

Acts Series Part 29

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] If you could turn with me to the passage that we read in Acts chapter 10 on page 1104. And if you're able to have your Bible open at that point, it will be helpful as we together turn to the passage and hear what God would say to us through it this evening.

Now, those of you who are part of the congregation and have been for these past months will know that we have been preaching through the book of Acts.

And what with Christmas and New Year period and one or two other reasons, we've not been giving it the same attention in these past few weeks.

But I want to pick up again where we left off in Acts chapter 10. Now, given that a few weeks have passed, perhaps just to very briefly refresh our memory concerning what we have already seen in this chapter.

Because in actual fact, the whole of chapter 10 and a good part of chapter 11 occupies itself with essentially the one same incident, the conversion of Cornelius and his household.

[1 : 18] And in this way, the gospel being embraced by the Gentiles and the Gentiles, the non-Jews being brought in to the church of Jesus Christ.

And we were introduced at the beginning of chapter 10 to this fellow Cornelius, this centurion who has a vision and who calls for Peter.

And we were challenged by Cornelius. How was one who, in a sense, was an outsider, a God-feeder, but not a proselyte, not one who had been incorporated into the Jewish community.

And yet, though he was, in a sense, an outsider, a challenge to us, given his devotion and his generosity to the poor, his praying regularly to God, and many spiritual virtues that we identified in this man, Cornelius, a challenge to those on the inside, but also an example to those on the outside.

Those who, like Cornelius, are out with the family of God, a challenge that they would seek God. And as God comes to their encounter, they would respond as Cornelius responded.

[2 : 40] The chapter continues, and we considered Peter's vision and how this vision was the means that God used to instruct Peter that this division that had existed between Jews and Gentiles was being removed.

How the abrogation of the dietary laws that the vision communicated, by implication or necessary consequence, removed the prohibitions that existed on fellowship between Jews and Gentiles.

And ultimately, and most importantly, removing any requirement, perhaps any imagined requirement, that Gentiles must become Jews in order to become Christians.

Now, perhaps for us, these things seem of only academic interest. It seems so detached from our reality. But of course, we know that for Peter and for the nascent church, these were fundamental and crucial issues that God was instructing them concerning.

And as we rejoin the chapter this evening and consider the rest of the chapter, the verses that we've read from verse 23, I want to do that in the following way, as we consider Peter's visit to the home of Cornelius.

[4 : 05] And as we consider this visit, we will find, or we will highlight in any case, four features of this visit. First of all, we're going to notice an expectant audience.

In this visit, we will find an audience, an expectant audience. Also, the passage will present to us a humble messenger, the one who brings a message for this expectant and waiting audience.

Also, we will notice in the passage a Christ-centered message. A messenger of necessity has to bring a message. And we'll consider the message that he brings, a Christ-centered message.

But then, finally, we'll notice also that this visit concludes with a divine visitor. And as I say, we'll just consider each of these aspects in turn.

As we do pick up on the story and remind ourselves of what has come before Cornelius, the Roman centurion, he has had his vision.

[5 : 12] And in the vision, he is told that he should send for this man named Peter. And so he sends messengers for Peter. And in parallel, Peter has his vision, the vision of all these animals that came down on this sheep from heaven.

And in this way, Peter is prepared for the arrival of these messengers who will ask him to go to the home of this Gentile, Cornelius. And sure enough, the messengers arrive.

They spend the night with Peter. We read there in verse 23, Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. And on the following day, this party makes its way from Joppa to Caesarea.

It's made up of Peter. It's made up of the three messengers. And in chapter 11, we're told that Peter was also accompanied by some of the believers from Joppa, six in total.

So this party of ten make their way from Joppa to Caesarea. And they arrive the following day. And that really is where we pick up the account. The next day, Peter started out with them.

[6 : 25] And some of the brothers from Joppa went along. The following day, he arrived in Caesarea. What do they find? What does Peter find as he arrives in Caesarea?

Well, he finds, first of all, an expectant audience. In verse 24, we read, And if we just consider some characteristics of this audience gathered in this home, waiting for Peter to arrive to bring the message that they were so anxious to hear.

What can we say about this audience? Well, one thing we can say about this audience is that it was an invited audience. We've read there that Cornelius had called together his relatives and close friends.

And there is there a simple but challenging application. Cornelius personally was very concerned to hear what God had to say to him through Peter.

Hence his concern to send for Peter, that Peter would come to his home. But he is not content to hear this message alone. No, he invites others. He invites those whom he values most.

[7 : 41] He invites those whom he loves most. His relatives and close friends, he wants them also to hear the message that Peter will bring. So this expectant audience is an invited audience.

And that's a challenge for us. Do we share with Cornelius this concern that our relatives and close friends would also hear concerning Jesus? That they also would have the opportunity to hear the good news?

The challenge on us is a greater challenge. Because in a sense, Cornelius was operating in the dark. Cornelius as yet didn't know the message that would be brought.

He was persuaded that it was a message from God. He was persuaded that it was an important message. But he didn't actually know the content of the message. And yet, he draws together his family.

He brings together his close friends that they, together with him, would hear the message that was to be brought. Let us be then like Cornelius.

[8 : 45] As we consider the neighborhood fellowships that have begun in this past week. And we've begun, understandably, and I think quite properly, by drawing together those of us who are part of the congregation.

That we might study the word together and pray together and indeed get to know each other better. But the challenge there is that we would also be concerned in the homes where we meet.

And indeed in our own homes. That we would draw together those who might, in our homes, hear the good news concerning Jesus. This audience was an invited audience.

It was a large audience. We're told there, in verse 27, that Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. Each and every one. Either part of the householder, Cornelius, or invited by Cornelius.

That they would be there to listen to the message. The audience also, we might say, was a prepared audience. And I say that on the basis of what we read in verse 33.

[9 : 50] When Cornelius is explaining to Peter the train of events that have preceded his coming to visit. We read there, So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come.

And then what does Cornelius say? Now we are all here. This large gathering that has been referred to, the relatives and close friends of Cornelius. We are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

This was a prepared audience. Cornelius is expressing not only his own sentiments. It wouldn't surprise us to imagine that this would be the conviction of Cornelius.

Given what we know of Cornelius, a devout man. Given that we know he was a praying man. Given what we know of the vision that he himself had experienced. It wouldn't surprise us that he would have that expectation.

That he would be prepared for what God was to say. But he says, we are all here ready to listen to what the Lord has commanded you to say.

[10 : 56] Now why were all the others also prepared? Well, was it not because of the work that Cornelius had already done for them? When he invited them to come, he didn't invite them in a vacuum.

In the measure that he was able, with the knowledge that he had, he enthused them. He said, come to my home. Because a man is going to come to speak a message from God.

And I want you to hear it. I want you to be there. It's important. So come and let's together listen. This audience was prepared. And of course we are also conscious.

And we'll notice this in a little moment. That that preparation was not only, no doubt, a result of Cornelius. But of the God himself, by his spirit, preparing this audience.

That they would be in this state of such expectation. At the prospect of hearing this message from God through the mouth of Peter.

[11 : 54] A prepared audience. But also that same verse, verse 33, presents to us a reverent audience. We are all here in the presence of God to listen.

We are all here in the presence of God. They weren't in a temple. They weren't in a synagogue. They weren't in a holy place. They weren't in a sacred space, as that may have been understood. They were in a home.

They were in the home of Cornelius. And yet, Cornelius is sure. And it would seem that those who were with him share this conviction. That they were in the very presence of God.

And this is no small thing that Cornelius is saying. Here we all are in the presence of God. God is here. God is here. God is here. And God is going to speak to us.

What great respect and reverence for the one who was with them. And the one who was in their presence. Invisible to the naked eye.

[12 : 51] And yet, present amongst them. And as we think of ourselves. We who have the privilege of having so much more knowledge concerning God and His Word.

Do we share this conviction of Cornelius and those who were with him? When we are here this evening. Do we share that conviction? As we come into this place.

Do we come with that conviction and with that assurance that we are in the presence of God? As we gather in our homes to pray and to study the Word.

Do we share that conviction that we are in the presence of God? Indeed, as we go about our daily business. And as we would serve God in so many ways. Do we do so in that conviction?

Here we are in the presence of God. This was a reverent audience. Indeed, the respect and the reverence of Cornelius finds inappropriate expression.

[13 : 54] Maybe, not maybe, but I'm sure we can understand him. And would be quite wrong to condemn him. And yet, this respect, as I say, finds inappropriate expression in verse 25.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said. I am only a man myself.

Now, I don't think that it would be in any way fair to suggest that Cornelius was involving himself in an act of idolatry. Not at all. It was inappropriate for him to get down on his knees before Peter.

But what it evidenced was this great respect for this messenger of God. For this one who would bring a message from God. Now, as I say, that respect finds inappropriate expression.

But it doesn't go beyond that. And we would be quite unfair if we were to condemn him for this. Even though Peter is quick to correct him and to assure him that this is not fitting.

[15 : 00] That he would bow down before him, a mere man. But we have this audience then. An invited audience. A prepared audience. A reverent audience. And evidently a willing audience.

Willing to hear. And by necessary implication, willing to respond. And to obey. This message that as yet they don't even know what it's going to be.

But they're persuaded that it comes. Or will come from God. An expectant audience. But also the passage presents to us a humble messenger.

The message is from God. That much is clear. But a messenger is required. And Peter is the appointed messenger. And he is a messenger of the best kind.

But he is a humble messenger. Pointing not to himself. But pointing to Jesus. We've already noticed that. In the way he is quick to correct Cornelius.

[15 : 59] When Cornelius comes and bows down before him. Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said. I am only a man myself. I'm no better than you. I'm a man. You're a man.

I'm a man. We're equals. You are not to bow down before me. By all means, bow down before my God. By all means, listen to the message I will bring concerning Jesus.

And bow down before him. Who is not only a man. But the very Son of God. But don't bow down before me. And so, Peter's humility is evident in not milking this situation of being treated with such deference.

But his humility and his appropriateness as a messenger finds expression also in what we read in verse 28. Where he explains a little bit of the background of Jews and Gentiles not being able to associate with one another.

But then Peter says, But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. Peter is saying, All my dearly held views.

[17 : 06] These dearly held views that I have been brought up with and that I have been fed upon. That I have held so firmly and so dearly to. All of them are subject to the voice of God.

And if God now shows me otherwise. If God has now shown me that what I thought to be so is no longer so. Then I can do no other than to humbly submit to his authority.

God has shown me that yes, I can meet with you. God has shown me that yes, I can come to your home. The home of a Gentile. God has shown me and so here I am.

And indeed his humble dependence on God is further illustrated by the question he then poses in verse 29.

When we read, So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. Even before we notice the question, those words in verse 29.

[18 : 11] I came without raising any objection. If we move swiftly to simply applying that to ourselves. And I ask the question of myself and indeed of all of us gathered here.

How much greater would the missionary task force and the pace with which the good news concerning Jesus could be spread abroad.

If all believers, you and me, were like Peter in this regard. I came without raising any objection. And when God would come to us and would say to us, go into all the world.

And when God would come to you and would say, speak to your colleagues. Speak to your friends. Speak to your neighbor. Share with them the good news. Are you able with Peter to express yourself in this way?

Is this your testimony? I came without raising any objection. I obeyed the exhortation I was given and spoke as I was commanded to speak.

[19 : 15] So here we have this humble, obedient messenger. Indeed, he obeys God's instructions even though he is unaware exactly what it will all involve.

He asked the question of Cornelius, may I ask why you sent me? I know I'm meant to be here. God has made that clear. But I don't actually know what I'm doing here, what I'm meant to tell you, what the purpose of my visit is.

That hasn't been told. Maybe you can enlighten me. May I ask you why you sent for me? So we have a humble messenger, an expectant audience, a humble messenger.

But then thirdly, we have also a Christ-centered message. And we find that message really from verse 34 through to verse 39.

In the intervening verses, as it were, from verse 30 through to verse 33, in response to the question that Peter poses, may I ask you why you sent for me, Cornelius explains the train of events.

[20 : 20] Now we are familiar with the train of events because of previous sermons on this chapter, and we won't dwell on them.

But Cornelius explains to Peter why it is he called for him. And as Cornelius explains the manner in which God has revealed himself to Cornelius, that he would call for Peter, it becomes increasingly clear to Peter that what is required.

You see, he's asked, why have you sent for me? What am I to say? What is the message you want to hear? As Cornelius speaks, it becomes so clear to Peter that what is required here in the home of this Gentile is nothing less than a presentation of the gospel, the full gospel concerning Jesus Christ.

This is the message he must bring. The same message that he's been preaching to the Jews, the same message he must preach to the Gentiles. Nothing less will do.

The vision received, the words of Cornelius, the evident work of the Spirit in preparing this dream audience, we might say. This dream audience hanging on every word that he has to say.

[21 : 37] All of these things admit of no other conclusion. What he must do is present the good news concerning Jesus Christ. The same message he has been preaching to the Jews, as we notice there in verse 36.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. This is the message I've been preaching to the Jews. Now this same message I bring to you.

That is why I am here. And what is the message that he brings? Well, the message revolves around one person.

The message revolves around one person whose activities evidently were in the public domain. As he introduces his message and addresses himself to Cornelius and all the Gentiles gathered there, he says, You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached.

And he goes on. He says, These things are familiar to you. News about Jesus was in the public domain. Cornelius and those who were gathered had heard about Jesus. They didn't understand who he was.

[22 : 47] They didn't understand his identity or the purpose of his coming, but they knew about him. No doubt the miracles he had performed and perhaps the death that he had died and perhaps the reports of his resurrection we don't know.

But certainly Peter says, This one of whom I speak, you've heard about him. And it is about him that I want to speak. This is the message I bring concerning Jesus.

And the message he presents concerning Jesus really is presented as a chronological account of the life and saving ministry of Jesus, highlighting and identifying three distinct phases, if you wish, of Jesus' life and ministry.

And indeed, the salvation that he offers as a consequence of his life and ministry. What are these three phases that Peter includes or incorporates in the message that he brings, this Christ-centered message?

Well, he speaks to his audience of Jesus' life and ministry. He speaks also of Jesus' death. And he speaks thirdly of Jesus' resurrection.

[23 : 55] Let's just notice each of these in turn. First of all, he shares with Cornelius and the assembled gathering concerning the life and ministry of Jesus. There in verse 38, as he continues introducing his words by declaring to them that this man Jesus is one of whom they have heard.

And then he continues, how 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.

And then it continues, we are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. So he begins by speaking of Jesus' life and ministry.

He speaks of his healing and of his power over the devil and his hosts. Jesus' life, Jesus' ministry is presented to this audience.

It seems reasonable to presume that what we have here recorded for us is a summary account. And no doubt, Peter was able to amplify and go into greater detail concerning the life and ministry of Jesus.

[25 : 08] But he begins, by identifying this one, anointed by God, and who went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him.

But then he goes on to speak of the death of Jesus. In verse 39, and in the second part, a very brief reference in this account, but there we have it, at the heart, as it were, of his message, they killed him by hanging him on a tree.

Nothing more is said, or at least nothing more is recorded for us. They killed him by hanging him on a tree. Now again, it does seem reasonable to presume that on the occasion when Peter was there in the home of Cornelius, he was able to expand on that.

But even if we limit ourselves to this one very short phrase, there is great truth in it that goes beyond simply a factual reference to the fact that Jesus died.

They killed him by hanging him on a tree. As I say, even in these brief words, there is implying a divine plan behind his death.

[26 : 20] Very particularly, the reference to the manner of his death, that he was killed by hanging on a tree. And that points to the way in which Jesus, in his death, was bearing the curse or judgment of God due for our sins.

This idea of one who was hanging on a tree as one who was cursed by God is developed for us, is presented to us in Deuteronomy, but then picked up on by Paul and developed in his letter to the Galatians.

And we can just very briefly note what Paul says in Galatians chapter 3 from verse 10. We read as follows, All who rely on observing the law are under curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

Clearly, no one is justified before God by the law because the righteous will live by faith. The law is not based on faith. On the contrary, the man who does these things will live by them.

And then we read, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

[27 : 37] And there, Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy. Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. And so even in these very brief words that we have in Acts chapter 10 describing the manner of his death, they killed him by hanging him on a tree that is within these words.

a very clear and explicit reference to the divine purpose behind his death. Not some tragic victim of the injustice of man, but killed as part of the preordained divine plan of redemption.

And so in this message that this messenger brings, this message about Jesus, Cornelius and the audience are told of who Jesus is, they are told of his life and ministry, but they are also necessarily and crucially told concerning his death and the reason for his death and the purpose of his death that he died for sinners such as they are and such as we are.

But then thirdly, the message speaks of the resurrection of Jesus. There in verse 40, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

And it continues in the following verse. This third element, this crucial element in a presentation of who Jesus is and what he has done, his life, his death, and his resurrection.

[29 : 06] This resurrection is presented as a divine act. God raised him from the dead. It's presented as a historic occurrence, as something that is datable on the third day.

It is presented also as a verifiable act. And we're told God caused him to be seen. God ensured that there were witnesses who could give credence to this claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And so, his resurrection is presented as part of this Christ-centered message. This message concerning the life, the death, and resurrection of Jesus constitutes the gospel.

And it constitutes that which the apostles were commanded to preach. As Peter goes on to say in verse 42, he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed and so on and so forth.

This message, Peter and the apostles were commanded to preach. And would it not have been so, and I ask you to consider this and see what conclusion you come to yourselves, would it not have been so that this fact that Peter highlights, that he was under the command of God to preach this message, would that not have added great significance to the words of Cornelius that we've noticed already in verse 33, where Cornelius says to Peter, now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

[30 : 49] Would it not have been so that as Peter heard these words, he'd have thought, how does he know? How does Cornelius know that indeed the Lord has commanded me to preach this message concerning Jesus?

How could he possibly know? And yet, he would have heard these words, and I'm sure it would have confirmed to him, if any doubt remained, that what he had to bring to Cornelius and to those gathered was the gospel concerning Jesus Christ.

He had been commanded to preach it, and here this Gentile says to him, tell us, speak to us, preach to us that which you have been commanded to tell us, and that is precisely what he does.

But this message is not simply to be heard. This message carries within it an imperative to respond and to trust in Jesus and his finished work, and that we find in verse 43 as Peter concludes his message.

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him, everyone who trusts in Jesus, receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

[31 : 58] not sufficient for Cornelius to listen and to give intellectual assent to what is being said, not sufficient for those who were gathered to say, well, this is a wonderful message.

It was necessary that they would respond to it and put their trust in Jesus. And so we have, so far, as we draw things to a close, we have this powerful, magisterial presentation of the gospel by Peter, one so well placed to give a full and convincing account.

And we combine this with an expectant audience hanging on every word, and we can only imagine that the outcome will be a great harvest of souls as all who are present repent and believe.

And of course, this is indeed the outcome. But for that to be the outcome, it required one more final crucial ingredient or actor to the expectant audience and to the humble messenger and to the Christ-centered message, we need to add the final piece of the jigsaw, and that is the divine visitor.

And we are told of him from verse 44 and following. While Peter was still speaking, these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

[33 : 19] Who was this divine visitor? Well, they had it so clearly stated for us. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, God Himself, came and visited that home.

What was the purpose of His visit? Well, His purpose was to enable the hearers to believe, to open their hearts that they might believe. We're told there, while Peter was still speaking, or as some versions put it, before Peter had finished speaking, the Holy Spirit comes and makes Himself present and enables Cornelius and those gathered to believe the message.

And had it not been for this work of the Spirit of God, this wonderful sermon that was preached, this humble messenger, this expectant audience would not have been sufficient for this glorious outcome.

It was necessary that the Holy Spirit make Himself present and felt and opened the hearts and the minds of Cornelius and his friends that they might believe.

That was why He came. There could be no believing, no saving response without the visit and work of the Spirit on all who heard the message.

[34 : 38] He came to open their hearts, to enable them to believe. He came also to grant to them the gift of tongues or languages. Not that this was an indispensable element in their believing, but it did verify in a visible and outward manner the inward work of the Spirit in their lives.

And so this occasion has quite reasonably been described as a Gentile Pentecost. When the work of the Spirit of God in the interior of this audience, of these hearers, finds visible and outward expression as they are granted this supernatural gift of speaking in tongues.

The Spirit came then to enable them to believe. He came to grant them this gift. But He came also to persuade the Jewish believers, Peter and those who were with them, of the genuineness of the conversion of the Gentiles and their full place in the church of Jesus Christ.

And this He admirably achieves. We read there in verse 45, the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

And so they were persuaded. They were persuaded by the work of the Spirit in the lives of Cornelius and his family and friends. And as Pentecost is described legitimately as a one-off event, so this Gentile Pentecost, if we want to call it that way, can be similarly described.

[36 : 18] And yet, the permanent need, the current and contemporary need of the divine visitor in any saving work of God remains.

And let us be very clear on this. Without the supernatural, regenerating work of the Spirit of God, no man will ever be saved.

No heart will ever be opened. No sinner will ever be saved. Without His work, we can do nothing and nothing of any spiritual merit will be achieved.

And so, given that that is so, let us pray to God that He would pour out His Spirit and visit us by His Spirit. As we close, 2,000 years have gone by, but we still need and greatly desire that there would be expectant audiences, and indeed, the Corneliuses who will gather such expectant audiences, that there would be, and here we have many who could fulfill this role, humble and obedient messengers, that there would be and there is a Christ-centered message to proclaim, but that also, and crucially, that the divine visitor, without whom all our efforts are in vain, would indeed come amongst us and make Himself evident.

Let us pray. Then, let us pray.