

THE GOSPEL SPREADS IN JUDEA The Gentile Pentecost

Acts 9:32-10:48

Key Verse: 10:13

God loved the world and sent his Son to be the Savior of all people. Jesus came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But until this time, Christianity was a sect of Judaism. As such, it was regarded as heresy by many Jews. On the other hand, if one was to become a Christian, it was generally accepted that he must first become a Jew—that is, be circumcised. As we saw in chapters 7 and 8, Paul himself was fanatically opposed to the “Way,” until he met the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, he gave himself and all of his strength to the task of eradicating the church. A breakthrough was needed if the good news of God’s love for the world was to reach the world for whom Christ died. This breakthrough occurred in Acts 10 and 11, when God himself sent Peter, the spiritual leader of the church, to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile with a prepared heart.

First, Cornelius and his vision (1-8)

Cornelius was a soldier. He was a centurion in the elite Italian Regiment, and he was stationed in the Roman headquarters in Judea, Caesarea. He was an unusual Roman, and an unusual soldier. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He did not lord it over the men under his command, but treated both them and the servants in his household with respect. He was a truth-seeker. He found a root of truth in the Jewish religion. He feared God. He prayed regularly. He gave generously to the needy. He did his best to serve the God whom he didn’t really know. One day he had a vision. God sent an angel to him with some instructions. After praising him for his godly life, the angel told him to send to Joppa for a man named Peter and bring him to Caesarea. Cornelius called two trusted servants and a devout soldier and told them about his vision. He sent them to Joppa to find Peter.

Second, Peter’s vision (9-23)

Peter was staying in the home of Simon the Tanner. He had raised the good woman, Dorcas from the dead and thus demonstrated to the Jewish believers of Joppa that he was God’s servant and the spiritual leader and shepherd of the church. One day, about noon, he went up on the roof to pray. He was praying, but he became hungry. This seems natural for Peter. While the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. This trance was not entirely from hunger. God had something to teach him. He saw heaven opened and a sheet full of all kind of animals descending to the earth. He heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” Now the animals in the sheet were not eatable. They were animals that were called “unclean” by Levitical law. So, Jews were forbidden

to eat these animals. Peter was a good Jew. He kept the dietary laws. So he declined, saying, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (It seems that Peter had an old habit of saying "No" to Jesus before saying "Yes.") The Lord patiently taught him. "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This vision of the sheet and voice occurred 3 times. Peter wondered what this vision meant. He was not left in the dark long. The three men sent by Cornelius had stopped at the gate and were asking for him. These men were Gentiles. The Spirit of the Lord told him to go down and meet them and to go with them. Peter obeyed. He went down. He violated Jewish law and invited these Gentiles into the house to be his guests. They spent the night and the next day, Peter and six Jewish believers went with them to Cornelius house in Caesarea.

Third, Peter and Cornelius (23b-33)

When Peter arrived, Cornelius and his family and a few close friends were waiting for him. Cornelius fell at Peter's feet to worship him, but Peter quickly made him get up. The humbleness of this proud Roman officer is amazing. But Peter would never usurp the place of God. Peter spoke plainly. He told Cornelius that it was against Jewish law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile. But he was there because God showed him that he should not call any man impure or unclean. Cornelius was not offended. He spoke about his angel visitor who had told him to send for Peter. He thanked Peter for coming and said, "Now, we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Fourth, the gospel message and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (34-48)

Peter could not get over his amazement that God accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. He had thought that God only accepted his chosen people, the Jews. But God was teaching him that the good news of God was for Gentiles, too. Evidently, the story of Jesus was well-known even to the Gentiles of Judea. Peter began by saying, "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." Indeed God sent the good news to the world through the Jews. It is the best news in the world, for it is the news of peace. And that peace comes through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. He reminded Cornelius and the others of the life of Jesus, beginning with the baptism preached by John. It was a baptism of repentance. John also baptized Jesus and at that time, God anointed him with the Holy Spirit. God was with Jesus as he went about doing good, healing the sick and rescuing those who were living under the power of the devil.

What Cornelius did not know clearly was what had happened after this. Peter and the Apostles were the witnesses appointed by God to testify to Jesus' death on the cross and to his resurrection. "They" killed him; God raised him from the dead. Peter and the chosen Apostles saw him; they ate with him. He commanded them to preach this gospel to the people. He commanded the Apostles to testify that this Jesus is the one

appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. The gospel, the good news is that Jesus Christ has risen and that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all those who were listening to his message. The same signs occurred as had occurred at Pentecost. These Gentiles were speaking in tongues and praising God. The circumcised believers, the Jews who had accompanied Peter were astonished to see that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on these uncircumcised Gentiles. So Peter ordered that they be baptized with water into the church. They were not required to be circumcised or to obey the Jewish law. They were not required to become Jews before becoming Christians. Something very new had happened in the church. Peter stayed on with them for a few days. Perhaps he taught them Genesis and some of the Old Testament prophets. Surely they needed some Bible study. At any rate, they were all filled with joy and they praised God.

Every culture and every person has blind spots. In the South, where I grew up, segregation of the races was enforced by law and African Americans were discriminated against. In Korea, many years ago, there was discrimination between the noble class and the servant class. In later times, provincialism separated the people of the various provinces—especially South Chulla and Kyung Sang. In Germany, those of non German blood are discriminated against. The Jews thought that Gentiles were unclean, so they made rules about associating with them. The gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down the dividing walls and enables us to respect and love one another, no matter what our ethnic or racial background may be. God taught Peter that God accepts all people. He told Cornelius, “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.”(28) He went on to say, “Now I realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” (34-35) When we go to live as God’s servants in another culture, we do not take our culture to plant it there. We must only take the gospel and plant the seed. If it is nurtured by prayer and by obedience to God and by love, it will grow and the gospel itself will expose the blind spots and break down the dividing walls of hostility between people.

One Word: God loves the world– his gospel is for everyone