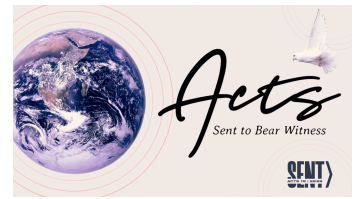


God Is For All – Acts 10:1-48

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



The sun is high in the sky and pressing down on him. Beads of sweat begin to collect on Peter’s brow and upper lip. This isn’t an ideal spot for a rest, but it is the best he has at the moment. Being on the roof in the middle of the day is hot, but it also means that no one is going to bother him. It has been a whirlwind of a trip. And while the events over the last week or so have been exciting and encouraging, to say the least, he needed a break and a rest. So, he gets away to the quietest place he could find and begins to pray. This pattern or rhythm of engaged ministry and then prayerful rest was not new to him or something of his own invention. It was the pattern he had watched and experienced with his mentor for many years. They would go from town to town, the crowds would press in, amazing ministry would happen, and then they would get away to quiet places for prayerful rest. And today, he needs it.

But, as he begins to pray, he can feel the growing hunger pangs increase. Yet, it wasn’t a time for a meal. He had already eaten that morning and knew that he would eat again later in the afternoon. Soon, the pangs of hunger were so intense that he sent for some food to be made. Before it could be delivered, though, he fell into a trance, a vision of a white sheet being lowered with all kinds of animals in it, and he heard the words, “kill and eat.” While his stomach was urging him to be obedient to that command, his heart was now torn and distressed because the only foods available were those that his people would never eat. They kept strict dietary laws, and he had never violated them. Now, even though he was desperately hungry, and there was this divine voice telling him to eat, he was determined not to give in and not to break the rules.

The voice spoke again, and this time it repeated its message three times. It said to Peter, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” Three times he heard that message, and with the previous instruction to “kill and eat” any of the un-clean or common animals in the white sheet, left Peter confused and perplexed at what God was trying to teach him. Soon though, he would learn and understand that the vision was not about food but people. He would learn about the depth of God’s love and grace. And, he would come to see that **God is for all people.**

1. God speaks to all people. (vv. 1, 9)

- a. Start here: Who is Cornelius?
 - i. The city was formerly known as Strato's Tower. It had an amphitheater, a hippodrome, and a temple dedicated to Caesar. Its role as the Roman provincial capital is why Cornelius is there.
 - ii. Cornelius is a centurion, a commander of one of the six units of one hundred men within a cohort (σπείρης, *speirēs*). A cohort would have had about six hundred members and would have been part of a legion of about six thousand men, which was the main division in the Roman army. He would have served under a tribune (BAGD 237; BDAG 298–99). Acts frequently notes such military figures (10:22; 21:32; 22:26; 24:23; 27:1, 6, 11, 43). Luke 7:1–10 has a key account of a centurion who is likewise portrayed positively. Centurions were to be men who were “good leaders, of steady and prudent mind” (Polybius, *Hist.* 6.24.8; Bruce 1990: 252).
 1. Cornelius's unit has a name, the Italian Cohort, and is probably an auxiliary force, not part of the regular army. An inscription found in Austria documents its presence in Palestine as late as AD 69 (*ILS* 9168; Polhill 1992: 251n69). The event here in Acts is probably still before AD 41 (Fitzmyer 1998: 449).¹
 - iii. Cornelius would likely be a freedman. **More than ten thousand former slaves took this name when Cornelius Sulla freed them in 82 BC** (Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.100), and so the name was quite common. As a Roman officer, he would have had social status. This is reinforced by the fact that only his Gentile first name is used by Luke, something he does with only two characters of Gentile origin (Julius in Acts 27:1 is the other; Le Cornu and Shulam 2003: 245–46).
 1. To the Jewish mind, Cornelius would be a real threat if he were to come to the newly emerging faith.
 2. Cornelius would have been a key tactical officer and probably an older man (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003: 247).²
 - iv. **Cornelius is introduced with a series of four positive descriptions** (other such descriptions: Acts 13:16, 26, 50, 16:14, 17:4, 17; 18:7):³
 1. Devout
 2. God-fearing
 3. Almsgiving (generous)
 4. Prays often:
 - a. Key: He has been exposed to God but is not a full Jewish proselyte. I.e., He has not fully embraced Judaism.
 - i. Reference back to the Ethiopian eunuch. (chap. 8)
- b. **Circle back: God's greatest desire is to be known.**
 - i. He makes himself known... I.e., He makes the first move. (Jn. 14:16)
 1. The Holy Spirit “cries out” (*parakletos*- helper) to make God known.
 - ii. The fact that God is speaking to an uncircumcised Roman soldier, who possibly started life as a slave, draws a highlighter over this idea.
- c. **Cornelius was a God-fearing Gentile who prayed.**

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 385.

² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 386–387.

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 385.

- i. Cornelius is engaged in his daily prayer time at three in the afternoon, also known as the ninth hour when he has a vision.
- ii. This is the same time as the afternoon offering at the temple in Jerusalem.
 - 1. **The coordination of prayer and spiritual events is common in Luke** (Luke 3:21–22; 6:12–16; 9:18–22, 28–31; 22:39–46; Acts 1:14; 13:1–3).
- iii. An angel calls out to him by name, an act that initially terrifies him, as is often the case when an angel appears (Luke 1:12). Cornelius finds himself gazing intently at what is before him, a description Luke often uses (Luke 4:20; 22:56; Acts 1:10; 3:4, 12; 6:15; 7:55; see Acts 1:10).
 - 1. The term ἔμφοβος (*emphobos*) refers to fear or terror: startled and caught by surprise. The term also appears in Luke 24:5, 37; Acts 24:25; and Rev. 11:13.⁴
- d. **I don't sense God speaking to me like Cornelius. / I can't hear God's voice.**
 - 1. Caution: Cornelius was afraid of the angelic messenger... I.e., This wasn't an everyday experience for him.
- e. **How we hear God today:**
 - i. **The Scriptures:** We believe that these are inspired by God and given for our flourishing.
 - ii. **Your conscience = The Holy Spirit:** Ever have that little voice in the back of your head that nags at you to do the right thing?
 - 1. That isn't the universe or your mother's voice. It is the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Believers: It is the Spirit helping you to glorify God.
 - b. Seekers: It is proof that there is a moral agent called God.
 - iii. **Learning from others:** Ask others how they have learned to hear God's voice.
 - iv. **Looking for the little things:** As we mentioned last week, if we only look for God in the big and miraculous, we will miss a mountain of little experiences and instances.

2. God determines the status of all people. (v. 15, 34-35)

- a. There is a significant tone to this vision about the equality of all people in God's eyes.
 - i. I.e., **This vision wasn't about food. It was about people.**
 - ii. To have fellowship with Gentiles and receive them as equals means that Gentile food and Jewish purity laws are not going to be issues for the church or a cause for separation between the ethnic groups that Jesus will reconcile.⁵
- b. **We were never in the position or given the authority to play favorites.**
 - i. This is pervasively practiced through sins of preference.
 - 1. There is no room for this in the church or in the life of a Christian.
 - ii. Paul calls out Peter for this very thing. → Gal. 2:11
 - 1. ¹¹**But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.**
 - iii. Paul reasserts the level playing field of the gospel. → Gal. 2:15-16
 - 1. ¹⁵**We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;** ¹⁶**yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ**

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 387.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 382.

and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

c. Jesus' presence with sinners provided them with personhood.

i. Mark 2: 13-17 – Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners at Levi's house.

1. His willingness to eat and fellowship with them affirmed two things in the first century.

- a. It provided them with personhood in a world that dehumanized them.
- b. It affirmed their non-law-conforming lifestyles.
 - i. However, if Jn. 1:14 is true... Jesus' presence does not affirm sin, yet his presence remains a gift of grace.
- c. These affirmations are what irritate the religious leaders that are on the outside watching.
 - i. Jesus (as a rabbi), who is supposed to hold the law above all else, seems to disregard the law.
 - ii. The religious leaders had a misplaced zeal for the law and a distorted view of the people around them.

d. A painting is incapable of defining itself. → Only the artist can do that.

i. No one asks a painting what it thinks of itself or how it defines itself.

1. Why? → Because the painting did not create itself, the artist did. So, we ask the artist.

ii. We have not brought ourselves into existence or have willed ourselves into meaning.

1. God who created us has.

a. And, when we see a painting, we assume a creator.

b. We who see creation and are created, should at a base level, assume a creator.

2. The assumption of a creator is a philosophically sound thought.

a. Kalām Cosmological argument – Anything that is created has a cause.⁶

b. Ontologically speaking – God is the greatest conceivable being, and if he exists in a possible world, it is more probable that he exists in the known world.⁷

iii. We tend to operate with a sense of unbridled autonomy both for ourselves and then over other people.

1. In that, we live as if we are capable of defining our own existence or personhood.

2. However, this vision and the story of the Bible as a whole tells us that only the creator gets to define the creation.

a. God says three times to Peter, "And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

3. God's kindness is for all people. (vv. 19-20, 33)

a. Rise and go... Peter is to be a tangible expression of God's kindness and faithful presence to Cornelius and his household.

⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, (2008), p. 111.

⁷ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, (2008), p. 184.

- i. v.33- **The note about Peter’s kindness (καλῶς, kalōs) recognizes that Peter has deviated from normal Jewish practice**, as the aorist participle παραγενόμενος (*paragenomenos*, coming) is simultaneous in temporal force to the idea of sending.
 - ii. They all gather to hear what the Lord has commanded Peter to say. They are gathered in the sight of the Lord (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, *enōpion tou theou*); they know God is responsible for their being together. God also is a witness to what is taking place.
 - iii. The commandment turns out to be the preaching of the gospel. Peter has a crowd whose hearts are prepared to hear what he will say.⁸
- b. Can the same be said about us? → Generous with Presence**
- i. Again, let’s draw back to Jesus’ interaction at Levi’s house...
 - 1. The sick (those needing a doctor) saw someone who **practiced joyful presence** with them.
 - 2. The “righteous” saw someone who enabled, or worse yet, entered into non-law-conforming lifestyles.
 - ii. **Am I willing to be generous with presence in a world that demands and forces us into seclusion?**
 - 1. Peter is being sent by God to bear Godly kindness to a person and household that he should have been excluded from it by cultural norms.
 - a. Peter’s cultural norms: Jews do not eat or fellowship with non-clean Jews or Gentiles.
 - b. **Our cultural norms:** How do we put up walls to others?
 - i. You think this so we can’t be friends.
 - ii. My lived experience trumps your lived experience.
 - iii. We would all say the world needs an extra dose of decency right now.
 - 1. Do I extend decency to those outside of my circle or tribe?
 - 2. Do I extend decency in my posts on social media?
 - 3. Am I willing to listen more than I talk?
 - 2. **How do I do this?**
 - a. Be humble in posture and genuinely be excited to be there and with them.
 - b. Ask lots of questions – Get to know them, their story, and their experiences.
 - i. Win them to yourself first and foremost.
 - c. Trust God’s Spirit to guide the interactions.
 - d. When there is an open door, share the gospel by talking about how Jesus has changed your life.
 - 3. **Am I willing to have religious people give me the side-eye for my willingness to be generous with presence?**
- c. **Gospel** – The gospel is the greatest expression of God’s generous kindness to those who don’t deserve it or are fit to receive it.
 - i. Jn 3:16-17 – ¹⁶“**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷ **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**”

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 395.
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- ii. Rom. 6:23 - ²³ **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**
- iii. 1 Pet. 2:9-10 - ⁹ **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

4. God’s rescue is for all people. (v. 44ff)

- a. As the story progresses, the scene comes to its appropriate conclusion. → The Gospel is declared.
 - i. **The Spirit of God has moved significantly to get us to this point.**
 - 1. A vision and divine interaction through prayer for Cornelius.
 - 2. A preaching and church-health tour that puts Peter in Cornelius’ region.
 - 3. A vision for Peter that makes clear God’s love for all people.
 - 4. The Spirit gives instructions to Peter directly following the vision.
 - ii. For this scene to end any other way than the gospel being preached would be a monumental “oops.”
- b. **Having established that his audience were meant to hear the gospel, Peter proceeded to proclaim it.**
 - i. The speech which follows is unique among the sermons in Acts in that it pays some attention to the earthly life of Jesus instead of taking up his story at the point of his rejection by the Jewish leaders and his crucifixion.
 - ii. The reason for this may be simply Luke’s love of literary variation; in other words, he has ‘saved up’ this motif for this speech, and its absence from earlier ones certainly does not mean that nothing was said about it on those occasions.
 - 1. It may also have seemed appropriate to include this point in a speech addressed to a non-Jew who might be presumed to know less about who Jesus was than Peter’s earlier audiences in Jerusalem.⁹
- c. **What are the implications of the conviction that God’s rescue is for all people?**
 - i. I.e., If I really believe this, what is my first course of action?
 - 1. Trauma medicine – Treat the most severe injury first.
 - a. Example: When guiding backpacking trips with a Christian Leadership organization, we had a student who fell while hiking; they suffered a deep laceration that really required stitches, a sprained ankle, and other various cuts and scratches.
 - b. We quickly assessed the situation and our surroundings. We needed to make sure everyone else was safe. We didn’t need other injuries.
 - c. Then, we began treating the injuries from the worst to the least severe.
 - i. The knee laceration was treated immediately.
 - ii. Then we checked other cuts.
 - iii. Finally, we dealt with the sprain.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 201–202.

- d. Can you imagine if we started with the sprain and let this student sit there bleeding from their knee?!?
2. How many of us treat the lives of those who are lost or seeking like this?
 - a. Do we treat the most pressing and serious need first?
 - b. Or, do we inadvertently work to clean up less severe things first?
- ii. **Essential Need:** If we truly believe in the power of the gospel, then we will see it as the first and most important need of every person.
 1. Yes, Jesus wants to do business with every area of our lives.
 2. However, if our lives are never turned over to him, it does not matter how much we first “clean them up.”
- iii. **Generosity:** If we truly believe in the power of the gospel, then we will align our time, talents, and treasures to support work that proclaims it.
- iv. **Sent:** If we truly believe in the power of the gospel, then we will seek to glorify God by proclaiming it.
 1. **Peter could have left it at a nice visit and dinner party...** “This was fun, it was great to meet you; if I’m ever in town again, I’ll stop by.”
 2. **He doesn’t. → He knows their greatest need, gave of his time to be there, and proclaims the gospel.**