and explained to them in order. I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision.

Something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of air.

All different categories that you get in Leviticus chapter 11. And I heard a voice saying to me, rise Peter, kill and eat. But I said, by no means, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.

But the voice answered a second time from heaven and said, what God has made clean. This is the main point of the vision. What God has made clean, do not call common.

[17:21] This happened three times, and it was all drawn up again to heaven. And behold, at that very moment, three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea.

These are the men coming from Cornelius. And the Spirit told me to go down with them, making no hesitation, making no distinction. And so Peter goes down with them.

In other words, notice how the men from Cornelius arrive at the same time that he heard the voice about the meaning of the vision. So God making all these animals clean is meant to be applied to people in this instance.

In Jesus Christ, God is making all people clean. And so he says, Peter, go with him. So how does God change Peter's heart?

He gives him a vision of God's revelation. It's accompanied by a spoken word and then strengthened by the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit. And now Peter's eyes are opened and he

can see the sin of discrimination for what it is.

[18:24] He says in verse 17, who was I that I could stand in the way of God? See, God does not make distinctions in his church.

And he's saying neither should we. All who repent and believe belong. All who are baptized into the name of Jesus belong.

All who receive the Holy Spirit belong. And it's one of the unfortunate truths of the church is that we have struggled to live this out over the years.

The sin of discrimination keeps reappearing and rearing its ugly head in different forms. And there are almost too many examples to count. We could talk about Peter's lapse in Galatians 2.

We could talk about a dynamic history of racism in North America. We could talk about different forms of nationalism around the world. It's my country first, right or wrong, good or evil.

[19:22] We could talk about tribalism in Africa or casteism in India or classism in Britain. Or social and cultural snobbery pretty much everywhere. A fascinating example of this can be found in the movie *The Jesus Revolution*.

Have any of you heard of that movie before or watched it? *Jesus Revolution*? Oh, we've only got like three people, that's sad. This is the first time I've ever introduced a group to a movie.

So, *Jesus Revolution*, you just watch it. It's a film that focuses on a revival that happened in Southern California in the late 1960s. You have a bunch of hippies who committed themselves to sex, drugs, alcohol, and rock and roll, whatever the trifecta is.

And by the end of the 60s, a number of them were finding quite hollow and didn't actually deliver on the meaning in life that they were hoping for. And a number of them started becoming Christians.

And so you have thousands of people being baptized in single weekends in the ocean in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And these hippies started coming to church. And these churches had no clue what to do with them.

[20:31] You know, like ripped jeans and acoustic guitars. Oh, me, oh, my. And people didn't know what to do with it. They represented everything that the churchgoers didn't want in their church.

And it pressed the question to some of the pastors, how will the pastor respond to this? One pastor, Chuck Smith, in particular, wrestled through this. And the movie is about him having to learn to discern the difference between what is the true gospel and what is a mighty work of God, the gospel leading to a new people group, and what is merely our cultural expectation of what we should look like as Christians.

And you see, each of us has a deep-seated prejudice of some sort, some sort of cultural blind spot.

The problem is that we're not aware of it because it's a blind spot that needs to be worked on by God so that God can powerfully work through us to bless others with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A silly little example of this. I grew up in a Pentecostal church where the three greatest sins were smoking, dancing, and gambling. And some of you are like guilty, guilty, and guilty.

Fast forward to my first year of university, and I was the only Christian in my dormitory, and I wanted to build bridges. I wanted to look for connection points with them because I wanted to get to know them, develop friendships, share Jesus if I had opportunity.

[22:00] And I felt like all anyone did was party and play poker. And I had this instinctive sense that that's bad and that's unclean. So I remember talking to my mom about a month or two in.

I was like, I don't know how to get to know these people. They're so different from me. I can't go to parties and I can't play poker. Like how in the world am I going to connect and share my faith with them without feeling like I'm compromising something significant?

And I remember her saying to me, Jordan, did God say don't get drunk? And I said, yes. She's like, you're right. So don't do that. Jordan, did God say don't play poker?

Sounds like you need to lose \$5 a week for the gospel. So let me wrap things up here.

What's the big picture? In Acts chapter 9, 10, and 11, we have a singular and powerful testimony to the impartiality of God and the power of the gospel.

[23:01] In chapter 9, we see the gospel has the power to convert Saul who hated the church. In chapter 10, we see the gospel has the power to convert Cornelius who was seeking God but didn't yet know Jesus.

And in Acts chapter 11, we see the gospel has the power to convert Peter who loved Jesus but still did not love all those that Jesus had come to save.

And so we see in these three chapters that the gospel has the power to change the anti-church, the unchurched, and the church. And that God is moving the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

And God does not show favoritism or partiality. He wants the good news to get to all people and for all people to have great joy in the Lord Jesus. And thank the Lord that he doesn't let the prejudices of his people, past, present, or future, be any match for the power of his gospel.

He does everything in us that needs to be done for us to be saved. And he does everything in us that needs to be done for us to be ready to share the saving salvation and grace of God with others.

[ 24 : 09 ] This is his work by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.