

Again, that's Acts chapter 10, looking at the whole chapter beginning at verse 1. I'm sure at least most of you are pretty well aware of the basic context for Acts. Many of you were around when Dr. Waters did a series through Acts a couple years ago. For those of you that aren't familiar, the book of Acts is one of the few books of the Bible where Jesus himself actually gives us an outline for the book. Like, I don't know how many outlines of books I've had to memorize for classes and whatnot. And, you know, and someone might disagree with my outline. In this case, I can be like, this outline comes from Jesus. So, disagree at your own peril.

But the outline he gives comes in chapter one, where he tells his apostles that you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And if you read the book of Acts, that's exactly what happens. The gospel first goes out in Jerusalem. in Acts 2, and then the gospel moves out from there into Judea as the persecution by Saul drives people out into the neighboring cities. And then the gospel makes its way into Samaria. The Samaritans, the sort of half-breeds, they had kind of a worship of God, not quite, gets into them. Well, in this passage, the gospel begins to go out finally to that last category. the ends of the earth, the Gentiles.

So let's read this text. Now as we read it, it's a long section, so I'm gonna be skipping ahead a couple of places just so that the reading doesn't get too burdensome, but it'll be in front of you so you can reference that as we go through the sermon. But before we read this text, let's ask God's help in prayer. Father in heaven, our prayer as we look at this text is simple. What we know not, teach us. What we have not, give us. What we are not, make us. For we are poor and needy. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Reading from Acts chapter 10, beginning at verse 1.

Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort. a devout man, one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw a vision, and an angel of God, who had just come to him, and said to him, Cornelius, and fixing his gaze upon him, and being much alarmed, he said, what is it, Lord? And he said to him, Your prayers and alms have ascended as memorial before God.

And now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man called Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying with a certain Tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea. And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in the constant attendance upon him. And after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up to the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and was desiring to eat. But while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance and he beheld the sky opened up and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by the four corners to the ground. And there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

And a voice came to him, arise, Peter. kill, eat. But Peter said, by no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean. And again, a voice came to him a second time. What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy. And this happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Now, while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what this vision which he had seen might be, Now skipping ahead a little bit down to verse 34, Peter is approached by these men. He hears about Cornelius. He agrees to go with them. He gets down to Cornelius's house and Cornelius repeats the vision that he'd been given by the angel and says, Peter, what do you have to tell me? What's this message that God has sent you to tell me?

Verse 34, and opening his mouth, Peter said, I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation, the man who fears him and does what is right, he is welcome to him. The word which he sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all.

You yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God appointed him with the Holy Spirit and power. Now 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 these things he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, and they also put him to death by hanging him on the cross. God raised him up on the third day and granted that he should become visible, not to all men, but to the witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he ordered us to preach to the people and to solemnly testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.

Of him, all the prophets bear witness that through his name, everyone who believes in him receives the forgiveness of sins. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speak with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, Surely no one can refuse water for these to be baptized, who received the Holy Spirit just as we, can he? And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay there a few days. This is the word of the Lord. May had his blessing to it. Some of you might know this, some of you may not.

I probably don't look it, but I actually played football in high school. Varsity football. I say played football. I mean, I played on the junior varsity team, but when it came to the actual varsity football team, I didn't get to play much. And honestly, being on the team wasn't that big of an accomplishment. Where I come from, if you can cast a shadow, you can be on a football team. There's like 22 guys on the team. It was crazy. But yeah, I'm on this football team. And during the varsity games, anyway, I didn't really feel like I was on the team. I mean, technically, I was on the team. But I was more of a glorified spectator. I did have one very important job, though. I was very, very good at it. In fact, I was so good at this job that when I'd get up off the bench and someone else would sit there, it'd burn them. I was the best bench warmer ever. It was great.

But yeah, when I was on this football team, I felt as though I was a glorified spectator. I was sort of a second-class member of the team. The starters, the guys who actually played, they were the real teammates. I was just sort of there. And as we read this text, we have to remember the original audience. The original audience was the early church composed of both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. And Gentile Christians who would read this text, they would be coming from a context where they would be tempted to feel like second-class citizens in the church. They'd be tempted to feel like I did on the varsity team.

You know, I'm technically in the church, I'm technically quite a part of Christ's body, but whenever the pastor gets up to preach, he's preaching about Abraham, the father of the Jews. He's preaching about Israel. That's not my nation, that's not where I come from, at least not physically. And he's talking about this Jesus, I love Jesus, but he's a Jewish person, he's a Jewish Messiah. Am I really a covenant heir? Am I really the same kind of believer as these Jewish Christians?

And you know, many in the church today might feel that way too. I mean, not in the same sense that Gentile Christians did back then, but wouldn't you say that there's a similar feeling among many in the church who didn't grow up in a Christian home? You know, you run into people who have been blessed with a Christian heritage, who grew up with their father reading to them from the Bible, leading them in prayer. They know all the Christianese, they know all the terms. They have parts of the catechism memorized, and you're just a new Christian.

And you think, am I really a Christian? Am I really a believer the same way that that person is? Well, in this passage, this passage proclaims to you, if that's you, that you are a true covenant heir if you trust in Jesus Christ. In Christ, you are a true covenant heir.

Why? Well, this passage gives us three reasons. First, because you've been called. Second, because you've been cleansed. And third, because you've been consecrated. You've been called, you've been cleansed, and you've been consecrated. So first, you've been called. Look with me at verse one of chapter 10.

Now, there's a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius. a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort. Now, the passage begins here by giving us some context, a bit of background info on Cornelius. Who is this Cornelius guy? Well, the first thing we learn about Cornelius is that he's a centurion, a Roman centurion. A centurion was someone in charge of 100 men. Those of you that have a bit of background in Latin can see centurion, that's of 100. So a pretty substantial commander. among the Romans. He's also mentioned here, he's from Caesarea.

Caesarea was one of my favorite stops when we, when I had the blessing of going on a trip to Israel just this last January. Beautiful place, more temperate climate than other parts, because they get those nice sea breezes. Still one of the most expensive places to live, partly for that reason, in all of Israel, which is saying something.

And Caesarea back at the time of Paul, the time of Jesus, and the time of Peter, was a Roman's Roman town. If you were looking for, if you were a Roman living in the area of Israel, and you wanted to feel like you could go

home for a bit, you wanted a place that felt like home, you'd go to Caesarea. Caesarea had it all, had a deep water port, it had pagan temples, It had gladiatorial games, it had a whole Roman amphitheater, chariot races, everything that made a Roman town Roman it had. But not only was Cornelius from a town that was a Roman's Roman's town, he himself was a Roman's Roman.

Notice it says he was from the Italian cohort. At this point in Rome's history, they were hiring a lot of mercenaries and they were levying a lot of soldiers from places outside the Italian peninsula. But not true of Cornelius. Cornelius was part of the Italian cohort. He was a Roman's Roman. That's why it's so surprising when we learn something else about Cornelius in verse two.

A devout man. and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." Seems like a pretty good set of qualifications there. Now, we may be tempted to say that he was a proselyte. That's not quite true. There were two different kinds of Gentile believers at this period.

There were proselytes, those who went all the way, those who truly convicted that the God of Israel was the one true God, and they would join with God's covenant people. They had a proselyte baptism where they were cleansed, and then they were circumcised, and they put themselves under God's law and became full covenant members with the Jewish people.

That's not what Cornelius was. Cornelius was a God-fearer. What is a God-fearer? A God-fearer was a Gentile who heard something about the God of Israel, respected him, was perhaps interested in him, would pray to him, would offer alms, whatever else. But he did not go all the way. He wanted to remain a Gentile. Didn't get circumcised, didn't put himself under the Mosaic law, but still had an interest in the God of Israel.

To put it in more of a modern context, imagine if you will, someone starts coming to our church. We'll say he's a rather wealthy individual, for argument's sake, and he gives lots of wonderful gifts to the church, He comes almost every Sunday, he prays, and he sounds pretty sincere when he prays. He's very spiritually interested, always asking good, intelligent questions, comes to the prayer meeting, but he's never been baptized, doesn't really call himself a Christian, and is not a member of any church. That's what a God-fearer would be in our context.

That would be a Cornelius. So, that's Cornelius's background. Now, I wonder if there's any Cornelius's here. I hope not. Because being a Cornelius, it's great. I'm glad you're spiritually interested. I'm glad that you're here. But unless you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, unless you place yourself under his yoke, Unless you call on him as your savior, you cannot be saved. And that was true of Cornelius. Look at Cornelius' call. God didn't leave Cornelius where he was. He didn't leave him as this spiritually interested person.

Look with me at verse three. And about the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come to him and said to him, Cornelius. And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, what is it, Lord? And he said to him, your prayers and alms have ascended as memorial before God.

And now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is called Peter. Notice what the angel says. He says, Cornelius, I'm glad that you've been giving alms. I'm glad that you've been praying to God. That's awesome. That's the work of the spirit drawing you towards God. That's great. But you need the gospel. Send to Joppa. Send for Peter. You need to hear about the work of Jesus. And that is the message of God to any Cornelius who might be here today. You need the message of Jesus Christ.

That's where all of us began. All of us began where Cornelius was, sometimes even further. We began not knowing God, being alienated from God, being in that kingdom of darkness, until we received the call of the Holy Spirit, until God called to us through this word and brought us to himself. That is where identity comes from.

That is why we're covenant heirs. We're not covenant heirs simply by being born into it, though there is a place for covenant children. We can talk about that on a later date, but that is not how we are made true covenant heirs. We're made true covenant heirs by the gospel, by the work of Jesus Christ, by calling on his name.

That's where all of us began. We are true covenant heirs first and foremost because we are called. And what are we called to? We're called to be cleansed, to be cleansed. Look with me at verse nine, where the camera kind of shifts here from Cornelius and Caesarea moves down over to Joppa.

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. They became hungry and was desiring to eat. But while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance. So Peter, he's hungry, he's looking to get something to eat, and while they're making him lunch, he falls into a trance. And the trance is sort of related to these circumstances.

Look at me in verse 11. And he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object, like a great sheet, coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground. And there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth. birds of the air, and a voice came to him, Arise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean. And again the voice came to him a second time.

What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy. Now this vision seems very foreign to us because we're not coming at this from a Jewish context. So let's set a bit of the context for this vision. The context for this vision has to do with the clean and unclean food laws, kosher food laws. This goes all the way back to when God established the nation of Israel as his people.

God comes to Israel and he says, you are going to be a different nation from all the other nations. You are going to be my nation. I am going to dwell with you. I am king over all the nations, but I'm going to live with you. I'm going to live in the tabernacle in your midst. And if God, the holy God, is going to dwell with sinful man, sinful man must be cleansed. They must be clean.

And to indicate that, to show that God gave Israel all kinds of rules and regulations to symbolize how they were to be this holy people. And one of the most important ways was their dinner table, what they ate. And the food laws, in particular, center around their distinction from the other nations. The unclean animals, like pigs, crabs, and other animals that they couldn't eat, represented to the Jewish people the unclean ways of the Gentiles. The Gentiles eat pork and worship pagan gods. We don't eat pork and we don't worship pagan gods. That was kind of the connection they were supposed to make. It was a sign that Israel was a different nation, that God had chosen the nation of Israel to be his dwelling place.

So setting that as our context, you can see why Peter is so scandalized by this vision. Here you have a sheet coming down from heaven full of not just the clean animals, but also the unclean animals. And God says to Peter, I want you to treat all those animals the same. I want you to kill and eat any animal you might choose. And Peter's horrified. He says, Lord, that's not what you said to Moses. What's going on here? Well, this vision is, you guessed it probably, symbolic. Like most visions in the Bible, this vision is not so much about animals, it's about the church. The sheet coming down out of heaven is a representation of the church.

It is the people of God coming down out of heaven, and what does it include? It includes the clean animals and the unclean animals, That is, it includes both the Jew and the Gentile. What God is indicating by the end of that clean, unclean food distinction is the end of the clean and unclean nation distinction. The people of God, God is saying, are no longer simply the Jewish people. It is a people of every tribe, nation, and tongue. Clean and unclean. And why? Why can the unclean Gentiles join with the Jews? Is it because God somehow changed his mind about the Gentiles? As though, I thought they were unclean, but after I got to know them, you know, I think they're okay.

No. What does the vision say? Verse 15. And again, a voice came to him a second time. What God has cleansed. no longer consider unclean. You know the reason that we can have the Holy Spirit dwell with us? It's because we've been cleansed. We've been made clean. We have been cleansed of all sin, all the sin that clung to us, all of our sinful, all of the guilt of our sinful nature, all the guilt incurred by all of our sins, if we believe in Jesus Christ, if we trust in him, has been washed away. That is the basis for why the Holy Spirit dwells with us. That is the basis for why we can be a part of that great congregation of every tribe, nation, and tongue. We've been cleansed.

How are we cleansed? Because of Jesus. Because Jesus came down, because His sacrifice for sin on the cross fulfilled all the sacrifices that God gave to the Jewish people. All the lambs, the goats, all of their blood only pointed ahead to the one sacrifice, the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. so that as Jesus died on that cross, all of our sins, all of our uncleanness, everything that made us unfit for the presence of God, in fact, fit only for His wrath, all of that was laid on Jesus, and all of His perfect righteousness is laid on us, and we are clean. We are clean. If you are in Christ, you are as clean as the Apostle Peter, as clean as the Apostle Paul, as clean as Jesus Christ.

That is what is true of you, and that is the basis for why you are a true covenant heir. No one inherits the promises of God, the promises of eternal life, the promises of heaven, the promises of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the promises of adoption. We don't get those. By anything we've done or by who our parents were, we get them by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and his blood alone. Why are you a true covenant heir? Because

you were called out of darkness and because you were cleansed. But not only have we been called, not only have we been cleansed, we've been consecrated. we've been consecrated.

The story continues. After Peter receives this vision, these men from Caesarea, from Cornelius, they come to him. They tell him about the vision. He follows them to Cornelius' house. And when Cornelius asks him, what is this vision, what is this word you have for me from God? What does Peter proceed to do? He preaches the gospel. You can scan again verses 34 through 43. And you can see how Peter summarizes the gospel message to Cornelius and his household.

And what does that tell you? Well, it tells you that they are being cleansed here by the gospel. And we know they're cleansed because the Holy Spirit comes and dwells with them. Look at verse 44. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. They were cleansed by Christ's blood as they heard the message and believed it. As they believed in Jesus Christ, they were cleansed, they were made fit for God's presence.

And just as when the temple was completed in the Old Testament, when the tabernacle was finished, the Shekinah glory came down and indwelt it. So when the people of God, when these people, when Cornelius and his household had heard the message of salvation, and been cleansed from their sin by faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came and dwelled them. That Shekinah glory came to dwell in their hearts.

How are we consecrated? Same way. We're consecrated by the Holy Spirit. We're consecrated by the preaching of the word. To consecrate means to make holy, to be made And why are we holy? We're holy because of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Why was the temple holy? It wasn't because it was a beautiful building. It was because God dwelled there. In the same way, you are holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

And as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in their hearts, the sign of that indwelling comes upon them in verse 45. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also, for they were hearing them speak with tongues and exalting God. Now, we shouldn't stumble over this and assume that because they received the sign of tongues, that is something that every Christian receives whenever they receive the Holy Spirit. No, the sign of tongues had a very specific role within the first century church. Why do the tongues come upon the Gentiles here? When was the last time you saw a group of people who had received the Holy Spirit and started speaking in tongues?

Acts 2. What happens in Acts 2? In Acts 2, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the apostles and their fellows, the Jews. the Holy Spirit comes upon the Jewish believers. And so what happens here? The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles, and they start doing the very same thing the Jews started doing. What God is telling his people is, these Gentiles who have trusted in me, they are on the same level as covenant heirs as the Jews. They are a part of that kingdom, of every tribe, nation, and tongue, just as much as the Jewish believers are. I've given them the same sign. That's what we should derive from this.

And while we don't receive a sign like that, the truth that it communicates is true of you. You have the same Holy Spirit that the Apostle Peter did. You have the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That is who dwells in you. That is the basis of your, of your hope as a covenant heir. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians that we have received the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, of adoption as sons. It is because you have the Holy Spirit that you can call yourself a true son or daughter of God. You have been consecrated by the Holy Spirit. You've been consecrated.

And the Holy Spirit is the down payment of an even greater inheritance. An inheritance that goes beyond the blessings that you receive now. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of the resurrection. Just as the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, he will one day raise you from the dead if you trust in him.

See, all the promises given to Abraham, all the promises given to Israel, about living long in the land, about a land flowing with milk and honey. They were merely signs, types, little tastes, little earthly shadows of a greater blessing, a blessing that God had promised them. We know that from Hebrews chapter 11. Abraham was looking to a greater country, a greater city whose author and builder is God, that great new Jerusalem. the new heavens and the new earth, that is your inheritance.

And in Jesus Christ, if you trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, that inheritance is yours. It is as surely yours as the land was surely Abraham's as soon as God promised it. You enjoy the blessings now, you enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Spirit now, but one day you will receive the full inheritance. You are a full covenant heir. Why? Because you were consecrated. So we've seen throughout this chapter, why are you, if you trust in Jesus Christ, a full covenant heir? Not because of anything you've done. Not because of ancestry. Not because of who your parents were. It's because you've been called. It's because you've been cleansed by the blood of Christ. and it's because you've been consecrated by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for this good word, for the promise that we have received the adoption of sons, that we have received the promises of the Holy Spirit, that by your Holy Spirit we are made heirs of all the promises given to Abraham, that we have a beautiful inheritance Lord, we are mystified by the wonder of this. We deserve nothing but your wrath, but we have received nothing but your grace. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.