SERMON TRANSCRIPT

11.22.2026 | Forgiveness For All Who Believe | Acts 10:34-48| Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I wanna invite you to turn with me to Acts chapter 10. We've been walking through the book of Acts and we're going to continue for today. And then we're gonna pause starting next Sunday for the season of Advent. And over the course of Advent, we'll go through gospel of John chapter one. Just consider what has happened in the incarnation and what it means for us. But today we're continuing on in our study of Acts and we're in Acts chapter 10. And today's passage really is part two of what we saw last week at the beginning of Acts chapter 10.

Last week we were introduced to a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman centurion. He was living in Caesarea, which was an important city of the Roman empire in the area of Israel. He was a centurion, meaning he was powerful. He was over about a hundred soldiers in the Roman army. We also found out that he was a fear of the God of Israel. He believed in the God of Israel. He sought to live in accordance with the 10 commandments probably. He gave generously. He prayed continually. And one day an angel came to him and said, Cornelius, your prayers have been heard by God.

I want you to do something. I want you to send a couple of people to go and find Simon Peter because he's got a message for you. Around that same time, Simon Peter was praying. He was hungry and he saw a vision. He saw that there was a sheet of animals, reptiles, birds, all different types of animals from the ground. It came down and he heard a voice from God telling him to rise, kill and eat. Peter, probably thinking this was a test, said, no, you don't understand. I don't eat those unclean animals. The voice from heaven said, what God has called clean, don't call common. What God has made clean, don't call unclean. This happened three times. And as Peter was thinking about what all this meant, these men showed up. They said they were from Cornelius and Peter started to put it all together. He understood that this vision wasn't just about animals and it wasn't just about food. It was about his limited perspective.

See, Peter thought that to be Christian, to be a follower of Jesus meant that you had to be Jewish. You had to follow the Jewish customs. Therefore, he tended to look down, as other Jews did at the time, on those who did not follow their customs. Thought that the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people were somewhat beneath them. God was going to show him something different. In fact, we saw last week, as he shows up at Cornelius' house, he says, you know that Jewish people like me don't normally associate with Gentiles like you in this way. But God is showing me something new. He's changing my perspective. Cornelius says, I heard a message from God to send for you because you had a message for me. What is that message?

And that's where we pick up in verse 34 today. Luke writes, so Peter opened his mouth and said, truly, I understand that God shows no partiality. But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of the peace of through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. 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 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 on the third day and made him to appear. Not to all people, but to us who have 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. While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Our family will be traveling this week for Thanksgiving. And all the other craziness that seems to be happening in the airline travel right now, one of the things that I just noticed that is a common experience in flying is you get put into certain groups and classes whenever you're in airports. Like they love to tell you which boarding group that you're in. Or they love to tell you if you're in gold class or platinum class, first class, if you're in economy or preferred economy. When

you're flying, you get put in all sorts of these different groups, but I find that one of the places you experience this most sharply is at airport lounges. (Audience Laughing) Airport lounges really is where you find out if you belong or you don't belong. I don't know if you've ever been to an airport lounge, but if you've ever passed by the front desk of one, you've probably seen somebody pleading their case as to why they should be let in. Like they're showing something on their phone to this person saying, no, no, I have a pass to get in here, but for some reason, maybe they don't belong. I've been that person before. (Audience Laughing) I have this credit card that I probably pay way too much money for that's supposed to allow me access to airport lounges. And I'll always find that something happens where I just sometimes don't get let in. Like maybe for some reason my flight doesn't qualify on that day, or maybe they've changed the rules and kids aren't let into the lounge. Or maybe it's just like two of my kids can come in. And so I'm like, all right Malachi, don't forget, it's gate D7, we'll see you there in 45 minutes.

Like there's just nothing more dejecting than feeling like you're gonna get to enter the lounge and just being told like you don't belong here. I was thinking about that today because I think at the center of this passage is really the question of who belongs. Really it's a question of who belongs to the people of God. If you would have asked Peter earlier in Acts chapter 10, he probably would have told you that only Jewish people or only those who follow the Jewish customs belong. In fact, even the way that the whole temple was set up was to restrict access to people who are not a Jewish descent. He said, I don't normally associate with people who are Gentiles, but God is showing him something. It's not just about where you're from or who you're related to, what ethnicity or race that you're a part of. But the question is, okay, well then who does belong in the people of God? Does Cornelius, a man who's not Jewish, but who seeks God, who fears God, who tries to live for God, who prays continually, does he belong in the people of God? What, the people of his house, do they belong in the people of God?

Well, I think we see in this passage as Peter stands before these Gentiles and proclaims the gospel. I think in a sense, what he says is this. He says, no one is beyond the reach of God, but all are in need of the grace of God. And all can receive the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and what he's done. Peter, I think it's coming to this realization that no one is beyond the reach of God. But something he knows is that everyone needs the grace of God and everyone can receive the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That's how I would just think about this message that Peter proclaims and what happens in response. And I just wanna walk you through his gospel message by breaking it down into three parts.

The first part is, as Peter begins, I think he helps us to see that our differences don't determine our standing before God. Our differences don't determine our standing with God. One of the things that we often do as people is we tend to divide. We tend to divide based on ethnicity, race, culture, language, where we come from, who we're related to. Maybe these days we tend to divide based on political preference, things that we do, ways that we choose to live. We just naturally tend to divide. And what I think often happens also is that we tend to make judgments based on those divisions. We tend to start to think that certain groups of people are part of the in crowd and other groups are part of the out crowd. We can't help but often think that the groups that we are a part of, the people we come from, are somewhat better than other people.

Certainly Peter, and I think the people of Israel in this day and age thought this. They believed that they were God's chosen people and so they thought that other peoples, other nations, other cultures were beneath their culture. And Peter thought it was unlawful, not good for him to associate with Gentiles because he thought that they were somehow beneath them. See, not only was he dividing, as the Jewish people probably did in that day, between him and the non-Jews, but he's making a judgment and I think even in that he's probably assuming that God makes that same judgment. Peter didn't just think that he was probably better than Cornelius, but he probably thought that God loved him more than he loved Cornelius. So that God loved the people of Israel, the Jewish people, more than he did the Gentiles.

But Peter's coming to see that that's not the right way of thinking. Listen to how Peter begins in verse 34. Says Peter opened his mouth and said, truly I understand that God shows no partiality. That language for partiality, it really means favoritism. He says, I understand that God doesn't have favorites. And I think he's saying this because that's not always the way that he thought. I think he really believed that God had favorites and now he's coming to understand that God doesn't show favoritism. God doesn't look at people and divide them based on culture or race or ethnicity or looks or preferences. He doesn't have favorites in the world. He doesn't think that one type of person, one group of people is

better than the other. God doesn't make those types of judgments. So Peter's coming to this realization. He says, I understand now that our differences don't change the way that God views us. Yes, God had given a special place for Israel, the Jewish people in his plan of redemption, but Peter's having to remember that it was a reason for that. That was so that all peoples could be blessed.

I mean, think about what he says in verse 36. He says, as for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. Peter says, yes, the law and the prophets and the revelation and even the Messiah came to Israel, but for a purpose, not because we are better than other people, but so that we could be a blessing to other people. God had told Abraham back in the very beginning, I am going to bless your family so that all the families of the earth might be blessed. The Jewish people had kind of forgotten this and Peter's coming to this realization now, that yes, our people had a special role in God's plan of redemption, but it was for the purpose that all people would be blessed. Israel had been given this treasure that they might share it with all families and all nations.

So yes, God doesn't have favorites. Now that doesn't mean we all have the same experience. The Jewish people had a different experience than the Gentile people. God doesn't have favoritism, doesn't mean we'll all have the same exact things in this world, but I think what Peter's trying to say is it doesn't change our relationship with God. Your heritage, your ethnicity, your looks, none of that changes your relationship with God. He is God over all and as he says here, Jesus is Lord over all. But he does say there is one thing that makes a difference. It was back in verse 35. Notice what he says, he says, "I know that God doesn't show partiality," verse 35, "but in every nation, anyone who fears him "and does what is right is acceptable to him."

There's two things I wanna help you see in this verse. By what Peter means when he says anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him. I think the first thing that I want you to understand is I think Peter is communicating here that no one is beyond the reach of God. In other words, Cornelius was seeking God. He's trying to live for the God of Israel. He's praying to God and God doesn't come to Cornelius and say, "Cornelius, I know you're seeking me. "You're praying to me, but sorry, you're not Jewish. "So we can't have a relationship." Peter's coming to understand that no one, even the Gentiles, aren't beyond the reach of God, that anyone who seeks God, anyone who is striving to know God, God will reveal himself to him. I don't think he's saying that Cornelius is accepted by God as if there's no problem. So I think he is saying that those who seek God, God will reveal himself to them. I think it's still true today. I think if people are really seeking God, God will make himself known to them.

Maybe it's through as they read the Bible, maybe it's through someone preaching the good news of Jesus, maybe as we even talked about last week, it comes through dreams and visions. God begins to reveal himself to people, but if people, no matter where they are, no matter what they've done, if they seek God, God will reveal himself to them. No one is beyond God's reach. I think it's the first thing to take away from Peter's statement here. But I think the other thing that we have to take away from Peter's statement is that all people still need the grace of God. It's important to understand when Peter says that anyone who fears God and seeks him is accepted, doesn't mean again that Cornelius is just accepted in the people of God because he's striving to live for God.

Here's why I tell you this. Because again, Cornelius was trying to live a good life, he's praying to God, and God also didn't come to him and say, "Hey, Cornelius, I've seen all those good things "that you're doing, I notice how generous you are "and how fervently you've been praying, so guess what? "We're good. "Our relationship is all good. "You've done enough good things, "we're now in a right relationship." No, what he says is, "I see that you're seeking me, "and here's what I want you to do. "Go find this Jewish man and ask him to come "and preach to you." And what you're gonna need to do is you're gonna need to repent and you're gonna need to believe in Jesus of Nazareth. See, Peter's coming to understand that no one is beyond the reach of God, but all people, including Cornelius, need the grace of God. Cornelius did not need to hear that his good, religious actions were enough. He needed to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

It's the same for you and I. No matter where you come from, no matter what you've done, no matter our differences, it doesn't change our standing with God, meaning God doesn't have favorites, he doesn't look down on some people, but also at the same time, all of us are separated from God and the life that is in him. Good, moral, religious people and pagan, immoral people, all are separated from God and the life that is in him. None of our differences ultimately change our standing before God, we are all created in his image and we have all separated ourselves from him. And therefore,

just as Peter needed to hear this message of Jesus Christ, so do we need to hear this message of Jesus Christ. We need to understand that Jesus has accomplished what we could never do.

This is the second part, I think, of Peter's message here to Cornelius. He wants Cornelius to know that Jesus accomplished what we could never do. You think about what Cornelius has accomplished in his life. He's a centurion, meaning he has worked his way up the ranks of the Roman army enough to where there is about 100 soldiers who answered to him. He's successful in his career, he's got power, but also at the same time, he's a good person. Like it says that he seeks to live for God and even, we heard last week that the Jewish people spoke highly of him. Most of the time, the Jews did not like the people that were in ranks of the Roman army, but it says he is well spoken of by the Jewish nation because of the way that he lives his life. Cornelius is a man who has accomplished a lot, but what he is going to discover here is that all that he has accomplished is not able to save him from his sins. What Cornelius is here is it's not, here's all the good things you've been doing, but rather, here is what Jesus has done on your behalf.

Listen to what Peter says, he says in verse 37, he says, "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 oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." It's kind of interesting, I mean, it's only takes up a couple of verses, but Peter actually spends more time here talking about Jesus' earthly ministry than many other gospel proclamations in the book of Acts. You have to kind of wonder, well, why is that? I think a big reason is Cornelius probably would have heard of Jesus of Nazareth. I mean, just in proximity, he probably would have known that there was a man named Jesus who did these things, and these things probably resonated with Cornelius. He says, "Cornelius, I know that you're seeking to live a good life. You're being generous with those who are in need, but there is a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who actually lived a better life than you. He didn't just give generously through alms, but he healed people who were sick. He set free people who were in bondage to the devil. He did this because he wasn't just an ordinary man."

Peter makes clear that Jesus, who is Lord of all, had the Spirit of God within him. He had the power of God to live these things out. He had the presence of God with him. Yet, this Jesus, who lived a life that was even better than Cornelius, he died. And not only did he die, but in the way that he died, verse 39, it says, "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." You know, to die by hanging on a tree in this time, it was a very terrible, shameful way to die. In the Roman world, it meant that you had died a criminal's death. In the Jewish world, it meant that you died under a curse. Why did this man, who did all these good things, lived a life even better than Cornelius could live, healed people, had the Spirit of God, why did he die in such a shameful, cursed way?

The answer is, is because he was dying in the place of Cornelius and of you and I. Lionel says, no matter how good Cornelius was, he was still a sinful man who had separated himself from the life that is in God. What he ultimately deserved was death. Even in all his good things, there was a sin and a shame that he carried. And the same is true for each one of us. Each one of us, created by God, God shows no favorites. We're all made in his image, but yet we've all separated ourselves from the life that is in him. We're all deserving of death, and yet it was Jesus who died in our place. Jesus lived the life that Cornelius couldn't live, and he died the death that Cornelius should have died.

The same is true for each one of us. Jesus accomplished what we could never do, in his life and in his death, and then thank God he did not stay dead. We saw just a couple of chapters back, Jesus confronting Saul on the road to Damascus. Why? Because Jesus is alive. What's what Peter says next, he died a shameful death by being hanged on a tree, verse 40, but God raised him on the third day, and made him to appear, not to all people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He says we've got testimonies to testify to the fact that Jesus really rose from the dead. We ate with him, we drank with him, we saw his body, saw that he was really alive, and he wasn't just coming to us, he was just entrusting us with the message to be witnesses, that Jesus rose from the dead, and now he has called us to share this message with others. Verse 42, 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. This Jesus who died in your place and rose from the dead, Peter says he is coming back to judge all people. The one who was humble enough to die on a cross, is coming back to be the judge. He is gentle and he is lowly, but he is also Lord of all. He's been appointed by God to be the judge overall, and so it is imperative that this message be shared.

Peter set up this whole message by saying, this is about the peace that comes through Jesus Christ. That all your striving Cornelius, all your good works, you have still separated yourself from God. You are still in need of forgiveness, but guess what? Because Jesus lived the life he did here on earth, because he died in your place, because he rose from the dead, he's accomplished what you could never do, therefore you could have the peace that you desire through him. Verse 43, to him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Cornelius' ethnicity didn't make him unreachable, but he still needed the grace of God. Peter says you still need the forgiveness of your sins, and it comes through belief in Jesus Christ.

Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ? Have you stopped your striving? You're trying to earn it on your own. You're hoping that you're seeking God, and your prayers and your good works will be enough to make you right. Have you taken that burden off your back and simply trusted that Jesus has accomplished what you could never do? If so, if you believe in his name, Peter says you have forgiveness of your sins. You have peace with God through faith in Jesus. See, the last part I think of this message is that faith allows us to receive what we could never earn. Faith receives what we could never earn. We're all separated from God in our sin. Jesus accomplished the work of salvation on our behalf, and by faith, we can receive what we never could have accomplished. Cornelius had accomplished a lot in his life, but yet he couldn't earn his salvation.

Peter is there not to affirm all his good actions, but he is there to proclaim the good news of Jesus, that if all who believe in the name of Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins. And Cornelius, and those who are in his house, they believe this, they receive the forgiveness of sins. They are made right with God. They receive this peace that comes through Jesus Christ. But yet, that's not all Cornelius receives. God doesn't just give forgiveness to those who believe in Jesus, but he gives his spirit. He gives himself. Verse 44, "While Peter was still saying these things, "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word." This is the prayer of every preacher, that while you're still preaching, the spirit falls and begins to work in people's lives. While he's still preaching, the Holy Spirit falls on all those who are listening, and the believers from among the circumcised, that's the Jewish people who are listening, who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. What you have here is almost like a Gentile Pentecost. Just as the spirit had fallen on Pentecost that day and the people were speaking in tongues to show the spirit's presence and power, that's what's happening in these moments. Cornelius and those people that are of his household, his friends and family, they are speaking in tongues to show the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I've tried to mention throughout our study, the book of Acts, that what happens in Acts isn't always what happens, or doesn't always look exactly like it does in the book of Acts. It'd be wrong to read this passage and think, well, that means if there's no tongues, then there's no Holy Spirit. Now one of the things that we see throughout the book of Acts, I pointed this out when the gospel went to Samaria, is that each time the gospel kind of goes forth to a new people or crosses a new boundary, there's this special unique way that it is shown so that we know that it is real. So like when the gospel went to Samaria, the apostles had to go and lay their hands so that people could receive the Holy Spirit to make sure that the good news of Jesus had been accurately proclaimed as the gospel went to a new people. Here, as the Holy Spirit comes to the Gentiles, it shows up, he shows up in a powerful way to let people know that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. And I think that was really important because it brings together the people of God in a unique way.

Now Peter just recognizes there's no differences between us and our ethnicities, all of the differences that the world would define us by. We're all sinful in needs of God's grace, but not only do we all receive forgiveness, but we all have the same Holy Spirit inside of us. He'll even say in just a moment, they should be baptized because they have the same Holy Spirit that we have. Think about how unifying that is for the people of God. Jesus is Lord of all. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter four, "There is one Father over all the people of God." We're all in one family. "There is one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "There is one Spirit who indwells all the people of God. "There is one hope, there is one faith, "there is one baptism." And that's how this story concludes. That as they receive by faith forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they are baptized together. Verse 47, Peter says, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people "who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And they commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Oh, I love the unity that's happening in this story. The way that God is bringing people together. Sometimes it's hard for us to grasp just the deep divides that would have been between Peter and Cornelius as Jew and Gentile. How big the walls are that they would have built up between them. Probably seemed like nobody could overcome, but in just a moment they had come down. God had united these people. Peter was said that he was hesitant to even come to Cornelius' house. Now he stays there for some days, Luke tells us. I don't know how long it was before Peter ate a piece of bacon with them or ate some shellfish, but I think at some point he did because there was true fellowship happening there. Because that's what the gospel does.

So the gospel reconciles us to God, but also to each other. Why? Why? Because the gospel humbles us. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. You can't believe that you're only saved by God's grace and you did nothing to earn that salvation and look down on anybody else. It just doesn't work together. If you really believe the message of the gospel that you are a sinner only saved by God's grace, it should humble you. Enough to never judge or look down on anyone else. But at the same time, the gospel elevates each one of us. It's hard to look at someone and know that Jesus died for them and the Holy Spirit indwells them and look down upon them. If we really believe this gospel message, that we receive the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit of God, that all the people you see who are believers in Jesus, they have the same spirit that you have.

There's this unity that happens amongst people. No matter the divisions, no matter the differences, God is bringing us together in Jesus Christ. So if you're here this morning and you've never trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I pray today that this gospel truth of all that we sang about earlier, that Peter proclaims just so straightforward in this passage, I pray that you would hear this and believe. I pray the Holy Spirit would work even right now for you to trust in Jesus and receive the forgiveness of your sins, receive the Holy Spirit of God. But I pray that those of us who believe this message would truly believe it. That we would treat other Christians as if they have the same spirit, that we would walk in unity together, and we would also carry out this mission together. That we would remember that the same spirit who indwelled Peter, the same spirit who empowers Cornelius and his family members to speak in tongues, he indwells you now. He is empowering you and equipping you to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. He dwells within us as his people, as his church, that we might carry out this mission that he has given us. So let us carry this mission out. Let us continue to repeat this gospel message so that other people might receive forgiveness of sins, might receive the Spirit of God.