

## ACTS 10:1-48

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### INTRODUCTION

- Most of us have at least one food that we absolutely refuse to eat. What is it for you?
  - For some of us it's mushrooms. For others it's olives. Maybe it's anchovies, liver, brussels sprouts.
  - Something we look at and say: Absolutely not. I'm not eating that.
- In our passage today, Peter says that very thing.
  - But it ends up being part of a story that will change the future of Christianity.
  - The ripple effects of which impact all of us here in this room today.

**[Transition]:** Before we look at it, let's **pray**.

### CONTEXT

- Every once in a while, something happens that completely changes the direction of a story—a moment where you realize: from here on, things will never be the same.
  - In the book of Acts, we saw one of these moments at Pentecost—The Spirit is poured out. Thousands come to faith. The church begins to grow.
  - And now, we arrive at another turning point—here in Acts 10.
- In the New Testament world, humanity was divided into two groups.
  - Jews—people from Israel.
  - And Gentiles—which basically meant non-Jews or everyone else.
- Up to this point, the Christian movement is near exclusively Jewish.
  - There have been a few converts outside Israel.
  - But the apostles are Jews, the vast majority of believers are Jews, and the church is still largely centered in Jerusalem.
- But now the gospel crosses a boundary that, for centuries, had separated people.
  - Jews and Gentiles did not enter each other's homes or share meals—generally, there was an attitude of mutual disdain.
  - But here in Acts 10, the gospel moves decisively beyond Israel.
    - It begins to flow to non-Jews, to the Gentiles—to everyone else.
    - And the early church has to wrestle with a question.
      - Can Gentiles belong to the people of God as Gentiles?
      - Or must they first become Jews—adopting the law, the customs, and the culture of Israel?
- In other words, they had to answer a question that would shape the future of Xnty:

***Is the gospel for one people—or for the world?***

## [Transition]

- Acts 10 answers that question.
- And in doing so, it teaches us two foundational truths about the Christian faith.
  - The language I'll use to summarize them isn't original to me—several commentators and preachers have described these truths in similar ways.
  - What matters is that we understand them—because they take us to the heart of the gospel itself.
- So, let's dive in with the first one.

## CONTENT

### 1. The Gospel is Radically INCLUSIVE

#### [State]

- Acts 10 begins by introducing us to a man named Cornelius.
  - A Roman centurion. A Gentile. An outsider to Israel.
  - But Luke also tells us—**V2**: He is devout. He fears God. He gives generously to the poor. And he prays continually.
  - God has already been at work in his life—orchestrating the entire scene as he always does—and now Cornelius receives a vision.
    - In **V3** an angel appears and tells him to send for a man named Peter.
    - Which he promptly does.
- Meanwhile, God is preparing Peter as well—like he does.
  - About 30 miles away, **V9**, Peter goes up on the rooftop to pray.
  - And while he's there, he also receives a vision.
    - A sheet comes down from heaven filled with animals.
    - And a voice commands him: **V13**: Rise, Peter; kill and eat.
    - Peter is horrified and refuses outright: **V14**: By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.
      - For centuries the Jewish law had drawn a sharp line between clean and unclean foods.
        - There was a whole list of things they wouldn't eat.
        - Which served to set them apart from their non-Jewish neighbors.
      - But now the voice responds, **V15**: What God has made clean, do not call common.
- Peter is puzzled by the vision, and as he's trying to figure it out—our two scenes collide as the men sent by Cornelius arrive.
  - In **V20**, the Spirit commands Peter to **rise and go** with them.
  - And when Peter finally enters Cornelius's house—everything he's been reflecting on finally clicks.

- He describes it in **V28**: 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.
  - The vision was never really about animals—it was about people.
- This is the moment when everything shifts.
  - For centuries, the people of God had been largely made up of one nation—Israel.
  - But now—as he’d always promised—God is opening the door to nations as well.
- And to prove it, something astonishing happens as Peter continues to speak:
  - **V44**: The Holy Spirit falls on all who hear the word.
  - **V45** emphasizes that the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.
  - So, **V47**, Peter declares: Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?
  - These Gentiles become baptized, spirit-filled followers of the Way.
- And it tells us something important about the gospel—back to our point:

***The gospel is radically inclusive.***

- It’s for everyone—Every nation. Every culture. Every background.
- No one is excluded—and that was always God’s plan.
  - From the very beginning God intended to bless the nations.
  - That’s why he told Abraham—all the way back in **Gen 12**—that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.
- Israel was never meant to be the final destination—instead they were the channel through which God’s blessing would reach the world.

**[Illustrate]**

- Imagine a long line of dominoes stretched across a table—when the first one falls, the whole chain begins to fall!
- In the same way, God laid out a beautiful pattern to save the entire world.
  - And Israel was the first domino.
  - Through her, blessing would cascade to the entire world.
- And now, in Acts 10, that plan is unfolding—the dominoes are falling.

***The gospel breaks out of Israel to the nations—and everyone’s included.***

**[Transition]**

- The gospel is radically inclusive—it’s for everyone.
- But our passage teaches us something else as well.
- Not only is it radically inclusive...

## 2. The Gospel is Radically EXCLUSIVE

### [State]

- Notice the message Peter preaches in Cornelius's house—**VV34-43** of our text.
  - He tells them the story of Jesus:
    - Jesus lived.
    - Jesus healed and did good.
    - Jesus was crucified—put to death on a tree.
    - But God raised him—he came alive again on the third day.
  - And then Peter comes to the heart of his message in **V43: Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**
- There you have it—inclusive exclusivity:
  - Inclusive because it's open to **everyone** who believes...
  - Exclusive because you must **believe** in him.
- In other words:
  - Christianity is not just one path up the mountain.
  - It is the only way to be saved.

### [Illustrate]

- In our day, people don't always like exclusive truth claims—but I invite us to consider that this one makes a lot of sense.
- A common illustration has us imagine a doctor discovers a cure for a deadly disease.
  - The doctor announces: "Anyone who takes this medicine will live."
    - That message is incredibly **inclusive**.
      - It doesn't matter who you are.
      - It doesn't matter where you're from.
      - It doesn't matter what language you speak.
      - Anyone can take the cure.
    - But at the same time, that message is also **exclusive**—you must take *this* medicine to live.
  - You'd never say to that doctor: Don't be so narrow minded.
    - That wouldn't make any sense.
    - If this is the only cure, you want her to tell you!
- That's exactly what Peter is doing in Cornelius's house.
  - The gospel is radically **inclusive**—Anyone can come.
  - But it is also radically **exclusive**—Jesus is the only cure.

### [Transition]: What do we do with this?

- If these things are true—and they are—they don't just shape what we believe, they also change the way we live.
- Let me share three implications.

## CONSEQUENCE

### 1. The first has to do with identity—How We View Ourselves

- In his commentary on this chapter, N. T. Wright highlights something that's striking to me.<sup>1</sup>
  - Up until this point, Gentiles who wanted to follow the God of Israel would have had to become Jews—adopting the law, the customs, and the culture of Israel.
  - But here in Acts 10 that changes.
    - Gentiles must repent and believe in Jesus.
    - But they do not have to become Jews.
  - Instead, they retain their previous cultural identity—but now it is subordinate.
  - The primary identity is no longer Jew or Gentile but this: ***We belong to Jesus—we are Christians.***
- And the same is true for us:
  - We may be American, Scottish, Korean, Nigerian, Brazilian, or something else.
  - Those identities matter—we can and should be thankful for them.
  - But they are no longer the deepest thing about us.
  - Our primary identity now is this: ***We belong to Jesus—we are Christians.***
- Our national identity and our spiritual identity are not the same.
  - It's important we don't conflate them.
  - And it's important that we prioritize them:
    - Our citizenship in heaven comes before our citizenship on earth.
    - Do not compromise your allegiance to that heavenly kingdom for your secondary allegiances in this kingdom:
      - When belonging to a **social circle** requires you to stay silent about Christ.
      - When **career advancement** causes you to neglect faith.
      - When your **political party** pursues policies the Bible contradicts. (And every political party pursues policies the Bible contradicts.)
    - Remember who you are—and whose you are:
      - You are deeply loved by Jesus.
      - And you belong to him first.
- Jesus is the lens through which we view relationships, work, politics—and all of life.
  - Don't let those other things become the lens through which you see your faith—much less Christ.
  - We belong to Jesus—we are Christians first.

## 2. The second has to do with equality—How We View Others

- Peter puts it plainly in **V28: God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.**
- The gospel destroys the categories we use to elevate ourselves over others.
  - Jew or Gentile. Black or White. Male or Female. Rich or Poor.
  - We're all on level ground:
    - All made in his image.
    - All sinners in need.
    - All offered grace.
  - This gives us:
    - Humility about ourselves.
    - And a joyful honoring of each other.
- In other words, the gospel creates the kind of equality our world longs for—but struggles to produce.
  - I find that intriguing...
  - Christianity provides a rational basis for the things our hearts instinctively long to be true.
- If you're not a Christian, can I encourage you to consider that?
  - If God doesn't exist...
    - If we're here by accident...
    - If we're ultimately nothing more than a collection of atoms...
    - And if our existence ends at death...
    - Then it becomes difficult to explain why every human life should have equal value, dignity, and worth—how do you defend that view?
  - But maybe the instincts in your heart are telling you something.
    - Maybe the conviction that everyone matters...
    - That racism and sexism and classism are wrong...
    - That we should care for the poor and the refugee...
    - Maybe these instincts are signposts pointing you to God.
  - And here he is in his word.
    - Declaring that every human being matters.
    - He's giving us the rationale—the basis—for the things we instinctively want to be true.
- Christianity is emotionally satisfying—but it is also intellectually compelling.

## 3. The last has to do with mission: How We View the World

- Back to **V43: Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**
  - If the gospel is **inclusive**—if anyone can be saved—we **can** take it to everyone.
  - And if it's **exclusive**—if we can only be saved by Jesus—we **must** take it to everyone.
- This inclusive/exclusive dynamic fuels, drives, energizes us to share the gospel.

- We're seeing this happen in Acts: From Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and now to the nations—to the ends of the earth.
- And we've seen it happen since.
- Tim Keller once pointed out that if you look at the major world religions, most of their followers live near the region where their religion began.<sup>2</sup>
  - For example, if we look at the world today:<sup>3</sup>
    - 99% of Hindus live in India and the surrounding region of South Asia.
    - 98% of Buddhists live in East and Southeast Asia.
    - The majority of Muslims live in Asia, and nearly all the rest live in the Middle East and Africa.
  - But Christianity is different.
    - Christianity is not concentrated in one region of the world.
    - Instead it has spread across cultures and continents.
    - Today:
      - 31% live in Sub-Saharan Africa.
      - 24% live in Latin America.
      - 22% live in Europe.
      - 12% live in Asia.
      - 10% live in North America.
  - In other words, Christianity is the most evenly distributed religious group—ours is the only global faith.
- And that shouldn't surprise us:
  - That was the plan all along.
  - And that's exactly what we start to see happening in Acts 10.
    - The gospel breaks out of its cultural boundaries and begins moving toward the whole world.
    - So let's keep going.
      - Sharing the gospel with our friends here.
      - Supporting our partners across the world.

**[Transition]:** All of which takes us back to where we started.

## CONCLUSION

- Not with mushrooms, liver, or brussels sprouts.
- Whatever your food preferences, here's the good news of Acts 10:
  - **The gospel has broken through to the nations—and that includes us!**
  - Most of us aren't Jewish.
  - Which means we're Gentiles:
    - We were on the outside.
    - But Jesus has welcomed us in.
- May his love change the way we view ourselves, others, and this world we live in.

## RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

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### Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*, 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> See Tim Keller, *The Gospel to the Ethiopian*, accessed [here](#) 3/5/26.

<sup>3</sup> See Conrad Hackett et al, *How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020*, accessed [here](#) 3/5/26.