

Title: Our People
Text: Acts 10.1-48
Theme: The opening of the gospel door to the Gentiles
Series: Acts
Prop Stmnt: Full fellowship with God means fellowship with one another

Read Text:

When David was king, his one son Absalom killed another one of his son's in retaliation. Then Absalom ran for his life. Eventually, he came back to Jerusalem, but he was not permitted to see David. Was he in the family? Yes. Was he the son of the king? Yes. Was he treated like it? No. That is an awful place to be. Some of you have family situations that are like that. You are related, but you really don't feel like you belong to one another. You don't expect in depth conversations from people you ride the elevator with. If you get on the elevator at the 4th floor and get off at the 1st and no one says anything, you are probably not offended. But, if you go to your family reunion and you are not included, now you are hurt.

God's plan is to have one people, one nation from every tribe, language and nation. The church is intended by God to be a preview of this. The church is a people who have been brought together in Christ. That is way different than being brought together at a stadium because we are united by a team, or brought together to an arena because we are united by a band, or brought together in a city because we are united by a fireworks event. The glue of those events is generally not very sticky. But, when you are brought together in Christ, you have been born again. You have been born from above. You have received a new life and this new life is not only in Christ, but you share this new life with other people who also have this new life. Now, the other people that you share this new life with in Christ are people who in some ways are like you and in many ways very unlike you. God is forming one people out of many peoples, and this is remarkable. The early church was primarily made up of Jews in the early years, but over time that changed and there came a time when the number of Gentiles outnumbered the Jews. That means that in the early days the leadership of the churches was primarily Jewish, but over time that changed. The testimony of the unity of the early church in spite of such cultural diversity is evidence of the power of the gospel. Some of you have come to faith in Christ out of some very dire circumstances. Many of you lost count of how many nights you almost drank yourself to death. God has mercifully rescued you. The fact that you get up on Sunday and go to church and have a job and have people in your life who love you and the fact that you have people in your life that you love and the fact that you are not hungover or stoned is God's grace. You are a testimony to the power of the gospel. But, the power of the gospel not only rescues us from life dominating and soul addicting sins, the gospel makes us, people who are natural born enemies with one another – one people. Seeing the change that God makes in the life of a person is glorious. And, seeing the change that God makes in the lives of people who want to be forged together into one people is miraculous. It is miraculous because it calls every person to think more about others than self. Only Jesus can do that. But he does. And in the early days of the church, God made it very clear that Jesus died for the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore, (big THEREFORE), his church, and his local churches are not going to all look alike. All of that is right here in chapter 10. Different People living as one people is not easy and it is not automatic.

But, this is our mission. And while the church has not always done well with this, we can learn and we can reflect Christ better.

I. **“Good” people need Jesus.** (1-8)

Cornelius is about as Jewish as you can get while still being a Gentile. This man takes God seriously and personally and God is fully aware of him. This is a great example of a person who has never heard the good news about Jesus, but who, if he heard about Jesus, would follow him. What does God do? God brings the gospel to him. God gets him to the gospel. Because while Cornelius is about as “good” of a man that you will ever meet, good people need Jesus because good people are not good enough.

We could take some time a go into detail of the 4-fold description of this man’s character and habits (devout, feared God with all of his household – wife and kids?, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God) and our conclusion would be, if anyone was good enough to get into heaven on the basis of their good works, this would be the man. But his good was not good enough. His good was good in comparison to others, but compared to God’s good, the good of Cornelius was not sufficient.

Cornelius had a great reputation, and rightly so (22). But, he needed Jesus. He needed to know what Christ had done because only Christ could do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When you think of standing before God and giving an account of your life, what comes to mind?

There are many people who do charitable things and feel good about it. (Arianna – philanthropist) We all want to be the givers so that we don’t have to be receivers because if we are the receivers, then we are needy and we don’t want to be needy. Cornelius was a giver. He leveraged his position of influence and authority in order to do good for others, but, Cornelius did not trust in his goodness. When the angel appeared to him, Cornelius did not protest nor try to prove why he was good enough. His response was humble. Frankly, he was terrified. If a man in bright shining clothes appears to you, that is unnerving. When he calls you by your name, you may have to go change your clothes. There is nothing happenstance or coincidental about this.

Look, we are here because we believe in God. We believe therefore in the supernatural. We believe not only in God, but we believe in angels and in legions of them. But, most of us have not had many conversations with an angel. Angels are often described in the Bible as very intimidating and, like here, terrifying creatures. Often, the response to the appearance of an angel is fear. But, the word for angel (angellos) is also translated as messenger, because in most cases, angels are sent by God to bring a message and the message is amazing. “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” Wow! God has heard the prayer of this man. God pays attention to the prayers of people. And this Gentile, who is not only outside of the nation of Israel, but is part of an occupying force in the land has been granted a vision from God. Think of it, men like Daniel, and Paul have received visions and now a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. Obviously, God is serious about Gentiles hearing the gospel. But, God does not tell Cornelius the gospel. He tells him to send to Joppa for a man named Peter who is staying with a man named Simon who is a tanner who has a house by the sea. The personal nature of the vision

combined with these specific instructions make it very obvious that God has something very intentional in mind.

Cornelius does not hesitate. He dispatches two of servants along with a devout soldier with clear instructions to get Peter and bring him back. There is a lot more to this account, but just this much is so encouraging. God does not hide. God has made himself known. We do not know what brought Cornelius to this point where he was hungry for God, but God did not make it difficult on Cornelius. We are rightly concerned about those who have not heard the gospel. We wonder about the one who perhaps having never heard about God or about Jesus looks into the sky at night sees some of the immensity of this galaxy and rightfully assumes that someone has made it all and wants to know who that Someone is. Isn't this encouraging? God does not say, "sorry dude, but the gospel just hasn't gotten to you yet – too bad!" No! God will get the gospel to that person or get that person to the gospel. And perhaps he will tap you on the shoulder and send you, like he did to Peter. Peter did not have to travel to another continent, he only had to go up the road a ways. But, he had to be willing to do something that he had not considered before. You see, while God can do anything he wants, he doesn't do everything because he has commanded us to be part of his plan.

II. **God can do anything, but he doesn't do everything.** (9-48)

A. **God lets us learn a few things on our own.**

God could have told Adam that he was all by himself and that he needed someone like him and yet different to complete him. But he didn't. Instead God assigned Adam the task of naming the animals. So, after observing all of the animals as male and female and classifying them according to their types and naming them, Adam would have been aware of something very obvious. All of these animals have a partner, and he doesn't. God had said that it was not good for man to be alone, but he allowed Adam to be made aware of that.

Cornelius is another example of how God doesn't tell us everything but let's a learn a thing or two on our own. God gave Cornelius a vision. Cornelius was clearly aware that God was aware of him. God also gave Cornelius an order. A Roman Centurion could appreciate a clear directive from an authority and he responded as one who was under authority. But there is more to this. God could have told Cornelius the gospel, but he didn't. There is more to this than Cornelius just going to heaven when he died. Hearing the good news that Jesus has come, and that he has died on the cross in order to pay for our sins is glorious and necessary in order for us to respond in faith to this message for our sins to be forgiven. And yes, when we do that, we are placed into the family of God and are assured of a place with God forever, but, God's plan is bigger than that. As I laid out last week, God is in the process of calling to himself a people from all over the world. God describes them as a people from every tribe, language and nation and Jesus prayed for everyone of them and he prayed that these people would enjoy a unity and harmony together that reflected the unity, harmony and joy that God enjoys as Father, Son and Spirit. So, here, the means by which Cornelius is going to hear the gospel is going to help advance that very cause and take a big step forward in bringing that plan into reality.

What is true for Cornelius is also true for Peter. God could have told Peter in a vision that the Gentile Christians were to be viewed and treated as full members of the church, but he didn't. Jesus had already hinted at this by some of the things that he did and said in his ministry, but even then, Jesus was careful not to put more on the disciples than they could handle at the moment. But now, it is time. The Ethiopian eunuch had come to faith in Christ. Peter had seen the gospel reaching the Samaritans and since Peter was seen as the tip of the spear at this point, he needed to witness something else with his own eyes, and God wanted some witnesses who would see it too.

There are some interesting aspects of Peter's vision. Peter goes up on the roof of the house to pray and gets hungry. Doesn't that happen to you? You go to pray and all of a sudden you realize, man, I'm hungry. So, someone is downstairs preparing a meal for Peter and Peter starts dreaming about food. Well of course he starts dreaming about food! The man is hungry and someone is cooking food and he is smelling the food which is only making him hungrier. It's like the old joke of the man who dreamt that ate a giant marshmallow and woke up and his pillow was gone. Peter is supposed to be praying but instead he is in a trance and having a vision about food. This probably doesn't feel very spiritual to Peter, but it actually is. Like Cornelius who prays and God directs him, Peter is praying and God directs him. But, here it is different. Cornelius had a vision of an angel. Peter has a vision of the world's largest Bar-b-que. What looks like a giant sheet is, in my opinion a tablecloth and look at what God is serving for dinner; animals, reptiles and birds. This, my friends is meat! There is no asparagus, brussel sprouts, cabbage, broccoli, lima beans or kale on this God-given, God-ordained heavenly menu.

Three times this happens. Obviously, there is very big lesson that Peter needs to learn and the voice that accompanies the vision, which also repeats the command makes it very clear that what Peter used to think was unclean is now clean. The diet restriction in the OT for Israel are no longer in force. They were temporary. They were in place to point to something greater and the great has come. Since Peter responds to the voice by calling him Lord, it is clear that Jesus is the one commanding Peter to get up, kill and eat. Peter wakes up and is wondering what all of this means, when the men who were sent by Cornelius show up at the gate. It all fits together doesn't it. Peter was hungry and someone starts making food thinking they were making food for Peter but they are making food for company that is showing up unexpected to them, but not unexpected to God. The Spirit tells Peter that there are three men who were looking for him and that he has to go with them. But, God doesn't tell Peter what they want. He just tells him that he has to go with them.

Peter goes downstairs, greets the men and asks them what they want. He knows that what they want is something that God wants him to be part of. They come into the house, which would mean the two servants (possibly Jews) and the soldier (Gentile). This would have been a big deal. But Peter has to do this. God literally told him to. The eat together, spent the night and Peter has the evening to think about this and the next morning heads for Caesarea.

Peter's arrival is anticipated by Cornelius. He has gathered his relatives and close friends. They are anxiously awaiting to hear what this man Peter has to say to them because God has made it very clear that Peter has something to tell them that they need to hear. When Peter enters the house, Cornelius, a Roman Centurion falls at Peter's feet and worships him. Think of this! A

Gentile official worshipping a Jew! Of course Peter doesn't let him do this, because Peter knows that he is a man, and not God. But, notice Peter's response. "Stand up; I too am a man." Bam! Peter understands his mission doesn't he? Cornelius is a Gentile, Peter is a Jew. Cornelius is a Roman citizen, Peter is a citizen of the Jewish state. Cornelius is an important official. Peter is a former fisherman. But, Peter realizes what they have in common and this is a foundational truth for the gospel. Cornelius, just like Peter, is a man and both men are in need of Jesus. Peter has learned this. He says so in v.28. He and all people stand on level ground. Remember, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. It doesn't matter who gets there first, but it does matter that you get there.

God doesn't tell us everything that we can learn on our own and neither does he do everything that he commands us to do. God wants Peter to be involved in his plan. Why? God wants Peter to enjoy a taste of the joy that God enjoys as being God!! There is a whole new world that is about to open up to Peter! The man is about to eat pulled pork! Seriously, he is about to experience fellowship with

B. God doesn't do everything that we are commanded to do.

Cornelius had to send for Peter. Peter had to go to Cornelius. Peter had to preach the gospel (34-43, 42) and Cornelius had to believe. Peter tells them why he has come and Cornelius retells his experience to Peter. But this visit is not a social call. There is gospel business here that God has ordained and Peter now preaches the gospel. But, the way that Peter begins his sermon tells us that Peter is beginning to realize the goal of the gospel. The facts of the gospel are here. Jesus came to earth. He came in fulfillment of the promises that God had made to Israel through the prophets. Jesus did many incredible things, but he died on the cross as one cursed (hanging on a tree) but was raised to life on the third day and appeared to many (like myself). We who saw him and believed are now witnesses to tell you what happened. This is all in fulfillment of what the prophets spoke about when they told about the Messiah and Savior who would be coming.

Peter has done what God told him to do. He went and preached. And now, God does what Peter can't. God saves!

C. God does what we cannot do, nor explain.

While Peter is preaching, people start believing. They are believing what Peter is preaching and because Peter is preaching the gospel, they are believing the gospel and God is saving them. God is making these people brothers and sisters to Peter right in front of him. It is such a privilege to witness someone coming to faith in Christ. Peter was doing what God commanded him to do. He was telling them about Christ and God was doing what Peter could not do. God was bringing faith to these Gentiles and causing them to be born again.

Up until this point, Peter and others basically viewed the church as being a subset of the Jewish people and religion. The church was primarily made up of people who believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Perhaps in some still vague and undefined way he was, to the disciples at least, the Messiah for the world, but Christianity had not really spread beyond the borders of Israel. What happens here is a major game-changer. If Christianity was going to spread beyond

the borders of Israel, it had to separate itself from those who wanted to keep it strictly Jewish. This meant that some things were going to change such as, what you could eat, who you associated with, when and where you worshiped, who you could marry, where you would be buried, what your wedding and funeral looked like, what holidays you celebrated, what you did with your life, and who you identified with. This is huge. But, this is what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus and his people are now your people. And Jesus and his people become our people like no one else.

As you can imagine, when word of this gets back to certain people in Jerusalem, it appears as if the church may be torn apart by this. We will dig into this next week, but know this, Satan hates our unity in the gospel because unity in the gospel cannot be explained in human terms. Only God can do this.

What makes church amazing?

It is when people, by God's grace, give away their right and love one another deeply.

- Who can you encourage?
- Who can you listen to?
- Who can you pray for?
- Who is missing that you need to call?