

Series: **The Original**

Today's Title: **"Breaking Down Barriers"** part 1

September 12, 2021 – Acts 10:9-23

Objective: To help Christians examine their heart/thoughts to see what God needs to change.

Opening prayer

Breaking down barriers. Pushing past your limits.

Busting through to new heights.

This happens in many ways in our life.

- If you're a runner, it can be breaking through to a faster pace on your runs.
- If you lift weights, it can be lifting more weight than you could 6 months ago.
- If you enjoy cooking, it can be after multiple failures finally getting that recipe perfect!
- If you are a parent of little kids - it's when they first roll over - or when they begin crawling - or take their first steps.
- Earning the degree you never thought was possible.
- Fitting into your jeans from high school!

Today, we're going look at how God was breaking down one of the great barriers to the spread of the Gospel.

Today is part 1 - next Sunday will be part 2.

Turn to **Acts 10:9-23** (p. 918-919)

Before we dive into the verses today, I want to discuss a key principle we see in this chapter - and all throughout the N.T.

God uses you to share the Gospel with non-believers.

Think back to last Sunday - when we looked at **10:1-8**.

vs. 3 - About the ninth hour of the day he (Cornelius) saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."

One of the things the angel tells Cornelius is to "send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter." (vs. 5)

A couple of questions for us to consider...

1) Why didn't the angel share the Gospel directly with Cornelius in the vision?

Think about it...wouldn't an angel - a perfect, holy being - do a better job of sharing about Jesus than any human could?

From our perspective...YES!!

But...God has not given His holy angels the privilege and responsibility to share the Gospel.

God has given us that honor.

There is only 1 exception to this.

Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

But this is the exception - not the rule.

God has given us this great honor - to share the Gospel.

I don't know if angels get frustrated - or confused with God's plan - but can you imagine how frustrating or confusing it might be to angels who look down - and knowing God has given people who are followers of Christ this honor and responsibility to share the Gospel - yet the angels can see that so many Christians don't share?

So many Christians don't even have a non-believer as a friend?

God has given us - followers of Jesus - Christians - the responsibility and honor to tell others about Jesus.

2. Why send men to Joppa - to Peter - when there were other Christians much closer?

The answer to this question helps us realize there's more going on here than getting the Gospel to Cornelius.

I first need to make a correction from last week.

I said the distance from Caesarea to Joppa was about 55 miles.

That is wrong - it is just over 33 miles.

Still a significant distance in the 1st century - a 2-day journey (see **vs. 24**).

Why Peter?

2 Reasons:

First - Peter needed this. There were others in Caesarea who were qualified and competent to share the Gospel with Cornelius.

Most logical person for the task was Philip.

Remember Philip - from chapter 8 - who shared the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch on the road by Gaza? The Ethiopian official believed in Jesus and was baptized, and then the Holy Spirit took Philip away from there and he traveled up the coast until he arrived at Caesarea.

We read in **Acts 21:8** that the Apostle Paul and his team - on their way to Jerusalem:

“...came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.”

Now he’s called “Philip the evangelist”!

He’s the perfect person to tell Cornelius the Gospel!

But he wasn’t the perfect person in God’s plan.

God was in the beginning stages of working on Peter’s heart, as we saw at the end of **chapter 9**.

Peter was a proud, orthodox Jew who believed in Jewish exceptionalism and Jewish exclusiveness in matters related to God.

This was a huge problem that was contrary to the heart of God, contrary to the mission of God

throughout history, but also contrary to the mission Jesus gave His followers to take the Gospel “to the end of the earth”. (Acts 1:8)

The Jewish people failed to understand and accept that:

- God loves the Gentile just as much as the Jew.
- God’s mission has always been to include Gentiles into His kingdom. He has been working since the time of Noah to bring Gentiles to Himself.
- The whole reason He chose Abraham, and his descendants (the Jewish people) was so the Jewish nation could be a shining light in a world of darkness.
- They were supposed to be an example to the nations of the world of what the true God was like - so the nations would also follow God and put their faith in Him.

Peter needed this for his own growth.

Second - Peter was the lead Apostle. The major obstacle to Jesus’ disciples bringing the Gospel to the Gentile world was not Gentile unbelief - it was Jewish exclusiveness.

Peter was the lead Apostle - so God would use Peter to break through this beachhead.

Since Peter would be directly involved with Gentile conversions, it would be an example and encouragement to other Christ-followers to do the same.

As I mentioned last week, Saul (the Apostle Paul) would be the primary way God would bring the Gospel into the Gentile world, but this first breakthrough into a prominent Gentile city - Caesarea - with a prominent man - Cornelius the Centurion of the Italian cohort - would be a significant statement by God.

This change and repentance of Jewish exclusiveness would take some time.

We read of this being alive and well a few years later.

Acts 15:1

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Talk about putting an obstacle in front of non-Jewish people to put their faith in Jesus!!!

To combat the spiritual pride - spiritual exclusiveness of the Jewish people, God would use Peter - the lead Apostle - to bring the Gospel to a prominent Gentile - with the confirming work of the Holy Spirit.

Back to our point...

God wants to use you to share the Gospel.

Who does God want you to share the Gospel with?

Last week I asked you to think of someone who was not a believer - but wants to know more about Jesus.

Is there someone else more qualified - more capable - more knowledgeable?

Probably.

But He wants to use YOU.

His plan calls for you.

Why?

I don't know.

- Maybe hearing about Jesus from you will have a greater impact due to their perception of you - or the relationship they have with you.

- Maybe this is how God is changing something in you - like He was changing Peter.

Who in your Circle of Influence (Family, friends, neighbor, co-worker) has God ordained for you to bring the good news about Jesus?

Let's look at our passage today - **Acts 10:9-23**

Read vs. 9-13

Peter's disturbing vision vs. 9-13

Do you like everything God says we should do / not do?

“sixth hour” = Noon - lunchtime.

He went to the rooftop to pray.

He was hungry. As the servants prepare the meal, Peter prays on the rooftop.

While he is praying, he falls into a trance and has a vision.

vs. 11 - “the heavens opened” and a large sheet descends, being lowered by its four corners.

On the sheet were all kinds of animals - especially what the Jews viewed as “common” or “unclean” animals.

What is this all about?

In O.T. - in the Law of Moses - there were restrictions - dietary restrictions on what the Jewish people were allowed to eat.

Some animals were declared to be “unclean”, and God prohibited His people from eating these animals.

Example:

Leviticus 20:24-25

“I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.

You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean.”

Big dilemma for a devout, orthodox Jew was if they went to a Gentile’s house and they were served something that was unclean / forbidden for them to eat according to the Law.

This is one of the reasons not even a moderately orthodox Jew would enter a Gentile's home.

But this issue was much deeper than the menu at someone's house.

Peter's vision is not about his diet - it's about his heart.

- It's about the image of God in every person.
- It's about the love of God for all people.
- It's about God's desire for all the nations to be reconciled to Him.

1 Timothy 2:4

"...God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Peter's initial reaction to the vision *vs. 14-17a*

Read vs. 14-17a

This is the Peter we grew to love in the Gospels!

We love Peter because...we can relate to him.

- He says the wrong thing...
- He does the wrong thing...
- He acts first, thinks later...

We love his boldness - his confidence - but he often lives in his own strength and wisdom - which is not a good thing.

Peter says, "By no means, Lord"

This is a contradictory statement by Peter.

"Lord" = Master / the one with authority / God

If this is your “Lord” - then obedience is required - not a protest.

But Peter’s been here before.

In **Luke 5** Peter has been fishing all night - and caught nothing.

Jesus tells him to go out into the lake again and let down his nets.

Peter gives a polite protest, but then he says OK.

Matthew 16 - Jesus asked His disciples “Who do people say I am?” - and Peter gives his great confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (16:16)

Then Jesus starts talking about how He must go to Jerusalem, and He will suffer and be killed.

Peter takes Jesus aside and tells Him - *‘No way Jesus - this will not happen to You!’*

Jesus tells Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan.” (16:23)

Do you say, *‘I love the Lord’* - but ignore what He says?

Do you call Jesus ‘Lord’ but continue to live as you want?

vs. 14 - Peter goes on: “...for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”

vs. 15-16 - God’s reply: “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

God rebukes Peter - and He does it 3x!

Peter is saved...the lead Apostle...preaching to thousands who give their life to Christ...but he's still stubborn!!!

This parallels what Jesus taught during His ministry.

Mark 7:14-23 - Jesus negates the dietary laws of Judaism - focusing on what makes a person unclean is not what they put in their mouth, but what comes out of their mouth - what they say, think, etc.

But in this instance, food and clean and unclean animals are being used as an example or an illustration of a more important truth and reality.

The clean animals represent Jewish people.

The unclean animals represent Gentiles.

“What God has made clean, do not call common.”

Nobody is unclean in the eyes of God.

Gentiles need to hear the Gospel.

God will save Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus, and they will receive the Holy Spirit - in the same manner as Jewish believers.

Peter's obedience to the vision vs. 17-23

God is stretching Peter to some very awkward and uncomfortable places.

These are places he never imagined.

These places - being with Gentiles - accepting Gentiles - seeing Gentiles as equals and loved by God - are not easy things for him to accept.

- Is God stretching you?

- Is he changing your heart and mind to conform to Him and His will?

But despite this awkward and uncomfortable place, Peter moves forward in obedience.

Read vs. 17-23

vs. 20 is key: “Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

Greek = *alla* - a simple conjunction - typically a strong adversative conjunction translated: ‘*But*’, ‘*nevertheless*’, ‘*on the contrary*’.

The idea here is: ‘*You may object but go without refusing.*’ Even though your conscience may object - go with them - I have sent these men.

Issues of your conscience.

Our conscience is our inner voice that tells us to do good.

Definition: *The sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good.*” ([https://www.merriam-](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscience)

[webster.com/dictionary/conscience](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscience))

For those who are Christians, our conscience ***should be*** ‘molded’ and informed by the Word of God - and the Holy Spirit uses our conscience to remind us of God’s truth - to convict us of sin, etc.

But what happens when our conscience is molded by something other than God's truth?

For Peter, his conscience was molded by Judaism's belief about the inferior place of Gentiles.

His conscience had been shaped and informed by false beliefs - by lies.

It's really important that we don't rely on our conscience alone.

Instead, we need to renounce sinful thoughts, intentions, and character - and embrace God's truth.

Obey God even when you don't feel like it.

We don't wait for our emotions to be in-sync with God's truth - and then obey.

We obey - and let our emotions catch up! (Love your spouse)

God loves every person.

There is nobody outside of God's love.

Jesus died for all people.

The Holy Spirit is telling Peter - commanding Peter - to go with these Gentile men - even if his conscience is troubled by this.

Galatians 3:28-29

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Apply it...

God has chosen you to share the Gospel.

Who in your life has God ordained for you to share about Jesus?

God loves every person.

He died for them.

His desire is for them to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

He wants to use you to bring them closer to Him.

Obey God, even when you don't feel like it.

Obey...and let your emotions catch-up later.

Let God mold you...stretch you...grow you.

This is usually uncomfortable - awkward - probably unpleasant as the sin in your life is uprooted.

Stay faithful - let the truth of God and the Spirit of God work in your life.

Let them transform you into the image of His Son.

Close in prayer