

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #25

Acts 10:23-48

Someone has wisely said “the ground is level at the foot of Christ’s cross.” Any person, who wants to be saved from sins, must by faith believe in Jesus Christ who hung on that cross. Any person, any sinner who is willing to believe in Jesus Christ will be given grace salvation. It doesn’t matter if one is Jew or Gentile, man or woman, boy or girl. Any person who places his or her faith in Jesus Christ and His cross work for salvation will be saved. That theological point is the very point of this text.

We may recall that Cornelius had been praying about some need and God gave him a vision to send for Peter. The need was the need of salvation. He had heard about Jesus Christ but he did not understand the salvific ramifications. This is the prayer God will answer for unsaved people. If unsaved people want to be saved and cry out to God for that, God will answer that prayer most of the time. There is a warning to God-mockers that they can reach a point where God won’t even answer that prayer (Proverbs 1:28).

Immediately Cornelius sent men from Caesarea to Joppa, a distance of about thirty miles, to get Peter so he could come and unravel the grace Gospel. By the time the men got to Peter it was late in the afternoon; so they stayed overnight and the next day Peter and some of the brethren from Joppa, apparently six other Jews, made the trip with Peter (11:12) and went to Caesarea (10:23). So there were six Jews, Peter, plus the three men who came to get Peter which is a total of ten men traveling. The six Jews will serve as key eyewitnesses to all of this.

According to **verse 24**, they took two days to get to Caesarea. Thirty miles was typically more than one day’s journey, especially when traveling by foot. On one elk hunt, I did thirty-two miles in one day on a horse, and when I got done both I and my horse were totally exhausted. Peter is probably traveling by foot so it took a couple of days to get to Caesarea. What we see in this text is this:

AFTER PETER FINALLY CAME TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE GRACE OF GOD PUTS AN END TO THE MOSAIC LAW, GOD SENT HIM TO A GENTILE AREA TO PREACH HIS GRACE GOSPEL SO HE COULD SAVE GENTILES.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Understanding grace comes by hearing the Word of God. Sitting under biblical teaching is not just a nice suggestion; it is vital to our growth. Until we grasp grace we won’t be used for much of anything. But the moment we grasp it, powerful ministry things happen. This trip to Gentile country will not initially sit well with most of the other apostles (Acts 11:1-3).

Now, Acts is a book of action and when Peter got to Caesarea a lot of action took place. There are ten actions that occurred:

ACTION #1 - Cornelius met him. 10:25a

It is stated that when Peter entered, he was met by Cornelius. We may assume that Cornelius meets Peter in the court area of his home because Peter will not “enter” into a room until **verse 27**. What this tells us is that Cornelius was a very wealthy man with a very palatial home. This is what rich people, famous people, poor people, average people all need – they need to hear about the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter if they live in a mansion or cardboard box; that is what they need to hear.

ACTION #2 - Cornelius fell at his feet to worship Peter. 10:25b-26

Cornelius falls down in worshipful homage to Peter. Now Cornelius was a centurion, which means he was a military commander and he was used to being honored himself. You do honor rank when you are in the military. But Cornelius was not afraid to honor a man of God as being higher in rank than he was. He knew he actually had one of the apostles of Jesus Christ standing in his home.

This tells us something about this tough military man; he had a very tender heart for the Word of God and he had great respect for true men of God. He respected them and honored them. He is doing this out of reverence for God and His Word and His apostle.

Now Peter had never quite experienced this kind of thing before. He had been a fisherman and he has this high ranking Roman bowed at his feet. It could have been a real stroke to Peter’s ego. After all, the Pope to this day loves people to bow down at his feet and kiss his ring. But Peter said, “stand up; I am also a man.” The Greek is very emphatic here; Peter stresses I, myself, am just a man. I am not someone you reverence. I am just a sinful finite man just like all men.

ACTION #3 - Peter found many people assembled at Cornelius’ house. 10:27

According to **verse 24**, Cornelius had called together his relatives and close friends. He had, as one writer said, gathered together a “mini-congregation of relatives and close friends” (Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, p. 162). He was very concerned that they all hear truth about the grace of God and Jesus Christ. He finally had someone in his home who truly understood God’s Word and he was not about to waste this opportunity. So he gathered together his family and friends.

ACTION #4 - Peter greets the people and asks why they sent for him. 10:28-29

Peter begins by telling them the reason he was there was because of a vision. Peter reminds the people that according to Jewish law it was illegal for Jews to associate with non-Jews or even visit with them. But, he explains that God had shown him he was wrong in calling a man unholy or unclean. Now we need to understand this. Peter should call all men unclean and unholy in the sense that all are sinners, but he should not prejudicially call all men unclean because they weren’t Jewish and refuse to have anything to do with them. Peter said once I knew it was the will of God for the Gospel to reach everyone, I came without any delay. Then Peter asks a question to Cornelius which is this: “Why have you sent for me?”

ACTION #5 - Cornelius informs Peter of his vision. 10:30-33a

Cornelius was a man who highly respected the Jewish religion. But that is not why he had sent for Peter. Cornelius told Peter about the vision which he received four days ago from that very hour, which means this is all happening at 3 P.M. in the afternoon (10:3). Cornelius had seen an angel (10:3) who appeared in the form of a man (10:30) and the angel told him to send men to get Peter, so he did. God revealed to Cornelius that he was to specifically send for Peter.

ACTION #6 - Cornelius informs Peter of their purpose for sending for him. 10:33b

Do not miss the end of verse 33; they have all gathered to hear him preach God's Word.

This is a wonderful moment for any true teacher of God's Word. The people had all gathered to hear him expound the Word of God. **What we will see right here in this epoch moment concerning Gentiles is that God will unleash His Spirit's power at this gathering and the whole purpose of the gathering was to hear God's Word expounded.** Cornelius had invited his family and close friends to hear Peter expound God's Word.

They have not gathered to hear music. They have not gathered to make friends. They have not gathered because of a great youth program or some fellowship outing. They have not gathered for some emotional experience or to see a healing. They have not gathered to have snacks. They have not gathered to be entertained. They have not gathered for a seminar or a video or a movie. **They have gathered to hear a man of God expound the Word of God.**

When you get this setting, there is no better environment for God's Spirit to powerfully work. When people gather together because they want to hear God's Word it is the greatest setting in the world for powerful spiritual things to happen.

And as we will see in a moment, this was not a light, fluffy presentation of God's Word or grace. This is why I believe a church like Texas Corners Bible Church offers the best possible environment for true Holy Spirit impact.

ACTION #7 - Peter preaches justification by faith in Jesus Christ. 10:34-43

This is the first message preached by Peter after having been set free from the O.T. Law. This is monumental exposition because this sends a new theology to the world. Peter weaves together a masterful theological discourse comprised of six points:

Point #1 - God does not show partiality. 10:34b

The actual reason why Peter brings this point up is because most believe God does show partiality. Think about this. Almost every denomination of the world thinks God is partial to them. But here is the truth; God will not show favoritism with anyone and you had better come to terms with Jesus Christ and the Word of God. You had better come to terms with the reality that you are a sinner and you need Jesus Christ to be your Personal Savior.

Point #2 - People in every nation believe that God will accept any person who does good works.
10:35

This verse has prompted controversy concerning the issue of whether or not a person's works can win the favor of God. Paul would later say all unsaved people are enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). To me, the controversy is solved by the first word of **verse 35** "but", which actually sits first in the Greek text for emphasis. Typically, a conjunction would be the second word in a sentence (postpositive), but not here. For example in **verse 34** the conjunction "and" sits second in the sentence, but in **verse 35** the conjunction "but" sits first.

Verse 35 begins with a sharp contrasting conjunction "but" (αλλα). Daniel Wallace in his Greek Grammar says this specific conjunction "suggests a contrast or opposing thought to the idea to which it is connected" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 671). What I understand this key grammatical point to mean is that **in sharp contrast to the theological reality that God will not show partiality (v. 34), all nations believe that if a man fears God and does what is right and does the best he can, he will be acceptable to God.**

This is what people all over the world think. People of all nations believe they can be saved by their works. If a man fears God and if a man tries to do what is right, the belief is God will accept him and welcome him into his heaven. Peter says that is what all people everywhere think. This interpretation is grammatically consistent with what Peter says next.

Point #3 - God sent His Word that peace with Him only comes through Jesus Christ the Lord.
10:36

Here is what Peter was preaching; if you want to be in a peaceful relationship with God, it must come through Jesus Christ. Do not miss this. All people believe they may have peace with God through works, and God's Word says the only way to have peace with God is through Jesus Christ. Notice Peter identifies Jesus by using three proper nouns:

- 1) Jesus, which means He is the Savior.
- 2) Christ, which means He is the Messiah.
- 3) Lord, which means He is God.

This is the only One who can give anyone a relationship with God.

Point #4 - You Gentiles know specific things about Jesus Christ. **10:37-38**

The Greek "you know" (υμεις οιδατε) is very emphatic. In other words, these specific people had this specific knowledge of Jesus Christ. There are two areas of knowledge they had:

(Area #1) - They knew what happened to Christ in Judea and Galilee after the baptism of John.
10:37

John's baptism is a critical moment in the program of God, because it introduces Jesus Christ to Israel as her Savior and Messiah. After the baptism of John, Jesus Christ took center stage and they knew about what had happened.

(Area #2) - They knew that Jesus had been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. **10:38**

They knew about the miracles. They knew about the miraculous things Christ did and about the healings and the power over the Devil that He displayed. The entire Trinity shows up here.

They knew that Jesus carried out His Messianic ministry to the lost sheep of Israel. He performed the Messianic signs proving He was the Messiah. They knew that Jesus went about “doing good” and so many believe that they will be saved if they follow Jesus and do good things. But it is Jesus who does good; we don’t. We have all done bad. What we need to do is to call upon Him to be good and gracious to us and save us.

Point #5 - We are witnesses of all the things Jesus did in the land of the Jews and Jerusalem. **10:39-41**

Why does Peter keep referring to the fact that Jesus was ministering in Judea and Jerusalem and the land of Israel? Because these Gentiles needed to understand that God’s central program is with Israel and some of the crumbs of that program were about to reach out to them. Gentiles had heard powerful things about Jesus Christ and what He did, and Peter says we were there and we saw it all. There are three eyewitness facts that Peter stresses to this group:

(Eyewitness Fact #1) - We are witnesses to His death on the cross. **10:39b**

Now we may remember that in the crucifixion of Christ, the Roman government and Roman soldiers were very much involved, as were the Jews. Hanging someone on a cross was a Roman form of public execution. What they were about to learn is that this crucifixion was the only way sinners could have their sins forgiven.

(Eyewitness Fact #2) - We are witnesses to his resurrection . **10:40**

This is so important to saving faith. **No other religious leader has ever been raised from the dead, which proves only Jesus Christ can save from sin.** False religions tell you that you can get to heaven by following them and their teachings and their works system. The only problem is their leader is dead. Mohammed (Islam) did not come back from the dead. Joseph Smith (Mormonism) did not come back from the dead. Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science) did not come back from the dead. Charles Russell (Jehovah’s Witness) did not come back from the dead. Their religion is nothing but a dead-end street. It will not lead you into heaven; it will take you straight into hell and to eternal death.

(Eyewitness Fact #3) - We are witnesses to His post-resurrection appearances . **10:40-41**

Jesus Christ showed Himself openly and visibly to us. He did not show Himself to all people, but to those chosen by Him beforehand that ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Point #6 - We have been ordered to preach to the people the following message: **10:42-43**

When Peter says “He ordered us to preach”, he uses a Greek verb (παραγγελλω) that means this was a direct order or command (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 338). The direct order that he got from Jesus Christ was an order to “preach”. That infinitive “to preach” (κηρυσσω) means the command was to go and proclaim God’s Word as a herald (Ibid., p. 246).

The very force of this Greek word means that the primary responsibility of the minister is to publicly preach and herald God’s Word. This is a command and if a minister doesn’t obey it, he is in direct violation of what he has been called to do.

Apparently some have overlooked this. Some believe their primary job is to lead a group discussion so all can share how they feel. Some believe their primary job is to be a back-slapping politician. Some believe their primary job is to create an environment where all people feel good about themselves. The job is to preach. Peter says here we have been ordered to preach; specifically, three key truths about Jesus Christ.

(Truth #1) - Jesus Christ is the One who has been appointed by God to be the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead. **10:42**

Do not overlook this. People like to think of Jesus as being a guy who would never step on a bug. But that is not the truth. You and I will face Jesus Christ as the God/Judge. He will be the One who will permit people to go to heaven and He will be the One who will send people to hell. When one gets before Him he had better have believed only in Him to save you. He is the Judge of those living and those who have died. He is the Sovereign Judge who holds the power of life and death in His hands.

(Truth #2) - Jesus Christ is the One of whom all the prophets predicted. **10:43a**

Every animal sacrifice, every prediction of a Jewish Messiah and coming Savior and King who would one day rule the world pointed directly to Jesus Christ.

(Truth #3) - Jesus Christ will forgive the sins of any who believe in Him. **10:43b**

Here, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the heart of the grace Gospel. Any who will believe in Jesus Christ will have their sins forgiven. The word forgiveness (αφεσις) refers to complete dismissal and release and pardon from all condemnatory sins (Ibid., p. 70). Do not miss this point because this is revolutionary. “Everyone” who will simply believe in the name of Jesus Christ will have their sins forgiven. Any person who has committed any sin, who will simply believe in the name of Jesus Christ, will be saved.

ACTION #8 - As Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on the people. **10:44-48**

Now this is a critical moment because to this point, the Holy Spirit had been poured out in Acts 2 on Jews, who are the circumcised. But now God shows His Spirit is moving out to the Gentiles. What we have here is the “Caesarean Pentecost to the Gentile world.” The Holy Spirit fell upon all Gentiles listening to Peter preach and there were two immediate results that occurred:

(Result #1) - The circumcised Jews were amazed that God’s Spirit was on Gentiles. **10:45**

The Jews who first saw God’s Grace branch out to Gentiles were shocked.

(Result #2) - The circumcised Jews were hearing the Gentiles speaking in their language, which included Hebrew and Aramaic, and exalting God. **10:46**

The word “tongues” is identical to Acts 2. The six Jews who traveled with Peter were from Joppa, and in Joppa they spoke Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. It is obvious that biblical tongues were a legitimate language and these circumcised Jewish believers understood every word they were saying.

ACTION #9 - Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. **10:47-48a**

Notice the baptism is not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but in the name of Jesus Christ. Also notice that Peter does not baptize these people; apparently the other Jews traveling with him did this. Jesus is the Savior and Christ is the Messiah, and since Peter had been talking about John’s baptism we must assume he had these ideas in mind. Cornelius and his family had never seen a baptism like John’s, but they had heard about it (**10:37**) and now they are participating in it, and it is other Jews who are actually baptizing them.

ACTION #10 - The believers ask Peter to stay for a few days. **10:48b**

These new Gentile believers wanted to hear more and learn more. They wanted to know more of God’s Word and they asked Peter to stay. Not to do miracles, but to preach God’s Word.