

The Kingdom is Available to Anyone

Acts 10

DT- God shows no favoritism.

Last week we looked at a portion of Acts 8 and how persecution effected the church. We are going to skip Acts 9 because that is a description of Saul's conversion and later this year the guys will preach through Acts looking at the life of Paul. That means today we will be looking at Acts chapter 10 and the visit Peter makes to Cornelius's house.

This should be a text that is near and dear to our hearts, because this is the moment were God makes the kingdom available to anyone. This new movement, this new thing that God was doing is not just for the Jews. God is going to break down some pretty large walls for Peter in this passage to teach him that even the Gentiles get to be part of the kingdom. Let's pray and we will see how God does this.

PRAY

We all have keys. Keys to our cars; keys to our house; keys to the place we work. Some of us carry lots of keys and some of us are more minimalistic in the amount of keys we carry. When Wendell comes in to do his maintenance projects here at the church we can hear him coming as his keys rattle against his leg. Keys of some kind are just part of our existence.

Right out of college when I was in part time ministry, my full-time job was working grounds at John Brown University in Siloam Springs Arkansas. Many of you knew that already. Because of the nature of that job we had keys to certain buildings across the campus. My first day on the job, my boss pulled a prank on me. He handed me the biggest bundle of keys I had ever seen. It was so big I honestly could barely get it in my pocket. He went through a whole list of stuff that those keys were for. I didn't know any better so I lugged those things around for the entire week until finally he told me that only 3 keys in that entire bundle would actually work. They all had a good laugh at my expense that Friday afternoon.

Nowadays the metal keys are replaced by fobs or cards. We have fobs that operate the doors here at the church. The gym here in town uses fobs. Hospitals use them to keep certain areas more secure. Whether you have a plastic fob or a metal key they all do the same thing. They are all used for the same purpose; to open something.

Peter had a set of keys. They weren't metal keys or plastic fobs; they were keys of responsibility. Keys of opportunity. Keys of leadership. Those keys were entrusted to him by Jesus himself. Jesus was asking the disciples who people say he is and in Matthew 16:15-19 Jesus asked, "But who do you say I

am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. If keys open things what did these keys open? They kingdom of course. The kingdom was not open in a physical way but a spiritual way. Peter first uses the keys to open the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Here in Acts 10 Peter uses those same keys to open the door to the kingdom for the Gentiles. How God goes about orchestrating this event is remarkable, and there are some important principles that we need to learn from this text. What we see first is how God provides the preparation.

1. God provides the preparation.

The reason Peter and Cornelius meet is solely because of God. He prepares Cornelius first and then Peter. In both cases he uses a vision or a trance to create this meeting. We learn that Cornelius is a Roman army officer and was a captain of the Italian Regiment. Without boring you with too many details you should know that Cornelius has reached the highest rank that he can, given his status.

Not only is he a high-ranking officer but he is also described by Luke as a devout, God fearing man, and everyone in his household followed his example. Although Cornelius was a Gentile, he did Jewish things. He gave generous offerings to the poor and he prayed at regular intervals. Then Acts 10:3-6 says this, "One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore."

How many of you would like to have a vision that specific? The angel essentially gives him the address. Send some men down to Joppa and bring Peter back to you. Cornelius responded right away and sent a few guys down to Joppa.

Meanwhile in Joppa God was about to make some preparations for Peter. The text says that Peter went up on the roof at about noon to pray. Going up on the roof was a normal thing to do, but the text says he was hungry. Most likely he hadn't eaten that day but there was a meal being prepared that he could smell and he fell into a trance. Does that mean Peter was getting hangry? Was he smelling the food and then fell into some strange premeal nap?

I can remember my mom telling Abby when we first got together that you better feed me at the right time otherwise I'll get cranky. She described that as a trait of all Frisbie men, but I would say that's a trait of all men. Peter's a little hungry, he can smell the food and falls into this trance. While in that trance Acts 10:11-16 says, "He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven."

I thought we'd have a little fun this morning and test your knowledge of the OT law. I'm going to say an animal and you tell me yes or no if that animal is clean and could have been eaten by the Israelites.

Camel	No
Goat	Yes
Eagle	No it hunts
Ostrich	No
Buzzard	No
Cricket	Yes
Locust	Yes
Rabbit	No
Antelope	Yes
Roebuck	Yes
Owl	No

Raven	No
Snake	No
Falcon	No
Ox	Yes
Badger	No paws
Sheep	Yes
Bat	No hands
Eel	No
Pig	No split hoof
Deer	Yes
Gazelle	Yes
Dove	Yes

If God had not abolished these laws you could not eat crab, lobster, shrimp, or any kind of pork. If you like Barbeque or seafood be sure you thank God that he changed these rules.

Peter sees a sheet full of animals, like the list we just went through, 3 times over. At first Peter doesn't understand the meaning of the vision, but he's a devout Jew and will not eat an animal that is unclean. Yet the voice says do not call something unclean if God has made it clean. Peter is confused about this whole thing. While he's still trying to wrap his head around this vision the guys sent by Cornelius show up.

The Holy Spirit says to Peter, get up and go with these men without hesitation because I have sent them. Peter does what he's told, and they arrive in Caesarea the next day. One of the principles we are learning from this text, and we will continue to learn it as we move one, is that we need to be open to the movement of the Spirit.

-Be open to the movement of the Spirit.

If the Spirit moves you to do something then go do it. I would imagine that many of you have heard about what is going on at Asbury University in Kentucky. A revival, an awakening began to happen a few weeks ago at a chapel service and thousands began to flock to Kentucky. It overwhelmed the little town of Willmore, and they even had to shut down the exit off the highway.

Some are arguing whether this is a true revival, is it just an awakening, is it just a really long worship service. Only time will tell as we see what comes of this event. It's fine that some are skeptical of this. 1 John 4:1 says, "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world."

It's fine for folks to test this revival and see if it is genuine. I didn't attend so I have no way of testing it, but I do know a few people who did. They were open to the movement of the Spirit, and they went and worshiped, and found it to be genuine. That doesn't make it a revival necessarily, but we might consider it an awakening of some sort. There's an old saying that goes, "Trust but verify." I think Ronald Regan made that phrase famous back when he signed the treaty with Gorbachev.

We need to be open to the Spirit's leading in our life. Whether the Spirit leads us to pray for someone right there in the moment, or he leads us to take some step of faith, or he leads us to say something when we might normally be silent. In whatever we're doing or facing, be open to the movement of the Spirit. A simple word of encouragement, a quick prayer with a friend or a stranger might completely alter their day.

Peter was open to the movement of the Spirit and when he arrived at Cornelius's house not only was Cornelius there but so were all his relatives and close friends. Cornelius tries to bow down to Peter in worship and Peter says, "Stand up, I'm just a human like you." They talk for a minute and then Cornelius asked him to come inside and that was a big No No for a Jew. You did not go inside a Gentiles house if you were a Jew, but Peter is starting to realize what that vision of the clean and unclean animals was about.

God, through the movement of His Spirit, is starting to break down some racial barriers that Peter and the entire Jewish community had built when it came to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were seen as unclean just like certain animals could not be eaten because they were unclean. The voice in Peter's vision said "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean". This was God's way of pushing Peter to use those keys to the kingdom to open the spiritual door for the Gentiles to come in and be part of what God was doing.

In fact, after Cornelius shares the story of his vision with Peter, the realization is complete and Peter says in Acts 10:34-35, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right."

Peter now fully gets it. God shows no favoritism. God has no prejudice against skin color. No prejudice against ethnicities. No prejudice against socioeconomic level. God shows no favoritism, and neither should we. Peter is being refined here in this moment. His old ways of thinking are being redeemed to think more like Christ. Hopefully that is happening in your life too. Pay attention and be open to the movement of the Spirit and God will refine you as well.

Throughout this whole interaction, God was the one providing the preparation for Peter and Cornelius to meet. That's typically what God does in our lives just before the Spirit moves. Once the Spirit moves us, God uses us for the purpose of proclamation.

2. God uses us for the purpose of proclamation.

That's precisely what Peter begins to do in verse 36. Peter retells the story of Jesus ministry, and then in Acts 10:39-45 he says, "They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name." Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too."

Peter preached the Word. Without proclamation there is no faith. The public at large knew about Jesus life, ministry, and death. Peter assumes that Cornelius and his relatives and friends knew that much; but only the Apostles and a few other believers were witnesses of his resurrection. Peter finishes his history lesson, and moves straight into the proclamation of the gospel when he says everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name. As Peter is proclaiming the good news, Cornelius and those around him begin to believe Peter's message and the Holy Spirit interrupts his sermon.

The folks at Cornelius's house began to speak in tongues and praising God. For Peter and the other Jews who came with him; this solidified that the Gentiles would get to be part of the kingdom too. Immediately Peter moves towards baptism, and from what we can tell the whole house was baptized that day. They showed Peter their gratitude by asking him to stay with them for several more days. Peter had the keys to the Kingdom, and he opened the door. The second important principle we need to learn from this text is that we must be willing to speak.

- Be willing to speak.

Church, it's not enough to just study the Word. It's not enough to just believe it and hide it in your heart. It's not enough to put in pictures and decorations and hang them on the walls around your house. We must speak it. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ."

The only way that the broken and lost will hear the good news is if we speak it to them just like Peter did here. I want to share a great resource with you. It's a book called "We Speak" proclaiming truth in a age of talk. It's written by 3 guys from Eastview Christian Church in Illinois. It's actually a 7 week devotional book to encourage you and help you find your voice so that you feel comfortable and ready to speak.

One of the sentences I highlighted in the opening chapter says this, "Speaking for Jesus, then and now, is arranged by the Holy Spirit through events and circumstances in our lives." That's exactly what the Spirit was doing here in Acts and he still works in that same way today.

God made all the preparations for Peter and Cornelius to meet. Then God used Peter to proclaim his message of reconciliation. A reconciliation that went beyond the Jews, and included the Gentiles as well. When I read this chapter I can't help but think about Romans 10:13-15 that says, "For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

How true that statement is. Church, always be open to the movement of the Spirit, and when you get the opportunity be willing to speak. The dominant thought of this sermon is the dominant thought of this passage. It's what Peter finally realized his vision was all about. God shows no favoritism. This chapter is proof of that. Therefore, we can show no favoritism when it comes to spreading the good news of the gospel message. When the spirit moves, speak; and tell anyone and everyone the good news.