



# Acts: The Unclean Becomes Clean

Acts 10:1-48

July 10, 2022

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Be sure you have read through the passage before discussing the questions with your small group. Also, you can watch or rewatch the sermon by going to <http://switzerlandcommunitychurch.org>

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*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.*

*The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.*

*Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation,*

*was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests.*

*The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."*

*And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."*

*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 peace 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 the people but to us who had 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.'*

# The Unclean Becomes Clean

*God makes the unclean to be clean and opens the doors to be with Him.*

Acts 10 tells the story of Cornelius. He was a Roman Centurion, who was well respected in the community, gave to the church, and prayed regularly. Yet, for all the positive attributes of Cornelius, as a gentile, he could not be a part of the people of God. In his mind, although he loved the Lord, having seen the hand of God, heard the stories, and see the Jewish people in their devotion to the Lord, Cornelius would never be a part of the church. This is the story of Cornelius who cried out to a God that he wasn't even sure was listening.

Acts 10, though, is also the story of Peter. Peter had been one of the original disciples, an apostle and leader in the church. Jewish by birth, he had walked with, talked with, and sat at the feet of Jesus. His life had ups and down of seeing miracles by the hand of God and denying Jesus in the darkest hour. Yet, despite Peter's frequent inadequacies and outbursts (having been called Satan one time), the grace of Jesus Christ shone through and now Peter stood as one of the leaders of a rapidly growing and global movement. This is the story of Peter who would come face to face with the realization that while the outward appearance of moral cleanliness is important, God sanctifies and redeems that which was once unclean.

The Gospel is bigger than us all and moves through Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Now, we begin to see the Gospel spread beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem. Through the work of the Spirit in Pentecost, as people returned to their homes, some of them throughout the region, the message of the Gospel returned with them. Yet, the issue soon arose as Gentiles began to hear the word of God and be impacted by it as the Spirit stirred in the hearts of man. The works of man are not enough to produce eternal salvation. Only God can make the unclean to be clean.

## **Responding to The Call of Christ Trust Him As Lord and Savior**

- *Acts 10:1-3 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."*
- During the time Luke wrote Acts, this part of chapter 10 and to be honest, the entirety of chapter 10 and 11 would have been scandalous to a Jewish audience. For the longest time, the Jewish people viewed themselves as God's chosen people, God's elect, representing Him in the world.
  - Now, Cornelius is described as a devout man who loved God. By designating that Cornelius gave alms and prayed in a disciplined manner, Cornelius is depicted as meeting a fair amount of the modern day understanding of righteousness.
  - These are the actions of a righteous person, and certainly not that of a Gentile.

- This man is in good standing among the community, leading a battalion of people, and having a reputation that preceded him. This is not a nobody in society, but someone with class and dignity.
- He was not allowed to participate fully in the faith but could only go as far as the court of the gentiles, basically on the outskirts. Furthermore, being south of Caesarea, he could not attend temple and instead had to opt for private prayers by Himself to the Lord.
- He eagerly desired to know God even though the people of God had not allowed Him to join the body of believers.
- At around the same time, Peter received a vision of meat descending from heaven. These particular meats, according to the ceremonial law had been regarded as unclean and unapproachable. Strictly speaking, associating with these had been largely off limits for the devout Jewish person.
  - God told Peter to eat of the food that had once been off limits.
  - Peter saw the Lord and acknowledged that God had been speaking. He openly called this voice speaking to him in a dream “Lord.” There was no question in his mind who was speaking to Him.
  - Yet, when he is told to eat of the unclean food his first response is to say no.
- Cornelius cried out to God understanding his inability to approach God but knowing all the same that He is God. Peter, however, had been challenged by his own self righteousness and had been challenged to trust in the Lord.
- *Psalm 84:10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*
- Cornelius heard the voice of God and immediately sent people to and resources to be obedient. He knew the depth of his uncleanness and chose obedience to the call of God, regardless of what God would do for Him. Peter, however,
- When God calls, how do we respond to the voice of God?
- Submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour means that wherever He calls us, whatever He calls us to are what we do even when we don’t understand.

### **The Gospel is Central as Only God Can Make the Unclean to Be Clean**

- *Acts 10:36-41 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace 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 the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*
- Peter, having gone to see Cornelius began to preach the Gospel as people had gathered around.
  - The message wasn’t particular long, complicated, or even teaching them anything new. In fact the bulk of Peter’s message was that they already knew what happened.

- This people who had been outside of the body of believers knew the events of what happened. But now stood before them a man who told them that the work of Christ counted for them.
- They were unclean but by the grace of God, they were made clean. Not by any work of their own, not by any striving or ability, not by any righteousness they could muster up, but by the love of God who calls us home to Him. Even the giving of Cornelius could not produce salvation. Only the Gospel.
- Self-righteousness is no form of righteousness
  - *Romans 3:10-12 "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*
  - Who gets to say that they are righteous enough to merit the eternal salvation of Jesus Christ.
- The core of the Gospel is that no one, absolutely no one, can produce righteousness in themselves. We are born sinful and in dire need of a Savior. Furthermore, we loved our sin. We loved the pleasure it brought and loved to dwell in the decay of our own demise.
- But Jesus, came to be with us, dying a brutal death on the cross. We sinned and Jesus died, knowing that we did not deserve it and could not earn it. Now, all who put their faith and hope in Him will be with Him forever.
- We don't have to continue in our sin, we don't have to continue in the temporary pleasures of this world that leave us empty. We don't have to die because of our own self-righteousness."
- We need a Savior and God took on flesh in Jesus Christ to be with us, dying in our place, so that we could be with Him, forever.
- *Acts 10:44-46 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.*
  - The Gentiles of Joppa responded to the Gospel and received salvation in that moment.

## **The Church Must Not Forget Its Mission To The World**

- Christ is the fulfillment of the law
  - *Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. "*
  - This is not that the law was not important but that the law could only reveal the weakness of man to meet the standards of holiness. It is a mirror that reflects our sinful nature because that is all it can show.
  - The requirements of righteousness had been met through the work of Jesus Christ.
- The truly heartbreaking part of the story of Cornelius is what happened after. People had come to Christ, had been filled with the Gospel, but Peter needed to convince the church that Gentiles could be a part of the family.

- *Acts 11:1-3 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."*
- Christ may have fulfilled the law but the religious elite had continued to heap the ceremonial requirements on people and gate keep a gate that God intended to be open.
- There are only Christians and non Christians and those who are in Christ and those who are not. That is the standard of the Gospel, of the word of God, and of the righteousness of God imputed to others.
- Our mission as a church is not to gatekeep the faith or continue to find reasons to exclude people but to welcome in people so that the world may know the power of the God who saves.
- When people come to Christ, they won't be perfect, but they will be born again starting a new life. The mission of the church is not to impose our criteria on them that exceeds the biblical standard but to welcome them in and disciple them to follow Jesus.
- Tradition/Traditionalism
  - Tradition is the living faith of the dead
  - Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.
- The person that scares me the most is the person who believes that they are a part of the church yet refuses to bow to the will of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
  - The person that is so consumed by the building of the church, the programs, and the structure that they forget that the Gospel is bigger than us all.
  - The person who claims to follow Jesus but demonstrates zero fruit of an actual vibrant relationship.
  - The person who says they know Jesus but in actuality just knows about Him.
  - The person who may be active in the church but only insofar as it does what I think it does.
  - The person who has lost sight of that fact that we were dead in our sins but through Christ, we have been brought to life.
- Jesus, during His earthly ministry had been profoundly more offensive to those inside the church than those outside for one simple fact; those outside knew they needed a Savior and the religious elite thought they could muster up salvation on their own.
- We do not outgrow the Gospel or graduate from the foundation but instead we daily remind ourselves of the grace of God.
- Do you know who is depicted the best in this story? Cornelius. Cornelius is described as a devout man, disciplined in prayer, generous in giving, and known well among the community.
  - It wasn't Peter who, when the food came down responded affirming the Lordship of Christ and still saying no.
  - It wasn't the church, that, even though persecuted and outcast, seeing the signs and wonderous of the filling of the Spirit still chastised Peter for even talking to them.

- It was Cornelius the unclean who follow God without even being allowed to join the family. Who knew it was better to be on the outskirts of the temple than to be in a palace far from God.
- Church, this is what I am most afraid we will become if we do not humble ourselves and turn to the Lord.
  - We will become jaded by our stubbornness.
  - We will become blinded by our preferences
  - We will become hardened by our entitlement.
- If we want to kill this church then we should embrace gossip, griping, and a constant need to get our own way.
- If we want to not just survive transitions but thrive in the process we will start calling that out in one another and look to the hand of God that is already at work. We will tell stories of the goodness of God
- We are owed the wrath of God forever. But by the grace of God, Jesus Christ died on the cross, for the punishment of our sins so that we might live with Him forever.

Some of you need to come up because you have heard the story of Jesus Christ and today is the day that you put your faith and hope in Him, knowing that His death counted for you. That however messed up your past might be, there is no sin too great that the Father will not forgive. *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* And others of us, we need to come forward in repentance where we have gripped and gossiped, seeking to make the church about what we want instead of what God is already doing. And here is the fun bit. We can do this because however messed up our past might be, there is no sin too great that the Father will not forgive and welcome us back Home. *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

As the band leads us in one final song, how will you respond to the call of God in your life? And will you put your trust and hope in the one who saves?

# Connect Group Guide for Sermon Talk Back

## Open in Prayer

Open up your gathering in prayer. Ask that God would reveal His word to you and move in and through your conversation to transform and renew you to glorify Him.

## Read Acts 10:1-48

Read Acts 10:1-48. After reading it, ask to see if anyone has any immediate questions or observations from the text.

## Discussion Questions

1. When God reveal Himself to Cornelius, how did Cornelius respond? When God reveal Himself to Peter, how did Peter respond?
2. What is the significance of the various meats that God shown to Peter? Why was Peter hesitant to eat the foods?
3. What message did Peter bring to the gentile people? Why do you think Peter responded to their reaction in that way?
4. What is the Gospel and how does it change the lives of those who receive it?
5. Why is it significant that the same Gospel for the Gentiles is the same Gospel for the Jewish people? Do we still need the Gospel? Why or why not?
- 6.
7. How does pride destroy our spiritual growth and how does it stand in opposition to what the Lord is doing?

## Prayer Requests

## Challenge for the Week

God is moving in the lives of the church and in the middle. He never rests and He never slumbers. Where do you feel God might be calling you? Who do you know that needs the Gospel in their life and how can you show them the Gospel? Take some time this week to consider these questions and ask God to reveal Himself to you.

