

Gospel to the Gentiles & every other race!

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

At Acts 10, verse 1, continuing our study of this wonderful book.

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.

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?

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.

[1 : 05] He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. 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 on the housetop at about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens open and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by the four corners upon the earth.

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 of 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 to heaven.

[2 : 16] Now, while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision 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 to ask whether Simon, who is called Peter, was lodging there.

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.

And Peter went down to the men and said, I am the one you're looking for. What is the reason of your coming? Verse 22, And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man who was well-spoken of 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 in to be his guest. The next day he rose and went away from them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea.

Cornelius was expecting them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. And when Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up, I too am a man.

[3 : 36] And as they talked to him, he went in and found persons gathered. 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 shall not call you, call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection.

I asked then, Why you sent for me? Cornelius said, Four days ago, about this hour I was praying in my house at the ninth hour. And behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said,

Cornelius, your prayer has been heard.

Your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who's called Peter. He's lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner by the sea. So I sent for you at once, and you've been kind enough to come.

Now therefore, we're all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. Verse 34, So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.

[4 : 45] But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. And 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 in Galilee, after the baptism that John proclaimed, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he went about doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with them.

Verse 39, And we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

But God raised him on the third day and made him appear, not to all the people, but to us who have been chosen by God as witnesses, 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 judge the living and the dead. To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives the forgiveness of sins through his name.

[6 : 06] And while Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard.

It's the word of God. On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King led a march on Washington, D.C. After the march, he stood at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial and famously said, I have a dream. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners, will one day sit together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day, even in Mississippi, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. Most memorably, he said, I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Now, whether you sit on the right or the left, whether you see MLK as a hero or a flawed liberal, we can probably agree that as we walk into MLK Day of 2020, his dream is not yet realized.

[7 : 33] The disagreement and division and violence over race and racism continue to dominate our daily headlines. You don't have to think hard to remember Michael Brown and Ferguson, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Walter Scott.

The names have become symbolic of the questions they raise about the way black men are treated by law enforcement.

And I'm not taking a side. I'm just laying out the things. The Charlottesville rally, the surfacing of a violent or passionate alt-right white nationalism rarely seen in public eye.

The removal or attempted removal of Confederate monuments all across the South. Last year's NFL game day kneeling to protest racial injustice.

I could go on. These events and all their various interpretations, which I'm sure however many people in this room would have a different interpretation than some of those things, they reveal a deep-seated racism in our nation and in the Church of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 40] In response, everybody's offering their opinions. White people need to repent and listen. They need to admit their privilege, their silent agreement with the structures of America that make it harder for minorities.

Whites need to consider paying minorities back, some say. Others say black people and minorities need to realize racism is over. They need to get a job. They need to take responsibility.

They need to stop complaining about privilege. These two sides seem hopelessly deadlocked. And even in the Church, I fear that the solutions are not much different. This morning, we come to one of the, if not the, most foundational New Testament passages on race.

Back in Acts 5, you remember Gamaliel said, if this thing is of man, it will fail. But if this thing is of God, it will be unable to be stopped. And that's what we saw as we walked through the past couple chapters.

The persecution that was supposed to stop them dead in their tracks only leads to the scattering and the spread of the Gospel. The Samaritan that two weeks ago, and the Ethiopian outcast are welcomed in.

[9 : 51] And so the Gospel meets them and brings them in. The persecuting Pharisee, Paul himself, buckles before the light and becomes a persecuted Gospel preacher.

And now the Gospel meets the Gentiles. The Gospel meets a Roman general named Cornelius, far from a Jew. That's why you hear that about his Italian cohort.

It's meant to signal in your mind, this guy is not one of us. And Luke underlines how important this passage is. It's the longest story in Acts.

And you felt that as I was reading, didn't you? It's the longest story. And that's not even all of it. It's repeated word for word in Acts 10, 11, and 17.

Why? Why? Because the Gospel meets the Gentiles. And is not stopped. The Gospel will not stop until all people are one in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 00] That's where we're going. The Gospel will not stop until all people are one people in Jesus Christ. You know, I want to begin this morning with a little bit differently, with a brief theology of race in our Bible.

You know, the Bible splits all of humankind into two groups of people, Jews and Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles. It's everywhere. It's from the laws in the Old Testament to the way Jesus related to people.

And in order to fully understand this distinction and what it means now, we've got to do a little bit of backstory, and then we'll dive in and take a few principles from the passage, all right? The first is that all people in all nations share the same beginning.

We have this for you. Genesis 1. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

God created three times. The image of God repeated two times. The idea is that all people are like Adam and Eve. All are created with the same dignity and value to worship.

[12 : 02] That's what it means to be created in the image of God. And serve God. And all people flow from this one man and this one woman. That's right. I believe in a literal Adam that is the father of all humankind because that's what the Bible believes.

Acts 17. He made, God made, from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. All people, therefore, share a common beginning, the same beginning and the same race. Now, you know the story of our Bible. I mean, things were going well in Genesis 3. And things spun out really quick. Man's sinfulness keeps getting worse and worse. And then man scatters and separates into different nations.

If you remember in Genesis 9, man's sinfulness is so great that God brings judgment on the whole earth, all of humankind, except for a remnant with Noah and his family.

And they weren't beating down the door to get on that ark. All humankind is eliminated. God says, now Noah, we're going to start over. And I want you to worship and serve me. You've been created in my image to worship and serve me.

[13 : 17] And they don't. They rebel. Again, and then Genesis 10 and 11 tells us how the Lord scatters and separates humankind into different nations that speak different languages.

So there once was one language that united us all. And yet, God brought judgment and split it up. But God reveals a plan soon after that to bring blessing to all the world.

You remember this. God calls Abraham. Father Abraham had many sons, as many as the stars in the sky or the sand on the sea. Remember when he says to Abraham, Genesis 12, now the Lord God said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I'll make you a great nation. I'm doing a new thing. I'll make you a great nation. I'll bless you. Make your name great so that you'll be a blessing. And I'll bless those who bless you. And him who dishonors you, I will curse.

And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. And the rest of the Old Testament is the story of this family, of Abraham, of the people of Israel, of God's people.

[14 : 20] Because they were his, God set them apart. In the same way that you may have house rules around your house, like no jumping on the couch or I don't know what yours are, you know, take your shoes off at the door or something like that.

God laid out some house rules for his people. He says there's blessings for being in my house. There's responsibilities for being in my house. And because they were his, he gave them to him. He promised to bless them, to provide for them. He sent them prophets, priests, kings. He fights for them. He established them as a nation on his word. You know, we have the Bill of Rights. He gave them the top ten, the ten commandments, the moral code. And then he gives them responsibilities. He commands the people to act differently, you remember? He says don't act like the other people in the land of Canaan. Be different. He separates them from the other nation. He gives them laws to obey. He commands them to offer sacrifice.

[15 : 19] He says you can only eat certain food. He says you can only marry certain people. He says you can only hang out in certain places.

Treat them to bear certain places so that you're not unclean, so that you're not like them. Now, some of these laws are just crazy. I was looking at Leviticus 19 this morning.

He said your cattle should not breed with another kind of cattle. You shouldn't sow two types of seed in your field. You shouldn't even wear clothing with two different types of material.

now that would probably take all of us out I don't know really what that means but the point is throughout the law is there's a separateness does that make sense?

there's this separateness now you may be thinking how's that bringing blessing to the nation? well the idea is that the people of Israel were to be a window into what it looks like to serve God now I don't know much about construction but I know there's a big difference between a wall and a window walls are obviously concrete or drywall and windows are glass and the value of a window I wish Ben Finch were hearing amen the value of a window is almost endless I once lived in a basement apartment an underground apartment with 11 college guys in one window you think getting up is hard when you have no windows man I couldn't make it anywhere on time the value of a window is almost endless it obviously helps you see out you know you see the yard and see flowers and things like that but it also helps you see in and that's what's going on the whole world was to see that Israel was God's people they were for God they could look in but the ultimate blessing for all the peoples of the earth would come much later and would be much greater in Jesus God reconciles all the people to himself and knits them in the church the blessing of Abraham comes to all people through Jesus Christ

[17 : 32] I know this is a little bit of heavy sledding but let's look at Galatians 3 he says Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it's written cursed is everyone who has hanged on a tree that's from the law so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith the idea is that Jesus is a son Jesus is a son of Abraham now we say that pretty well back in December but that's saying something even more important it's saying that Jesus is the son the true son of Abraham the pure promised seed and son of Abraham is not Isaac, Jacob, David it's Jesus so that whoever comes in him is grafted into the family of Abraham and we're all Gentiles so we gotta be all grafted in and called God's people let's go back to that if we could Sarah

Galatians 3 so he's redeemed us from the curse of the law but come and curse for us look at that so that therefore in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so he was born and was our substitute so that this blessing might come to us here's the point until Christ the only sons of Abraham were those born of a certain race and a certain nation of Israel but now the sons of Abraham is everyone born of the spirit and washed in the blood until Christ the only sons of Abraham were those who were born into the right family now it's those who were born of the right spirit this is a radical change and a little side note it is why I don't baptize babies this is a radical change it's why Jesus said when he was walking into Jerusalem he said don't tell me you're a son of Abraham I'll raise sons of Abraham from those stones true Israel is not those born of the blood of Israel true Israel is those born of the spirit the church becomes an incredible place a new race a new people born of the spirit and bound by the blood of Jesus Christ look at the way

Piper says it the bloodline of Jesus Christ is deeper than the bloodlines of race the death and resurrection of the son of God for sinners is the only sufficient power to bring the bloodlines of race into the single bloodline of the cross the theology of race lands us there and the gospel won't stop until it gathers everyone now our passage is totally fascinating I guess I could say that every week because it gives us the first look at what happens when the gospel hits the Gentiles it's incredible first is all people are made clean in the image of God all people are made clean in the image of God

this is not moonshine this is trying to help my voice today voice is dying a little bit all people are made clean in the image of God so the verses begin right they begin this new section the new section is all about

Peter Peter is up on the roof at noon he gets hungry he may get hangry he gets like some of our toddlers do he falls into a trance and he sees a vision this is not what you feel sometimes when you get super hungry the big sheet comes down you remember and all the different types of animals reptiles and birds are on it and these are verses we love rise Peter kill and eat is what the voice says and Peter says no way I'm a Jew I know what's clean and unclean I'm not going to do that I don't eat things forbidden by the law the voice says what God has made clean don't call common and then it happens three more times in the exact same way this vision means at least two things the first is the church can eat bacon yeah the clear takeaway is that foods previously called unclean or common can now be received with thanksgiving and gifts of God bacon is legal the second thing though the church can befriend

Gentiles not only were the food laws removed by this vision the purity laws that separate Jew from Gentile declared null and void these purity laws that separate the world into clean and unclean are now thrown out these purity laws that called the lepers crippled sick and Gentiles unclean are now thrown out now it's interesting that Peter was probably walking through this season of his life he realized the gospel was probably going to go to the Gentiles there's too many prophecies about it but he didn't know how he wasn't taking the gospel there because he didn't know how and the vision unfolds how and he begins to realize it look down in verse 23 so he sees his vision then he says so he invited them in to be his guests they were uncircumcised Gentiles they could not come into his house but he invites them in the next day and the rest of that verse he rose and went away with them again the interaction wouldn't have been that you wouldn't have traveled with them and spent time in that way look at look at verse 28 he gets even more clear he says to them when he first gets into the house there he says you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation but God has shown me that I shall not call any person common or unclean not only are all foods clean all people are clean all people are made in the image of

[24 : 08] God what Peter realized there's no distinction before God between the different people and races of the earth there's no purer race race there's no American that is three fifths American it's tragic and despicable to conclude otherwise it directly contradicts scripture it's racism because it's opposed to God's word racism is any time one race is elevated above another whether explicitly in our words and actions or implicitly underneath our words and actions in prejudice bias and partiality all of us have been guilty of it in one way or another and this passage is telling us to stand up refuse to call unclean what God calls clean or common what God calls beautiful in the 1968

Olympics two black track stars captured the attention of the world in history by raising a black glove I'm sure you've seen that picture right somebody nods and say they have you've seen that picture yeah thank you buddy bailed me out you know the white man in the picture seems out of place right now everybody is joining in in actuality his stand for human rights was no less significant his name is Peter Norman he was an athlete from Australia he overheard what Tommy Smith and John Carlos planned to do on the podium and he wanted in he was from Australia a country divided geographically in segregation a country plagued by racism not much different than ours nevertheless he wanted in at great personal risk to himself all three are wearing a badge you see that badge all three are wearing a badge for human rights the story goes that when they are about to go out they realize they had one pair of gloves and

Norman said you take them and we forget about his stand but will you take a stand you may never be on the national stage I may never be on the national stage but will you refuse to join in laughter at racial jokes and slurs will you refuse to stereotype profile and prejudice anyone because of the color of their skin the size of their wallet or the expression of their sexuality will you fight for the poor marginalized forgotten and unborn I realize that a lot of ways I'm preaching to the choir but because racism is such an internal thing the choir must be preached to we must not call unclean what God calls clean or common what God calls beautiful point two all people and races receive the blessing of the Gentiles all people and races receive this blessing after

Peter realizes that they are clean he goes to them in Caesarea remember we read that he to meet Cornelius Cornelius I just love this guy he said he is a God fear which meant he knew he was not a Jew but he feared God anyway and everyone in this house he said we're all gathered to hear from

you just what the Lord commanded you there's been no more captive audience or attentive audience than that but he preaches the gospel the gospel I just read was the first recorded sermon to Gentiles in the book of Acts and the point we're supposed to see immediately is there's nothing new in it nothing there's nothing new in this gospel that Peter preaches to the Gentiles it's the same gospel and it's for all people that's what Luke is trying to tell you it's the same gospel and it's for all people look at the way he opens that sermon look down there with me in verse 34 again he says truly I understand that

God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears the Lord and does what is right is acceptable to God God shows no partiality anyone who comes to the Lord can be saved what that means is that on the one hand it says no one is more acceptable to God because of who they are God has created a world of endless diversity and differences I was a corn fed white boy who married a Vietnamese American woman who just opened me up to a culinary world that I will never go back from you know and the world has just endless diversity and other worlds too not just culinary but there were but there's these different races there's different social and financial statuses there's different talents gifts body types opportunities and all those differences that mean so much to the world mean nothing to the Lord we know that

[29 : 44] God made all people clean but let me tell you God does not have a favorite hue he doesn't have a favorite color he doesn't have a special love for the well to do or well rounded or well grounded he doesn't have a special regard for those whose talents sparkle there's no exceptions there's no exceptional group it also means though that not only is no one more acceptable to God because of who they are no one is more acceptable to God because of what they've done that's the point of Peter's sermon to Cornelius is Cornelius comes a Christian and he doesn't have to become a Jew he doesn't have to be circumcised he doesn't have to obey the law he doesn't have to prepare himself to receive grace no no one is more acceptable to God because of what they've done salvation is by grace and grace alone and up against the Gentiles is where grace shines it sparkles it means all our prayers and

Bible reading and obedience and giving and serving and successes do not matter at all to the Lord nothing you did this week made God love you more nothing you did this week could make him love you less his love is all grace if it wasn't you're out you're out do you believe it this is not the world we live in is it I mean what we live in is you do well in school you get good grades you get good grades you get a good job you get a good job you get a good promotion and you get you keep working at it and keep doing good things you get 2.4 kids and a wife or a spouse and we assume God must work the way if he's a good God then he rewards good people and the bad people he throws out but God doesn't play those stupid games because if he was throwing out the bad people he'd throw everyone out it's either all grace and only grace or it's nothing the good news for the gospel of the gospel is it's for all people and all races can receive it that's the point it's for everyone it's for anyone it's for you

Jesus Christ suffered in your place on the cross but God raised him up the scriptures say that he is now seated at the right hand of God the father on high and one day he will judge all the world will be united again what are you going to say to him are you going to say I went to Sunday school I was baptized my parents read to me that stuff is wonderful but it doesn't matter you must say it's because you died for me that's the truth of the gospel if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead for your sins you can be saved right now the free offer that came to the Gentiles comes to us point three all people are bound in one spirit in

Jesus all are bound in one spirit and in Jesus after Peter preaches the spirit falls we saw that down in verse 34 if you'll look there with me actually 44 while Peter was still saying these things the holy spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles the spirit falls I mean this is a second Pentecost this is revival because the spirit is falling on the Gentiles and after the spirit falls which we didn't have a chance to read I'm sure you guys are bummed out because of how long I already read but Peter goes to the apostles and brothers in Jerusalem he tells them what happened look down there in 11 verse 15 he tells them the same thing that he experienced he says as I began to speak the

Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning Acts 2 and I remembered the word of the Lord how he said John baptized with water but you will be baptized with Holy Spirit if then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to stand in

God's way that's such a vivid verse they're waiting to see if the Spirit fell verse 18 they said they all fell silent and then they glorified God this is a crucial moment there's another one of these crucial moments is they're deciding whether these Gentiles should be received into the church of Jesus Christ if they didn't it'd just be another schism and we already know too much about church splits so thankfully they did not do that they stayed low they listened they received what the

[35 : 28] Lord was doing and they received these Gentiles brothers I believe in many ways we have a similar incredible opportunity for us we live in a day of globalism that's one of those big ism words but the cultures and people from across the world now work and shop and live in our community even our community in Athens it's not the way it was when I was a kid I was born in 1980 I remember I was at a store one just talking to somebody and I met a girl who was an Iraqi Latino from Colorado I was like that is a head scratcher her name is Roya I said Roya that's a head scratcher I don't understand how all those worlds got together but that's the effect of globalism and Iraqi you know from the

Middle East Latino Latin American in Colorado just blew me a lot but the idea is America is drastically changing for our eyes it is the melting pot we've heard that referred to since 1965 new immigrants and their descendants have accounted for 55% of the population growth the Hispanic born and Asian born population has risen significantly the meaning of American is not white Anglo Saxon in addition interracial marriage is increasing race while formally somewhat fixed is becoming more and more fluid and mixed America is a literal melting pot I think the Lord is behind it I think it's a beautiful thing to see not just because my kids are mixed I think we have in the church of Jesus Christ a tremendous opportunity to rise up welcome and show the world how the gospel won't stop until it finds a place for everyone what we need as a nation and as a church is not to keep pointing fingers and calling for our simple solutions what we need is to see the gospel as the only real solution and the church is the only place where all people must be welcomed and made one that's where all of history is going there will not be a white section of heaven or a black section of heaven or a Latin American section of heaven or Vietnamese section of heaven there will be one heaven for every tribe tongue people and nation Lord Luther King had a dream and the Lord does too and the church now not meant to be a place where it just reflects what the culture is doing but a window into a world that's coming soon let's do it let's stay humble let's preach the good news to everyone and let's welcome those unlike us amen let me pray for us you've been listening to a message given by

Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us to!

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