

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 10:24-48

Topic

Peter answers the invitation to come to Cornelius' house and learns that the Gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit are for “whoever will believe”

Title

Guess Who's Coming To Sinners?

Acts 10:24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Acts 10:25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*.

Acts 10:26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

Acts 10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 10:29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

Acts 10:30 So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

Acts 10:31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.

Acts 10:32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'

Acts 10:33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

Acts 10:35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Acts 10:36 The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all -

Acts 10:37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

Acts 10:40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,

Acts 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead.

Acts 10:43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

Acts 10:45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Acts 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,

Acts 10:47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?"

Acts 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Introduction

When I was growing up the only thing 'equal opportunity' in my family was our prejudice. *We ridiculed and despised everyone!* We had put-downs for ethnicity; age; disability; social status; religion; intellect; ignorance; sexual orientation; politics; and physical appearance. **I think that just about covers it!**

I can relate to Peter's dilemma in the first century. The Jews had deeply ingrained prejudices. They had no dealings by choice with Gentiles. They certainly would not show or share hospitality to

Gentiles. One tradition taught that the only reason God created Gentiles was to fuel the fires of Hell.

It's pretty obvious that the prejudice went the other way as well. Throughout history, and continuing today, the Jews have been despised and persecuted by the Gentile nations of the world.

Yet here was Peter on the threshold of a Gentile's house about to break Jewish law and break-down centuries-old barriers by taking a step inside.

I think you can summarize the change in Peter's heart in one word that he used twice in these verses. It's the word **whoever**. Peter came to understand that God would save **whoever believes in Him** (v43). Ethnic, national, religious, and social barriers were divinely removed. Peter could look at Cornelius and say, **I myself am also a man** (v26). Just a man; just like Cornelius; just like all other men. There was only one race – the human race – and God is not willing that any should perish but all come to know He has redeemed them and they can therefore be saved.

Maybe you are free from prejudice; maybe you aren't. Either way you and I will benefit by looking at **all** unsaved men, women, and children as **whoever will believe**.

- being changed to bring change -

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Every Person You Encounter Is "Whoever Will Believe," and #2 Whoever Has Believed Is A Person God Can Empower.

#1 Every Person You Encounter
Is "Whoever Will Believe"
(v23-43)

The word Peter used can be translated **whoever** or *whosoever* or *every one*. It's a big word that scares some people. They don't understand how God can remain sovereign if every human being has a real opportunity to receive or reject Jesus Christ. They want to reduce the "whoever's" to a smaller group within the human race.

I understand some of the theological issues raised by the word **whoever**. But at the end of the day **whoever** means “whoever from among the whole human race.”

We left Peter in Joppa at the home of Simon the tanner. Cornelius had sent a delegation to fetch Peter to Caesarea at the bidding of an angel who had appeared to him.

Acts 10:24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Cornelius was counting on Peter’s obedience. That’s a heavy thought! Are nonbelievers, in a sense, counting on my obedience? On yours? Am I in a place spiritually and personally where I can hear from God and be sent to someone? Stay ready. Live as though you are on-call all the time.

Acts 10:25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*.

Don’t you find it awkward when people fall down at your feet and worship you? *I know I do!*

Acts 10:26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.”

Peter was only a man... **Just like Cornelius!** It was a big statement for a Jew to make – to put a Gentile on equal footing while simultaneously reducing the importance of being a Jew.

Look, too, at the symbolism: Peter lifted Cornelius up to his level. They were equal – two men, two humans, no longer a Jew and a Gentile.

Acts 10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

Cornelius was an important and influential man. Plus he was a genuinely nice guy! The place was packed-out with family and friends.

Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 10:29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

In our previous study we saw the import of the words **common** and **unclean**. Jews were God's chosen nation; all other Gentile nations were thus **common**. God had removed that designation. No one was common any more. No one was barred from salvation. Gentiles need not first become Jews to be saved.

Cornelius rehearsed the visit of the angel:

Acts 10:30 So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

Acts 10:31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.

Acts 10:32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'

Acts 10:33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

Cornelius is a biblical example of a nonbeliever living according to the revelation of God he has received. God saw his heart seeking after truth and made sure that additional revelation was provided for him. Cornelius continued to act upon the further revelation until he was presented with the Gospel and saved.

As evangelicals we believe that God will respond to the seeking heart and provide a fuller revelation of Himself to those who have not yet heard the Gospel. *That's our story and we're stickin' to it!*

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

Acts 10:35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

These words are mind-blowing. Centuries of Jewish law and tradition are cancelled-out. God is not partial to either Jews or Gentiles. He

isn't interested in nationalities. By extension, and further revelation, we learn He is not interested in ethnicity, or gender, or any of the categories that prejudice a person. He sees all as humans – sons and daughters of Adam - needing to be saved.

When it says **whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him** it doesn't mean you can be saved by sincerity or good works. Cornelius was such a person but we'll read later in chapter eleven that he was not saved until after Peter arrived and preached the Gospel. It just means what we've already said: God will respond to the seeker and send additional revelation.

Peter got right to it:

Acts 10:36 The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all -

Acts 10:37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

Acts 10:40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,

Acts 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead.

To teach this sermon fully we'd have to break from the Book of Acts and read through the four Gospels. What we do here on Sunday mornings is go as deep as the Holy Spirit deems fit for our growth and knowledge.

(Those who want to dig deeper can and should be supplementing the Sunday sermon with reading commentaries by good, solid, evangelical authors).

This may be only a summary of Peter's words; but even if he said more, he, too, summarized an awful lot!

Peter gave the essence of the Gospel: Jesus Christ came, was crucified, rose from the dead the third day, and is Lord over all forevermore. **His sermon can be spoken aloud in less than one minute.**

Not always but sometimes we give too much information! When I got saved a friend of mine spent nearly an hour trying to convince me of certain truths. At the end he simply asked me, *Do you want to get saved?*, to which I responded, *Of course!*

Acts 10:43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Peter didn't know it but this was his conclusion and altar call! Cornelius and those gathered understood that they qualified as **whoever**; they believed in Jesus; they immediately **received remission of their sins** and were saved for eternity.

Before we see the joy of their salvation let's focus one more time on this word **whoever**. If I am a Christian I should no longer see a person as a Jew or as a Gentile. I should no longer see them through their ethnic heritage. I should no longer see them through their religious beliefs. Or their politics. Or any of the other categories that prejudice me against them.

For sure, those things can come into play. I would share Christ differently if the person were a Muslim or a Mormon; or if I knew something about where they were coming from. But I should no longer see them in that way.

Everyone I encounter is **whoever will believe**. They need to know the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. They need to understand He has redeemed the entire human race by His death at Calvary and will save any and all who believe on Him. I'm not interested in them changing their religion; or their political affiliation; or their sexual orientation. All those things will happen *after* they are saved!

#2 Whoever Has Believed
Is A Person God Can Empower
(v44-48)

This would be a good time to remember the theme of the Book of Acts. Jesus told His disciples **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit** (Acts 1:5) and **you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell upon them as promised.

The same thing now happens to Gentiles!

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

Acts 10:45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Acts 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,

Those of the circumcision refers to Jewish believers Peter had brought with him. Peter knew he was heading into uncharted spiritual waters by visiting Cornelius. He wisely took guys along with him. It's always a good idea to share ministry.

This is a repeat of what happened to the Jewish believers on the Day of Pentecost. Thus the **speaking in tongues** referred to here is them speaking in other foreign languages that were unknown to them. It is *not* the gift of tongues later described by the apostle Paul as speaking in an unknown language.

It's an important distinction because some Pentecostal Christians believe, teach, and stress that you must speak in tongues to prove you are spirit-filled. But the Bible indicates that the gift of speaking in tongues is not given to everyone.

The speaking in tongues at Pentecost and at Cornelius' house was a miracle – not a gift. It was to show not only that God had saved them, but that He had broken down all ethnic and national barriers to salvation. **Whoever, whosoever, every one can be saved.**

Acts 10:47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?"

Since the disciples were charged to make disciples and then baptize, Peter was simply stating that these folks – even though Gentiles – were most definitely saved. Nothing a Jew might object to could change the fact they had received both the indwelling and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

They went right into their first Church retreat! Peter was their guest speaker.

You can never get too far into the Book of Acts without a reminder we need the empowering of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This experience with the Holy Spirit is for believers. It was received in a variety of ways in the Book of Acts:

1. Some received it subsequent to their salvation and water baptism after a time of waiting for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them.
2. Some received it subsequent to their salvation and water baptism by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.
3. At least one person, Paul, received it subsequent to his salvation but before his water baptism by the laying on of hands of an average believer.
4. Some received it simultaneously with their salvation and before they were water baptized.
5. I would add to all the Bible says the testimony of many godly men in Church history who describe receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit much later in their ministries. Men like D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey; men we trust as excellent expositors of God's Word who nevertheless understood that you could be saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit but lack His empowering baptism.

We could say that there are four types of people here today:

1. There are nonbelievers. You may believe certain things but not yet be saved. You've never been born again. The Holy Spirit does not indwell you. **You need to be saved!**
2. There are believers who, either simultaneously or subsequently, have by faith received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. He fell upon you and you understand your dependence upon Him to empower your witness.
3. There are believers who have not yet received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. You are saved and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. But you lack power in your witness. Maybe you've never heard it was possible. Or maybe you've become convinced there is no such experience subsequent to salvation.
4. Then there are those who, although you've received this baptism with the Holy Spirit, need to be stirred-up to serve the Lord.

As we close, you can resolve these issues. You can be saved; you can receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit; you can get stirred-up to serve the Lord.



Calvary Hanford
- being changed to bring change -