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August 18, 2024

INCLUDING: ACTS 10:34-48

Salvation comes to anyone who believes in Jesus.

FACILITATOR 2

Focus Attention

Introductory Activity: Prior to the group time recruit someone in your group or from outside the group to share about their experience going on a mission trip. Specifically, remind this person that they have only 5 minutes to share. You can have them back at another time to share more extensively if they would like. Ask them to focus on what it was like sharing the gospel or the love of Christ with those far from home or those who are culturally different. As your group gathers explain that this volunteer is going to share about their experience as we begin our class time.

After they conclude, explain that sometimes sharing the gospel is easier while on a mission trip than while going about our everyday lives at home. Sometimes, that is because we feel more comfortable or braver sitting in the homes of people we do not know and who do not know us. However, presenting the gospel cross-culturally can also present some challenges. Language differences, cultural differences, and well-worn phrases (like ask Jesus into your heart) that do not translate well can be challenges. The challenges multiply when presenting the gospel cross-culturally at home. The language barrier might be easier to overcome and well-known phrases might be more easily understood, but the barrier of culture still stands in the way. The barrier of culture and race can sometimes be more problematic at home because, unlike the mission field, the people we invite into the Kingdom should also be invited into our churches, small groups, and friendships. While many of us might say that race, economic situation, and cultural background are not stumbling blocks, these factors can influence our actions and the actions of those in our church.

FACILITATOR 1

Introduce the Passage and Transition: In our passage today, we will see that "Salvation comes to anyone who believes in Jesus" (EBT LG, 131), and we should accept those Jesus saves. Today's lesson picks up in the middle of Acts chapter 10. While we do not have time to completely review the events prior to those presented in the lesson, we need a quick overview of the first part of the chapter so that we can more fully understand the implications of the passage.

Acts chapter 9 concludes by telling us that Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon the Tanner. Verse 1 of chapter 10 transports the reader up the coast to Caesarea Maritima. In Caesarea, a man named Cornelius received

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Exalting Christ in Acts* (Exalting)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte

TEACHERS NOT: If you have someone in your group who recently went on a mission trip that required them to share their personal testimony you can begin with your group time with them sharing their testimony instead of you.

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a vision from the Lord. Luke tells us that Cornelius was a Roman Centurion as well as a worshipper of Jehovah God. "He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God." (10:2) In the vision the angel of the Lord instructed Cornelius to send for Peter in Joppa. Luke then transitions the account to Peter's perspective. Again, we could spend an entire lesson on Peter's vision, but we will have to quickly review it and its implications. As the visitors from Caesarea were approaching Joppa, Peter received his vision. In the vision, three times God presented a sheet to Peter containing all sorts of animals both clean and unclean. God instructed Peter to kill and eat any of the animals. Peter initially refused to eat the animals that were restricted by Old Testament laws. God said in response, "What God has made clean, do not call impure." Peter was confused by the vision, but the reader of Acts is aware that God is trying to accomplish something through these two visions. Luke makes this clear in Acts 10:17-19.

Read Acts 10:17-19 (¹⁷ While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, right away the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon's house, stood at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹ While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, "Three men are here looking for you. ²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and go with them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them.")

It takes a few days for everything to come together in Peter's mind, but after traveling with the men to Caesarea Peter understands what God is up to. Let's look at that in Acts 10:34-36

1. OFFERED TO ALL (ACTS 10:34-36)

Read or have someone read Acts 10:34-36

Explain: Upon arriving in Joppa to meet Peter the men were invited to stay the night. The following day they set out for Caesarea. It probably took them two days to get to the city. When they arrived at the home of the Centurion, Peter was probably a little shocked at what he found. Luke tells us, "Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends." (10: 24) This official called together his God-worshipping-Gentile family and his friend to hear the words of the fisherman from Galilee. He said, "So now we are all in the presence of God to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord." (Acts 10:33) In verse 28, Peter acknowledges that it is against Jewish law for him to enter the home and spend time with Gentiles. But by this point, the pieces of this God-ordained meeting had started to click in Peter's mind. In the introductory remarks to Peter's "sermon," we can see two clear principles.

God Desires all People to be Saved: Peter declares what God has been teaching him: God does not show favoritism. Just as one food is not more

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acceptable than another, one person is not more acceptable than another. The vision and declaration that God had made about the food in Peter's vision was an object lesson used by God to help Peter understand this principle. To understand this principle and why it was so life-changing for Peter we need to understand the mindset of first-century Jews. The Jews were God's chosen people. With a just cursory glance at some OT passages, we can get a glimpse of how Jews, like Peter, would have felt about their status in the world.

Read Genesis 12:3 (³I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.) When God first called Abraham from Ur, He announced that Abraham's descendants would be His instrument of blessing in the world.

Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14 (¹⁴and my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.) This passage concerns the relationship between God, Israel, prayer, and repentance, but it also reminds us that the nation bears His name.

Read Exodus 19:5-6a (⁵Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, ⁶and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.) The entirety of the nation was in a sense priestly and set apart (holy) to represent God to the nations and the world.

The Jews in Peter's day looked down upon other groups and refused to associate with them if at all possible. They also felt that God favored and loved them more than all other groups on earth. First-century Jews had a problem with racism and xenophobia.

FACILITATOR 2

Apply: In the twenty-first century we still deal with favoritism and discrimination. We do not like to hear about or admit that it's a problem. Moreover, we do not want to admit that sometimes we practice favoritism and discriminate against others. Ask your group to consider ways in which they might play favorites and/or discriminate against others (of a different race, economic class, nationality, or culture.) If you feel you need to be less forceful you can ask, in what ways might a person play favorites and/or discriminate against others. (Discuss their answers and depending on the atmosphere spend time asking the Lord to make those in the group most accepting of others.)

Explain: In Peter's mind and the minds of other Jews of his time, Israel was the most special group of people on the planet. In their minds, God loved them more than any other people on earth. Moreover, to associate with those outside of Abraham's descendants would make them dirty and unfit as figurative priests. However, Peter has come to understand that this is not the case. God does not lift his face to Israel and smile at the Jews any more than he does with other peoples. Azurdia asserts "In order to convert Cornelius, and to show the Jewish Christians the gospel was for everyone without distinction, God had to 'convert' Peter—not to Christianity but to the implications of Christianity." (Exalting, 143) With the coming of Christ, all people can be part of God's special people and His special plan. Later, Peter will make this explicit when he applies the language used for OT Israel to the NT church.

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Read 1 Pe 2:9–10 (⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises, of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.)

FACILITATOR 1

The first principle we see in Peter’s remarks is that God desires all people to be saved.

The second principle we see is that **Some People are More Ready to be Saved than Others**: Cornelius was ready to hear the gospel and did not even know it. When the men arrive at Simon the Tanner’s house looking for Peter, they describe Cornelius as “an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation.” Clearly this man who loved God acted out that love in a way was noticed by those in his community. More importantly, the Lord Himself noticed his actions. When the angel appeared to Cornelius the angel said, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have ascended as a memorial offering before God.” (10:4) This man had God’s attention because Cornelius’ attention was turned to God. He believed in the one true God of Israel, and he lived in a way that reflected his belief. Cornelius had seen the light of monotheism and because he acted on the revelation that he had by living righteously God sent Peter to give him the fuller revelation of Jesus.

In our world, we will encounter people who are hard and totally opposed to the Truth of the Gospel. We will also encounter people like Cornelius who are interested in spiritual things and trying the best they can to be good people. Many times, those people will jump at the chance to hear the Good News of Jesus. They are more ready to hear the gospel than some others.

Summarize and Transition: This passage reveals that Peter has come to understand that “in every nation the person who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to” (10:35) Him. It does not matter is a person is Jew or Gentile God will accept them. God had accepted Cornelius’ love and acts of service. Nevertheless, Cornelius only had a little bit of the truth and God told him to call Peter. Cornelius did not know he needed more truth, but God sent him a man who could teach him that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

2. THROUGH FAITH (ACTS 10:37-43)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 10:37-43

Explain: In this passage, Peter launches into what should be familiar to the reader of the books of Acts. When Peter is given the opportunity to proclaim the Truth about Jesus, he will take it. We can imagine him sitting with this group of willing souls and passionately teaching them the truth in what was “the first-ever cross-cultural home Bible study.” (Preaching, 150) The outline of his sermon focuses on the life of Jesus and presents the death and resurrection as essential to the gospel. Tony Merida outlines the message as

1. Jesus, the Messiah, is Lord of all.
2. Jesus was empowered by the Spirit to liberate the devil’s captives.
3. Jesus died under the curse deserved by others.

Notes:

“God was already working his grace in him, and it manifested itself in his good deeds. Now God would show him his greatest grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit.” (NAC, 261)

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4. Jesus was raised up to reign forever.
5. Jesus will judge everyone.
6. All of this is in accordance with the Scriptures, which promise forgiveness for everyone—for every people—who trust in Jesus’s name. (Exalting, 151)

In the book of Acts, Luke records five “sermons” by Peter (Acts 2:14-21; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; and 10:27-48). The “sermon” presented in Cornelius’ living room is unique among the more extensive of these “sermons” (excluding 5:29-32 which is very short). The unique nature of the sermon is dictated by the unique audience. The other recorded sermons by Peter in the Book of Acts were delivered to Jewish audiences. This sermon in Caesarea is delivered to a welcoming group of Gentiles who believe in the God of Israel. While they have a love and devotion to the Lord God, they do not possess the Biblical and theological grounding that the Jewish audiences would have possessed. This difference necessitates a different way of presenting the gospel. Here we can glean a third principle for today’s lesson: **Some People Need to Hear the Gospel in Different Ways.**

In Peter’s sermon to Cornelius, his family, and his friends Peter does not appeal directly to the Old Testament. In the other three sermons in Acts 2, 3, and 4 Peter quotes from the Old Testament in his presentation. He does not do that with this group because as people who grew up in a pagan world, they might not have been able to connect those dots. Instead, Peter focuses on the stories they have heard about Jesus. Remember they were God-fearers, but they had no cultural framework for connecting Jesus to the Lord God or to the Messiah. So, Peter reminds them of what they heard of Jesus.

FACILITATOR 2

Apply: We can experience similar situations today. We might consider two areas in which we might need to consider different approaches to sharing the gospel. First, individuals with varying degrees of Bible knowledge will require different ways of sharing. Visiting with someone who grew up in church and has a general grasp of Scripture will necessitate a different approach than visiting with someone who has never darkened the door of a church. Age and generational cohort will also affect how the gospel is shared. For example, communicating the gospel to a digital-native might require a different approach than sharing with a baby-boomer. Ask the group to consider some ways their church or small group does or can share the gospel with different kinds of people.

Explain: When presenting the gospel to those with more Bible knowledge, the presenter can reference biblical events and themes without explaining them. These people can also be “re-introduced” to the gospel through book studies or Scriptural dramas. When witnessing to those with less Bible knowledge we might rely on tools like the Evangecube or an outline like The Three Circles. Generational differences might lead one to use sermons or large group Bible study with older people who need to hear about Jesus. For younger people, you might witness to them using a video or a mobile app like Life on Mission.

Notes:

“This section is unique among the speeches of Acts in the amount of attention it gives to the ministry of Jesus. The other speeches of Peter emphasize the death and resurrection, as does this speech (vv. 39–40). Only the sermon in Cornelius’s house, however, provides an outline of Jesus’ earthly ministry (vv. 37–38).” (NAC, 261)

“The difference in this sermon to Gentiles reveals “the necessity Peter felt to explain the Jesus story more completely to Gentiles who would be familiar with the facts but not the meaning.” (HNTC, 164)

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Transition: Peter was culturally aware of his audience. He did not hit them with heavy theological content. He simply reminded them of the stories they knew about Jesus and then connected the group's love of God, understanding of the world, and their need for a savior. But before Peter can finish his sermon God intervenes. Let's look at that.

FACILITATOR 1

3. ACCEPTANCE FOUND (ACTS 10:44-48)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 9:10-16

Explain: In this passage, we see that salvation is an internal event evidenced by the external working of the Holy Spirit and the intentional work of the believer.

Salvation is an internal event: Many times, in our churches or when we present the gospel one-on-one we conclude with a call to action—come down the aisle or pray a prayer. Peter does something similar in his other presentations of the gospel. Specifically in Acts 2:38, he tells the people to “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This is a good practice when presenting the gospel. A good gospel presentation should always end with a call to follow Jesus. However, as so many like to point out in our current culture, a prayer does not save a person. That is correct, but generally the way one repents and confesses Jesus as Lord is through prayer. However, as this passage shows us, God knows the heart of the repentant person more clearly than anyone else. These people in Cornelius' home came to the place in their hearts and heads where they believed the gospel. God did not wait for them to vocalize a prayer to save them. Salvation takes place in our innermost being and God knows the moment that it takes place.

Salvation is always evidenced by the external working of the Spirit: In the book of Acts, the remarkable manifestation of the Spirit through “speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God” takes place several times. While the Holy Spirit does not evidence salvation in the same way today, the work of the Spirit in a believer's life *does* substantiate the internal work of salvation. While we cannot see the justifying work of God in a person's heart, we can see the sanctifying work of the Spirit in a person's life. A changed person demonstrates that God has changed them.

Salvation is evidenced by the intentional work of the believer. The manifestation of tongues by the new Gentile believers convinced Peter that the Christian movement had expanded to the Gentiles. The next logical step for them was to be baptized. The same is true today. When a person comes to faith in Christ the next logical step is baptism. Baptism is an intentional action taken by the new believer to show the world what has happened internally. It is not the only intentional step that authenticates God's work in their life. Other intentional actions include participating in spiritual disciplines that amplify the work of the Spirit during the sanctification process. Spiritual disciplines include Bible reading and study, prayer, Christian stewardship, and evangelism.

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Apply: Ask the group to consider their salvation experience:

- Have they truly experienced the internal work of God in their life and experienced true salvation?
- If so, do they allow the Spirit to work in their lives and move them toward Christlikeness?
- Do they participate with the Spirit through the practice of the spiritual disciplines?

Encourage a moment of prayer and let the group respond to those questions in prayer to the Lord.

Summarize and Transition: The Lord brought Peter to this group of Gentiles. He did his part and presented the gospel. Then God did His part by saving them. Finally, they followed through in obedience and baptism. Every person played a part in this movement of the gospel from a Jewish sect to a worldwide faith.

CONCLUDE

We cannot lose sight of the fact that while this group of Gentiles moved from death to life through salvation, Peter too experienced a change. Through the visions sent by God and the experiences in Caesarea, Peter became more accepting of others. They moved into the Kingdom of God and Peter allowed them to move into his life. Luke tells us that “they asked him to stay for a few days.” We can assume he stayed because, in the next chapter, we are going to see that this caused others to complain. Peter’s actions can remind us that God still calls believers to put away favoritism, racism, and exclusion. We are to cross all boundaries and share the gospel. Then we are to accept others into our lives and live in Christian fellowship with all people.

Conclude the group time in prayer asking the Lord to grow the group members in Christlikeness and acceptance of others who might look different or live differently than they.

Notes: