

Acts 10:1-23

“Challenge Leads To Change”

Quick question; how open are you to change? (Based upon the way you select your seat week after week; I'd say, most of us, not very 😊). But how many of you realize that though God is the same & He changes not (the same yesterday, today & forever), the truth is He's seeking to change you & me every single day!

Why is it that God never changes? Because He's *perfect!* He's perfect in love, perfect in wisdom, perfect in righteousness, in holiness, in grace/mercy, there's no area in His nature in need of improvement, therefore He *never* changes. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for you 😊 (or for me).

If there could be such a counterintuitive term such as “perfectly flawed” perhaps we could claim that, but the truth is, though (in Christ) we're covered in perfect righteousness, we've got practical issues... & The apostle John encouraged us by telling us that when we *see* Jesus, we will be *like* Jesus for then we shall see Him as He is, but until that time, as Paul informed the Corinthians, “*But we all... are being transformed into the same image* (that is the *image* of the Lord) *from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*”¹

The fancy bible term for it is “sanctification”. The Spirit of God is changing us, making us more like Jesus, day after day after day. & This is the reason that it's so important that we remain flexible, pliable, open to being stretched; because changing can be challenging. & If we remain set in *our* ways, we might hit a roadblock & miss out on *God's* way.

Acts Ch 10 is certainly one of the more exciting Ch's in this book & perhaps of the entire bible. Not because it's full of action-packed drama. Really, quite the opposite is true, it's a rather “chill” kind of Ch. But because what happens here will impact all the earth, & the history of humanity from this point forward as the door opens up & the Gentiles enter the kingdom of God.

But 1st God had to challenge Peter's previous way of thinking, change his perspective & open him up to new possibilities.

Vs 1-2

So the scene opens in the city of Caesarea Maritime, an ancient port city from which Rome governed the area of Judea.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [2 Co 3:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

As far as the *Jews* were concerned, Jerusalem was the capital city (& certainly the center of religious power), as far as Rome was concerned, it was Caesarea, this is the area in which the political power was seated, where the Roman governors lived. This is where Archeologist discovered a stone inscribed w/the name “Pontus Pilate”.

& As the camera kind of gives us a sweeping shot of the city, a centurion by the name of Cornelius is the “character” whom the Holy Spirit brings into focus. & Immediately we learn several things about him. We’re told that he was a centurion of the Italian Regiment. The Roman army was comprised of Legions (numbering 6,000 men). Legions were broken down into Regiments (or cohorts) of 600 men, which were divided into 6 groups of 100. The man commanding the group of 100 soldiers was called a centurion (a century is 100 yrs, a centurion commanded 100 men, you get the idea).

& Though by the very nature of the fact that he’s in the army of the occupying force over Israel (which would put him at odds w/the Jews), it’s interesting that whenever centurions surface on the pages of scripture, it’s always in a favorable light.

It’s there in Luke Ch 7; the Lord enters Capernaum & a certain centurion’s servant was sick & about to die. When he hears Jesus is in town he sent certain elders of the Jews to Him, pleading w/Him to heal his servant. & They went to the Lord & they began to beg Him on behalf of the centurion saying, “This guy is deserving Lord, he loves our nation, he’s built us a synagogue & everything...” The Lord said, “Ok, I’ll come heal him.” But the centurion, hearing that Jesus was coming to his house was like, “No; I don’t need You to come, I understand authority, I have people to whom I say ‘go’ & they go, or ‘come’ & they come. Just say the word & my servant will be healed...” That kind of insight regarding the Person & power of Jesus blew Jesus away! He said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”*² It was a reference to Gentile nations entering the kingdom of God (& we’re preparing to see the beginning of that being fulfilled here in Acts 10.

It was a centurion at the foot of the cross who upon seeing Jesus die said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

Here we have Cornelius, a centurion recognized as a “devout man”, one who “feared God” & “gave alms” (made donations) generously to the people & prayed to God regularly.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 8:10-11] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So we see him as a religious man, a sincere man... but he's still an *unsaved* man. He's "devout", meaning he's respectful, reverent, humble... he "feared God" meaning he'd come to realize the vanity & futility of worshiping the gods of Rome (Jupiter, Mars, Venus). He was no longer pantheistic, he was monotheistic, he'd come to believe that the God of Israel was the One/true God... But he wasn't a full-blown proselyte (he hadn't undergone circumcision, he didn't adhere to the dietary laws) that's why he's referred to as a "God fearer". He sought to honor God, but he didn't come full blown into Judaism.

We see that he was generous toward the Jews, gave alms generously & he prayed regularly. He would be sort of like unto a man today who comes to church perhaps a little more than on holidays, believes in God & makes a nice donation every time the plate is passed (so to speak) but he's not saved. **The difference maybe being that as to where the man I described has perhaps settled into believing he's good w/God because of the good he thinks he's doing, Cornelius wasn't relying on that, he wanted to be right w/God & was doing the best he could w/the light he'd been given.**

But ladies & gentlemen, this is why we affirm to you again & again that just being "religious" isn't enough. Going to church, praying, giving, these things are nice, but they don't in & of themselves commend us to God. People say, "Well, as long as someone is sincere & they try to do right, God understands that." Cornelius would be the poster boy for that position. **But it wasn't enough. If it was, God would've said, "Look at Cornelius, he's a church goer, he's a prayer, he's a giver, that's good enough, he'll be ok." But it didn't go that way did it? Instead, Acts Ch 10 becomes the story of a gracious Savior seeking out a searching sinner. I'm telling you, that when someone truly wants to be right w/God, God is big enough to find that person & get the message of the gospel to them...**

The subtle & sad rebuke of this passage is that sometimes people who *don't* know the Lord, have a devotion & deeper conviction to know & be right w/Him than those who *do!*

Now; there's something sorta tucked away here in this passage & I think it's important to lift out. We read that he "feared God (notice) w/all his household". **There are reasons Satan seeks to attack the family unit today, to facilitate divorce, the separation of the man from his wife & children. One of those reasons is because of the tremendous amount of influence that a man has in/upon his family.**

According to a 2016 survey : *"if a father does not go to church, even if his wife does, only 1 child in 50 will become a regular worshiper.*

If a father does go regularly, regardless of what the mother does, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will attend church as adults. If a father attends church irregularly, between half and two-thirds of their kids will attend church with some regularity as adults.

If a mother does not go to church, but a father does, a minimum of two-thirds of their children will end up attending church. In contrast, if a father does not go to church, but the mother does, on average two-thirds of their children will not attend church.

Another survey found that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability everyone else in the household will follow. If the mother is the first to become a Christian, there is a 17% probability everyone else in the household will follow. However, when the father is first, there is a 93% probability everyone else in the household will follow.”

What’s the point? That a man has a huge impact of the faith & practice of his family. When Joshua was addressing the men of Israel in Josh 24 he said, **“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt (quit compromising in your commitment to God). Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**³ This is the mentality that Cornelius had adopted, he had purposed that as for him & his house, they were going to serve the Lord (& his family followed his lead).

Vs 3-6

Do you see what I mean when I say that God is more than able to direct *clearly* the one who’s seeking Him truly (that is, from the heart)? If He has to dispatch an angel from heaven to lead that person in the way that they should go... He’ll do it! He’s not willing that *any* should perish & He knows what’s happening in the heart of every man...

Now; I want you to realize (as I said) Cornelius isn’t saved (spoiler alert, he will be). But even still the Lord was noting his heart to seek after Him. There he is (it’s about 3:00 in the afternoon) & he’s praying (this was one of the hours of prayer so I’m sure he’s just doing what he thinks he needs to do to please God) & God gives him a vision...

³ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Jos 24:14–15]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In this vision he sees an angel, & this contact w/the supernatural frightens him (understandably so). The angel says, "Cornelius!" To which he basically answers (in true military fashion), "Yes, sir!" "What can I do for you; sir!" & Notice the angel says (in essence) "God recognizes the pouring out of your *soul* to *Him* & the practical outpouring of *yourself* to *man*." You're seeking God & serving others... God sees that.

Again, whenever someone is seeking God (even as Cornelius did), God is going to get the gospel to that person, we have every biblical reason to believe that.

I also want to encourage you with this, if God sees what the *unsaved* is doing in seeking Him & serving others, how much more does He recognize, receive & remember those things that *you're* doing as His own? You & I may forget someone's kindness, their contribution, their service & submission... God does not. Heb 6:10 tells us, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." ⁴

So the angel tells him, "Send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He's staying at the tanners house in Joppa by the sea, he will tell you what you need to do." (Meaning, what you need to do to be saved).

Question, why didn't the angel just tell him right then? 2 Reasons it seems. #1 God has chosen to use redeemed man to minister the message of redemption *to* man. Yes, God could use angels to share the gospel (& one day He will [Rev 14:6]), but for now God chooses to use one who's *experienced* salvation to explain the *message* of salvation to others. & He uses it as a means to reward you eternally! Be a soul winner, God will reward you greatly. Daniel Ch 12 & Vs 3, "Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever." ⁵

"Ok, I can dig that, I can stand behind that. Why then call for Peter? We know that Philip was already in that city (Acts 8:40)?" This is the 2nd reason, I've been kind of hammering this point home for a while now. God has a plan, that plan involves people, not random people, specific people for specific purposes.

God was going to use this event to do something in Cornelius & in Peter. God has good works prepared for *you*, that *you* should walk in them (Eph 2:10). The works He's prepared for *you* He's not going to forward to *me*, I'm to walk in the works He's prepared for *me*.

⁴ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 6:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Da 12:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Maybe there's someone in your life who isn't saved & you know it. You're just hoping/praying that God will send someone to talk to them, but maybe He's wanting to send *you*. (Write it down, read it later Rom 10:14-17).

Vs 7-10

Couple things, 1st of all, don't think it strange that Peter went up on the housetop to pray. It wasn't like a 4/12 pitch w/shingles & he's just up there praying on top of this man's house. It was more like a flat (very common) & it was used kind of like a porch.

2^{ndly} I want you to see that this is typical of how God operates. Not necessarily in visions & dreams (though that can happen) but more so that He in some way will prepare both ends or speak to multiple people about something significant He's wanting to do, not just one. There's confirmation along the way, the witness of 2 or more.

Cornelius had a vision, sends his men on a 30-mile journey to ask for a man they've never met, but on the other end Peter is being prepared by God for the encounter. He's praying, he's hungry, he's overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, perhaps ships are out at sail, he starts kind of phasing in & out of focus (this happens during prayer doesn't it?) God will use it. Peter sees something...

Vs 11-16

Peter was hungry, God served him up some pigs in a blanket! Literally! ☺ But again, let's remember that God is preparing Peter to go w/some Gentiles (whom Jews considered to be unclean) & so ultimately He's using Peter's strict convictions about dietary laws to inform him of the fact that He's getting ready to do something that's going to challenge him, push him outside the confines of his comfort zone.

When Peter hears, "Rise, Peter; kill & eat" all he can think is that there's no way that he's about to come into contact w/unkosher, ceremonially unclean animals! It goes against the grain of everything he's been taught! --- But w/the work of the cross, he's not under law, he's under grace & God's going to do something new (not something beyond the confines of His word, a light to the Gentiles has been in the plan since the beginning), but it's something that will go beyond the personal prejudice of Peter.

Family, that's the bottom line of what's being addressed here. Peter was saved, he was an apostle, he was used tremendously of God, but he wasn't perfect. He was still Peter & there were still things in his life that needed dealt with. I for one love this... Because it tells me that I don't have to be perfect to be used by God, I've still got a long way to go, but I love Jesus, I'm available to Jesus & God can use my life as He challenges/changes & makes me *like* Jesus.

Question; are you ready if God wants to challenge you, wants to do a new thing in your life? You're of a certain political persuasion, are you ready share the love of God w/the other? Or do you think they're so out in left field that there's no point?

Peter wasn't prepared for what God put before him. He had to grow through it. He says, "No way, Lord!" Now, that's what we call an oxymoron. You can say, "Not so man", "Not so friend", "No way brother..." But if Jesus is truly your Lord, you can't say "Not so, Lord" only "Yes, Lord. Your will be done." But how often has God put something on our heart that we refuse to respond to? We're not so different...

The Lord says, "Listen, what God has cleansed, you must not profane by considering it common." This happens 3xs. Evidently Peter learns in 3s ☺. He denied the Lord 3xs, was given opportunity to confess his love for Jesus as he was restored, 3xs. & This happens 3xs. He's teaching Peter to not only *preach* grace, but to practice it... His old habits have taken hold of him.

It's interesting to me that the nonbeliever was more flexible & yielded to God's direction than the believer. Listen, it's true that from dead in sin to alive to God in Christ is a miracle. Equally true (however) is the miracle of "crusty Christian" stuck in the quagmire of tradition or personal persuasion, delivered & brought into appropriate illumination by the Spirit of God! Willing to change in order to stay in stride w/what the Spirit is wanting to do.

Peter still isn't altogether certain what God's trying to teach him, but he's certainly aware that something is happening that God is wanting to change, God is challenging his perspective.

BTW, God has cleansed *you*, He's washed *you*, don't consider yourself "common". Most folks have the tendency to think that God couldn't use them, wouldn't use them, after all I struggle w/this or do things I regret. I'm just common, dirt, nothing." God says, "What I have cleansed, don't call common." (Write it down, look it up later Eph 1:4)

Vs 17-20

Note all the ways that God communicates in this Ch. Through visions, an angel, His voice, the still small voice of the Spirit. God will use His word, circumstance (open & closed doors). God knows how to get our attention & lead our lives.

Peter's still trying to figure this out when that still small voice says, "Listen, just go down to the 3 men that are seeking you. & Don't doubt anything they say, I've sent them."

At this point Peter doesn't know they're Gentiles.

Normally Peter wouldn't associate w/them being a good kosher Jewish boy. But the Holy Spirit has him on task & he's told simply to obey.

Now; there *are* times to have questions, when seeking to discern a situation. But there are other things that we don't need to question, God has given us His word & it's ours simply to obey (that was the case here).

God's never going to ask you to do something that will contradict His word, it will always correspond w/His word. The new covenant was in effect & God was wanting to pour out His Spirit, it was Peter's place to say, "Yes Lord."

So to w/you & so to w/me. We need to be willing to allow God to break up our routine, to shake us out of our comfort zone to do something fresh. It may mean a new job, a different ministry, whatever, but the key in experiencing the fresh outpouring of God's Spirit isn't to say, "No, Lord", but "Yes, Lord." Peter's coming around to that...

Vs 21-23

No doubt when Peter went down to the men his jaw hit the floor, "God sent... Gentiles!" He's challenging Peter, changing Peter. He's having to "unlearn" some things that he might *truly* learn the heart/ways & word of God. Sometimes this is true of us as well...

Peter is being summoned to preach the gospel to a commanding officer in the Roman army... I can't imagine that he's doing anything other than freaking out inside...

But he's ready to obey (& that's the key). He didn't shun them, encourage them to find an inn so he wouldn't have to come into contact w/them. He invites them in, entertains them, takes care of them... God's growing him, he's learning to be a light to the Gentiles. -- This would've made a great reality show, "3 Gentiles, a tanner & a kosher Jew all in one house..." ☺ God is so good. Peter knew something was stirring & so the next day he takes off for the adventure of a lifetime & we'll see it... next time.

Prayer Points:

God thank You for allowing us to see the humanity in the people You used tremendously. May we never be set in our ways, convinced of our own perspective such to the point that we don't give You room to challenge & change us. Help us to be of the mind to say, "Yes Lord, have Your way." Use us to be a light, to share the hope of the gospel w/those around us...

What is the gospel? Christ died for our sins, was buried & was raised from the dead 3 days later. He paid a debt He didn't owe, because we owed a debt we couldn't pay; this is the love of God. Forgiveness of sin through faith in J.C. Believe on Him now & you will be saved.