

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 10 August 2008

No. T0534

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Key events in the Acts: Gospel preached to the Gentiles – Acts 10

Whilst on holiday many years ago in a remote part of Scotland, I attended a Sunday morning church service in the local village. The church was packed to capacity, which is always a good sign for any visitor. When the preacher opened the service with a hymn and a prayer, my heart sank. He spoke in a dour Scottish monotone voice. This continued as he read from the Scriptures about the Gospel preached by Peter to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, Acts 10. Then suddenly he burst into his sermon. His voice entirely changed. "This is your Pentecost!" he thundered. And so he continued with powerful, positive, energetic speaking until he reached the end of the preaching, when he returned to his formal monotone for the closing hymn and prayer! But I've never forgotten his message that morning! Yes, Acts 10 is a key event for us Gentiles – it's our Pentecost! Last week we looked at Acts 9, Paul's conversion to Christianity, in which God provided His apostle for the Gentiles. However, in Acts 10 it's **Peter, not Paul**, who's commissioned to open the Gospel door to the Gentiles, that is, all people who aren't Jews. Again, Peter uses 'the keys of the kingdom' as he first did on the day of Pentecost.

Was the preacher correct?

But was the Scottish preacher I heard right when he stated that Acts 10 is the Gentiles' Pentecost? Most definitely!

- When Peter later defended his actions back in Jerusalem he recounted what happened in Cornelius' house and said: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning [at Pentecost]. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'...God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us" (11:15-17).
- A few years later, Paul formalised it in doctrine about how the church was formed when he wrote to the Corinthians: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with [the church]. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or [Gentiles], slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

A Key Event

When the Judean Christians first heard of Peter's expedition to Caesarea, they were horrified and severely criticised him. According to their Jewish traditions, Peter had defiled himself by socialising with 'uncircumcised men'! But Peter told them how God had worked through him and asked them: "If then God gave the same gift to [these uncircumcised people] as he gave to us [Jews] when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17). Their reaction emphasises the importance of this unique event in the history of the Christian church for "when they heard these things they fell silent and they glorified God, saying, 'To the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'" (11:18). In effect they were saying, "We now realise that the Gospel message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is for the whole of mankind, not just for God's special earthly people the Jews".

Important points about this key event

The common thread, that joins together all of the stories in the Acts of the Apostles, is that God's at work through His servants who preach His word. We also see God's arrangements in this event: Peter is led to Joppa; Cornelius, a Roman is brought to serve as a centurion in Palestine; and God uses an angel to guide him to hear the Gospel from Peter. But there are several special issues associated with this special story of the first preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles that will help us in our day to spread that same message.

Peter, a prepared servant, Acts 9:31-10:20

This section describes how, following Paul's conversion, Peter busied himself, as the apostle to the circumcision, by visiting and edifying the saints throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. He was then called away to Joppa, where he raised Dorcas from the dead and was detained there because the miracle reaped further Gospel converts and these new believers needed nurturing (9:36-43). One day, as he was refreshing himself for this service, he fell into a trance

on the housetop of his lodgings, whilst waiting for a meal to be cooked (10:9-10). In his vision, he was commanded by God to eat animals which were forbidden him by Jewish Old Testament laws. Peter protested: “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (10:14). However the Lord insisted: “What God has made clean, do not call common” (10:15), which was a startlingly new idea to Peter. The vision was repeated three times to fully convince Peter so that he was ready for the knock on the door by the delegation from Cornelius. As he later explained to Cornelius: “God had shown me [by the vision] that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came [to you] without [any hesitation, misgiving or] objection” (10:28-29).

Do you and I understand the need for time with the Lord, over and above our normal ‘quiet time’, to allow Him to prepare us for the work He has for us to do? Notice how a servant is prepared for the work of the Lord:

- It comes through prayer and dependence upon Him.
- It’s only by obedience to His commands, which for us are found in His word, as prompted by the Holy Spirit.
- Much has been made by commentators of Peter’s initial reaction in verse 14: “No, Lord”. These words are truly incompatible! But we have to admit they so often reflect our attitude to the direct commands of the Lord. Perhaps we give Peter too much criticism, whilst too readily letting ourselves off the hook! (After all, he did have to learn how the Old Testament laws had been set aside.)

Cornelius, whose heart the Lord opened

It’s obvious from the narrative, that God was already working in Cornelius’ life to make him ready to accept the Gospel message from Peter:

- He’s described in verse 2 as a devout God-fearing man who also engendered this attitude in his entire household.
- His genuine piety was shown by his charity; and by the way he prayed continually to God.
- He didn’t hesitate to obey the angelic vision he received. He said to Peter: “I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (verse 33).
- His genuine faith was rewarded because he diligently sought further light from God (see Hebrews 11:6).
- All of this was so unusual for those times when God was dealing with men primarily through the testimony of the nation of Israel.

An extraordinary Gospel meeting!

Whenever I hear about, or have been involved with, a Gospel campaign, a Gospel camp or a church Gospel meeting, I always wish that the Cornelius house meeting could be repeated in some form or other.

- The people who were there (and there were lots of them!) had deliberately come together to hear the Gospel.
- They realised that they were meeting up with God, through meeting and listening to the evangelist!
- They even understood that the evangelist had a special word from God for them, commanded by the Lord Himself for the angel had promised Cornelius that: “Peter will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (11:14).
- The evangelist was prepared and sent by God.
- The Spirit of God was moving in the meeting, convincing and convicting the hearers, and enabling them to believe the message of salvation.

So, like the apostle Paul in Romans 10:14-15, I ask: “How are they to call on [the Lord] in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” Let our prayers be that the Lord of the harvest will, in these our times, send out His labourers into our country, and into the entire world; and that they will find fields that are already white for harvest (see Matthew 9:37 and John 4:35).

Great News for Gentiles

Peter preached the good news of the Gospel against the dark background of declared hostility from the Jews, whose understanding was that Gentiles were ‘the uncircumcision’, who were, up until that time, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, as well as strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world (see Ephesians 2:11-12).

- But now God had shown Peter that Jews have no advantage over Gentiles because Jesus Christ had come and peace was being preached through His Name. (Rather than having any favours with God, Israel is more responsible because Christ was sent to them and the Gospel was first offered them before the Gentiles!)
- In fact, God has always been impartial – He doesn't make any racial differences in His dealings with mankind. Anyone, anywhere who sincerely fears Him and as a consequence acts in a righteous way is accepted by Him (10:35). As Paul puts it in Romans 2:6-11: “[God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the [Gentile], but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the [Gentile]. For God shows no partiality”.
- Paul also explains God's actions during the Gospel era: “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all. For there is no distinction between Jew and [Gentile]; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 11:32 and 10:12-13).
- Above all else: “everyone who believes in [Jesus Christ] receives forgiveness of sins through His name” (Acts 10:43).

The Good News about Jesus Christ

In order for the people in Cornelius' house to believe on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, they had to be reminded of the facts about His life, His death and His resurrection. Peter outlined this wonderful story in verses 37-43: “You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were [harassed and] oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him [from among the dead] on the third day and made Him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name”.

When you or I preach today, it's of the utmost importance that we present these truths, how that Christ died for our sins, how that he was buried, and how that he was raised on the third day, all in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The absolute truth of the Gospel

Whenever I've preached from Acts 10, I've always used these words: “Jesus Christ - **He** is Lord of all” from verse 36 as a text. It's a powerful text, which sets out some absolute truths of the Gospel. These truths must be presented in some form or other whenever the Gospel is preached:

1. Jesus Christ has claims over every person in the world. He's both their Creator and their Redeemer. As we've already noticed in the case of Cornelius, everyone is given opportunities by God, at sometime or other in life, to acknowledge and respond to the lordship of Christ.
2. Jesus Christ has demonstrated His lordship over disease, the devil and death by His resurrection from among the dead. Everyone must face up to the fact that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ through this resurrection. ‘Every knee must bow to Him’ either voluntarily now or by compulsion in the day to come.
3. The Gospel has no take-it-or-leave-it options. It has now been published to the entire world, according to the command of the eternal God, with the objective of bringing people to obey it by faith (see Romans 16:26).
4. Peter said in verse 42 that God had charged them to preach the Gospel and proclaim that Jesus Christ is the one ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead: “The times of [mankind's] ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by [His appointed] Man [i.e. Jesus Christ]; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead” (17:30-31).
 - a. The living in verse 42 are those who have believed in Christ. They have passed from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life. In the resurrection to life, believers will be judged at Christ's judgment seat. Their service for Him will receive proper assessment and will be rewarded in His kingdom (see John 5:24, 29; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:6-11).

- b. The dead in verse 42 are those who have never believed in God and who have refused to acknowledge Him in any way at all. In the resurrection of judgement, they're raised to face Christ at the Great White Throne judgement and condemned to the lake of fire (see John 5:29 and Revelation 20:11-15).
5. The Lord Jesus also has authority to forgive people their sins, so that they don't come into the judgement of the Great White Throne. As Peter said in verse 43: "Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."
6. Finally, Philippians 2:10-11 triumphs the reason. It's so: "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

The Result: Gentiles are blessed

This first preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles by the apostle Peter provides a good example of what should happen each time there's a preaching of that message. Conversions should follow.

- The Holy Spirit is said to have fallen upon all who heard the preaching – a way of saying that they were born again and believed.
- These people repented and were blessed according to the Gospel formula: "repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).
- They also received the Holy Spirit to indwell them. (To convince the Jewish believers who accompanied Peter that this had happened to Gentiles, on that special occasion, they miraculously spoke in tongues.)
- They were baptised in water unto the name of Jesus Christ, showing their commitment to Him as their Lord.
- The differences between Jew and Gentile disappeared. After Peter had explained that God had gifted the same Holy Spirit to these Gentiles, there were no more objections from the Jewish believers. The dividing wall of hostility, broken down by Christ's death, was gone and peace became a practical reality.
- Above all, God was honoured and glorified (11:18).

What does the Gospel mean to us twenty-first century Gentiles?

As we conclude our talk today, each one of us must ask: have we benefited from the Gospel going out to the Gentiles to take from the Gentiles a people for His name? (Acts 15:14).

- Have you heard the wonderful story of the Gospel about God's gift of His beloved Son for your salvation?
- Have you repented of your sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you've been converted, then you're "in Christ", you've been sealed with the Holy Spirit and you're a member of His church. If you haven't, then you remain in your sins and you face the judgement of God with its terrible eternal consequences in the lake of fire!

If you're a believer, how much do you appreciate God's goodness in extending His blessings beyond the narrow limits of the nation of Israel? Let's heed Paul's warnings: "Do not be arrogant toward [the nation of Israel]. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, '[They] were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God" (Romans 11:18-22).

Finally, let's be active in spreading this message of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which has been entrusted to us (1 Timothy 1:11).

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.