

**Series:** Encounter

**Title:** Encounter the Gospel

**Text:** Acts 10:1-48

**Big Idea:** The Gospel is for everyone.

**Introduction:**

Money stresses my wife and me out. Especially when we go on vacation. Years ago, we discovered something called an “all-inclusive resort!” Let's talk about this for a minute... anyone ever been on one? So, what you do is you pay an upfront price. On paper, it sounded cool, but I thought, you know, there's the small print I missed. I'm sure there is still stuff I have to pay for. We went to dinner... paid... the lobster ... paid... dessert... paid. The snorkeling gear... paid... The mini sailboat... paid. The price that I paid for this resort included more than I thought—and you can probably guess where this is going. You guys ever have that experience where you got more than what you thought you paid for? Don't you love that feeling? I hope you have that feeling today as we read through Acts 10 and learn that the price Jesus paid includes more than what Peter thought.

[Translation:] Let's look at the first 2 verses. As we get started, it is important to have an understanding of who Cornelius is. Let's look at the first 2 verses.

*1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

Within the first 2 verses, we learn some things about Cornelius. The first thing we learn is that he lived in Caesarea. Caesarea is a seaport on the Mediterranean coast that was rebuilt by Herod the Great and named after Caesar Augustus. Jews like Peter hated Caesarea. The population there had more Gentiles than Jews and served as the showpiece for Roman culture. Caesarea was the home of many riots between Jews and Gentiles that eventually sparked a Jewish war against Rome in Caesarea in AD 66 ending in the massacre of 20,000 Jews. Cornelius lived in a culture that despised God and worshipped Roman culture. Not only did Cornelius live in this

deeply entrenched Roman culture, but he worked in it and fought for it. He was a centurion meaning he was a commander of one hundred troops.

While Cornelius was a Gentile who lived and worked in the Roman culture, we also learn that he was a devout God-fearing man who prayed and gave regularly. What this means is that Cornelius accepted, studied, and practiced the Jewish laws except for circumcision, which was the most difficult command for adult Gentile men for obvious reasons.<sup>1</sup> let's continue reading:

*3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" 4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.*

One afternoon as Cornelius is going about his day, he encounters God through a vision of an angel. The angel tells Cornelius to send some of his men to retrieve Peter, and he does. Now before we continue on, there is a truth that I want to pull from this part of the narrative.

### **God finds a way to encounter everyone who seeks Him.**

All throughout Christian history, there is testimony similar to Cornelius of God visiting those who seek Him.

“One day in the early part of this century, a chief in Malaysia was repairing one of his wooden idols when he told his wife, “This is so foolish, here we are worshipping these wooden objects, but our hands are greater than they are. Surely there must be a higher being, the God who created all of us. Let us worship Him.” So, for twenty-five years, they went into their prayer room every day and prayed to “the unknown God.” One day a Christian missionary came along and introduced the chief and his wife to the bible and to Christ. When they heard the good news, they rejoiced and said, “This is the true God we have been seeking all these years. We now believe in Him.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando, Acts.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando.

I stumbled upon an article from The Gospel Coalition written in 2007, where Dudley Woodberry and others published a study that recounted 750 former Muslims who had converted to evangelical Christianity. Many of the reasons they gave for their conversion would be expected—The love of God, a changing view of the Bible, and an attraction to Christians who loved others. But one reason might come as a surprise: the experience of a dream they believed to be from God... Mission Frontier magazine also has reported that out of 600 Muslim converts, 25 percent experienced a dream that led to their conversion.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, God did it then, and He does it today! What about those people who live in unreached areas of the world? God finds a way to encounter those who seek Him, and here is the reality He will often use you to introduce Him.

### **God can use you to introduce Him.**

While God meets people who seek Him, this does not put the church or missionaries out of work. Look at how Paul puts it in Romans 10.

*“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” - Romans 10:13–15.*

While God will often visit people in dreams or visions, He still sends people to finish the job by bringing and proclaiming the gospel. This is what is portrayed in Romans 10 and this is what we see playing out in our text today. God visits Cornelius and He sends Peter. Take a look:

*About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” 14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” 15 The*

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<sup>3</sup> Carlson, “When Muslims Dream of Jesus.”

*voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."  
16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.*

Notice the time of day in which this vision comes... lunchtime. My guess is that Peter is hungry. Yet in the midst of his hunger, God visits him with a vision of lunch consisting of all different types of animals, both clean and unclean animals according to Jewish law. What comes next is something that anyone who has eaten a smoked pork shoulder is grateful for... "Kill and Eat!" In other words, "the buffet is open." Notice Peter's reply, "Surely not!" You must be testing me... and God speaks to him again "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

What we see unfolding in this vision is God challenging all of Peter's preconceived religious understanding. Peter was with Jesus when he made the radical claim that nothing that enters the body is unclean (Mark 7:14-19). But the Jewish kosher laws were so entrenched, mandated that it was one thing to know it and another to actually experience it. This left Peter obviously wondering what this vision meant. Let's keep reading:

*17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." 21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" 22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. Peter at Cornelius's House The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." 27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" 30 Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before*

*me 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”*

As Peter is making his trip and visit to Cornelius, it finally hits him over the head. The vision wasn’t as much about food as it was about people. If God is declaring all foods to be clean, then he must be proclaiming all people as clean!!

### **The Gospel is for everyone.**

As I have mentioned before, the Gospel is the great equalizer. In other words, there is no discrimination when it comes to the gospel. There is no room for tribalism. We see this narrative as God crushes the racial, historical, and cultural barriers that Peter has built up in his life. Look at how Peter puts it,

*34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.*

Friends, we live in a culture where everyone’s identity is wrapped up in their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender. When these aspects move past characteristics to provide purpose and meaning in our life, that is when we see the division that we see in our culture today. Movements like the black lives movement, which tries to address racism, only perpetuates it. These types of movements dig the trenches of racism deeper and deeper into our culture. We are beginning to see it within political tribes as well. These movements like BLM and governmental policies and programs fall short as they only propagate the lie that our identity is found in the created, not the Creator.

We are all created in God’s image and this is precisely why the gospel is available to us all. The gospel has the ability to cross the boundaries of skin color, culture and sex. The gospel has the ability to bring unity because God shows no favoritism when it comes to the gospel. Some of us

need to learn what Peter learned: When it comes to the gospel, we must check our prejudices at the door.

Transition: This truth propels Peter to see past his bias and to bring the gospel to the gentile Cornelius's family.

*36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

### **Only Jesus paid the price, no one else.**

When Peter comes to Cornelius, he gives them Jesus. He tells him who Jesus is. He tells the family what Jesus did... his baptism, the healings, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the grave. He tells them what they need to do *“Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.”* This narrative exposes a lie that our culture and some Christian movements embrace. It exposes a lie that Satan regularly relies on... the lie of faith by works.

It is not enough to fear God. Notice Cornelius, he feared God. It is not enough to obey the law... Notice Cornelius, he did his best to obey the law. It's not enough to just give to the poor.... Notice Cornelius, he helped and served his community. While Cornelius and his family did all these “good” things, he still needed Jesus. Cornelius, despite his good works, was under condemnation for his sin and still headed for hell.

Friends, if you think that because you live a good life, you will have a good eternity. Because you go to church with your wife. Because you give to the church. Because you give to the poor. You are wrong. When it comes to your eternity, it's not about what you did... but what Jesus did.

[Transition:] The only thing that matters is what you will do with Jesus because, in the end, he is the judge.

### **Jesus will judge everyone.**

Peter includes in his gospel message the reality that Jesus is the Judge who will send you to heaven or hell. This is something that we tend to ignore in our culture and even in some churches, the topic of hell. It's like if we just ignore hell, it will just go away. Unfortunately, it won't. Judgment was a key way in which God arrested the careless and disobedient Jews in the OT. It is also an essential part of the message of Jesus, as he spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Scriptures. Jesus did not speak about judgment primarily to inform people with details about what hell is like. Rather, he did so to warn people so that they would repent, live righteous lives, and avert punishment.<sup>4</sup>

*“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.” - Mk 8:34–38.*

CCH family, what you do with Jesus impacts your eternity. You can either accept or reject Jesus. Let's look at what Cornelius and his family did.

*44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 “Surely no one can stand in the way of their*

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<sup>4</sup> Burge, John.

*being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.*

### **The Spirit is available for everyone.**

In this section of scripture, we see a conversion experience that religious Law could not provide. A conversion that is centered on Christ. Further, we see the gift of the Holy Spirit fill his family. Therefore, not only is the gospel for everyone, but so is the Holy Spirit. This was unmistakable evidence that Gentiles had experienced conversion. Peter’s point is: “They received the Holy Spirit just as we have!” He was having an all-inclusive resort moment.

### **Conclusion:**

I think Paul sums up this interaction between Peter and Cornelius earlier in Romans 10 when he writes,

*11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” - Romans 10:8-13*

Jesus’ payment on the cross was able to cover everyone. Gentiles... paid. Jews... paid. Blacks... paid. Republicans... paid. Democrats... paid. Atheists... paid. Muslims... paid. Homosexuals... paid. Transgender... paid. As Paul says... Anyone who believes... What about you? While the all-inclusive resort has been paid many will not go on the trip. What are you going to do with Jesus' payment?

### **Conclusion:**

Two things can be true at the same time. While Jesus makes himself available to everyone. It is also true that he will send those who reject him to Hell. Don’t say I didn’t warn you. Notice what Paul says:



*9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. -Roman 10:8-10*

To believe is a heart posture of trust. Just like this stool, I can know that it will hold my body weight when I sit on it. Belief happens when I transition that weight to the stool. To believe in Jesus means to transfer the weight of your life and death off of your own two feet and onto Jesus. You can do that by confessing... recognizing what is already true... That Jesus is Lord. If you want to do that today, I want you to close your eyes and pray this prayer of confession with me as I have it up on the screen.

Jesus, I recognize that I am not lord but that you are. I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior.