

Acts 10:24-43 (NIV) ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.” ²⁷Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” ³⁰Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” ³⁴Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. ³⁹“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44-10-01-The Inclusive Nature of the Gospel

memo: rewritten for 2017/09/10

Christ, prejudice, inclusivism, evangelism

Acts 10:24-43

Jesus cares about *all* lost sheep and sends us to bring them home.

INTRODUCTION: (Text for Scripture reading)

–The **text** read from Acts 10 **clarifies the title**. It’s **not about God going to a new plan**. It’s about us **moving from a culture-based gospel to the global Gospel that God always intended: HOM.idea.**

I. God Wants Christ’s Light to Shine Worldwide.

- A. It was prophesied in the OT—Isa 42:6-7, “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (This describes Israel’s calling, but the Jewish people never fulfilled it; only Christ fulfilled it.)
- B. It was Christ’s self-concept in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
- C. But it’s also the identity Jesus wants us to own—Mat 5:14-16, :You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
- D. Why do I make this point about an inclusive Gospel so strongly?
 1. In our fallen human nature, we tend to be *exclusive*—to feel that all believers should be like us; that our own group has the place of prominence in God’s eyes. Such elitism is a sin of pride.
 2. Prior to Peter’s invitation to visit Gentiles, God had instructed him 3 times in a vision to kill and eat unclean meats, a religious taboo for Jews—“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied (in v.14-15). “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”
 3. Peter already broke a Jewish taboo by staying “in the home of Simon the tanner” [permanently “unclean” from touching dead animals], but God was going to stretch him even farther, because the Gospel wasn’t just for Jews. Yes, “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” were important, but **Jesus cares about all lost sheep**, and told us in

John 10:16, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”
When the Lord finds us, He sends us to bring the others home, too!

TRANS: We may need a wake-up call, like Peter’s vision. *I did*. [God kept stretching my vision of diversity in the church: GARBC > BJU > Jesus People > YWAM > NCB > CFO > studying Monasticism & Eastern Orthodoxy > finally, my biggest stretch an invitation to speak at a retreat put on by an evangelical church that meets in a nudist resort (After much prayer, God gave me 3 positive confirmations of guidance in one day. It was a stretch, but I obeyed and went there to preach.) I could connect with all these diverse groups because of God’s vision. We can gain His viewpoint, when His light removes our prejudicial blindness.

II. God Sees the Bigger Picture in People

- A. Whether in Peter’s day or our own, God sees beyond our narrow definitions of people in terms of race, nationality, status or beliefs.
- B. God saw the bigger picture in the centurion, Cornelius:
 1. As an uncircumcised Gentile and army officer, he was hated by the Jews in terms of race and because of the Roman occupation, but God saw his heart— v.2, He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.
 2. God notices a hunger for truth— v.33, “*So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.*”
- C. God also saw the bigger picture in the heart and life of Peter:
 1. God knew this new form of outreach would be in conflict with the religious customs of Peter’s religious upbringing.
 2. Even though God had to repeat His vision 3 times, He knew that Peter was teachable and would be willing to break a powerful social and religious taboo in order to reach people for Christ.

TRANS: [I read of a missionary couple having no success reaching a naked tribe. Then one day, their kids were outside skinnydipping in a small plastic pool, and some natives stopped by to talk. Later, after praying about what they should do to reach this naked community, they started going naked when visiting their nude neighbors. Soon, their neighbors trusted them, they were able to share the Gospel and establish a small church in the village. Afterwards, they learned that the tribe had shunned them as insane people for wearing clothes in 100 ° humid heat.] When that couple felt called to the mission field, this key to success probably never crossed their minds. When Peter followed Christ, he probably never planned to

enter a Gentile home. BUT God sees the big picture. All people matter to Him. He sees us as men & women; sons & daughters; children & parents. He sees our ethnic heritage, our nationalities, our vocations, our upbringings, our personalities, our sins. Nothing escapes God’s vision. But what is He looking for?

III. God Cares about and Is Looking for Lost Sheep

- A. We can play favorites—see people through a false lens of power, prestige, or prosperity, but Peter said in v.34, “*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism* (God looks at who we really are, especially at our dreams of being better than we are, which is a task His grace begins working on, when we come to Christ.
- B. So, God sent Peter to tell Cornelius and his household about Jesus; about His ministry, His love, His crucifixion by the Jews and His resurrection by God; about the “good news” that Jesus was still at work, but at work through people— v.42-43, “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
- C. What Peter shared with Cornelius about Christ’s loving care for the lost is still ours to share with others who are hungry for truth.
 1. We don’t know what’s in people’s hearts. God does, and by the Holy Spirit He can direct us to those ready to hear about Christ.
 2. But we, like Peter, must often leave our comfort zone, in order to be messengers of this Gospel of God’s love in Christ.

CONCLUSION:

—Moral guidelines are important. But God has no passion for legalistic rules and regulations. He’s passionate about people. He sees the big picture of people’s wounds, their suffering, their losses, their longings, but especially their hope of being connected to Him. He looks at people the way a shepherd looks for lost sheep, to bring them home to the fold. We are called to have His heart, to see with His eyes, and to treat others as He would, regardless of the state of their skin or their sin, regardless of their social station or cultural background. **Jesus cares about all lost sheep and sends us to bring them home.** They matter to God, and we can reach them, if we show that they also matter to us.