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The Power of the Gospel

Acts 10:1-48

Introduction

1. If you are a part of God's family which meets here or are someone who has been worshiping with us for a while, either in person or through one of our media formats, there is a word which you have, no doubt, heard from time to time.
2. It is the word "gospel." What does it mean? What is it all about?
 - a. It is from an old English word, "godspell" which meant "good history" or "good word"
 - b. It is the good news of the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, God's only Son.
 - c. It is the story of how God made possible our salvation.
 - d. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the saints in Rome, wrote, "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16b).
3. Who needs to hear the gospel? Everyone!
 - a. Everyone!
 - b. Those people who we would consider generally good, those who would consider themselves the worst of the worst, and everyone in between..
4. This morning I want us to take a look at a man named Cornelius who was a good man, one described by those who knew him as "a righteous and God-fearing man," but one who needed Jesus Christ.
5. But before this man could hear the gospel, God had to overcome the prejudice of one of his most prominent apostles — Peter.

6. As we look at these two men, I would like for each of us to ask ourselves, "Am I like either of these two men?"
 - a. Am I a person in need of God's salvation?
 - b. Am I a Christian whose heart God must change because of the prejudices I have?

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I. A Gentile Who Needed Christ

A. CORNELIUS, THE MAN

"Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 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." (Acts 10:1-2, NASB95)

1. Stationed at Caesarea
 - a. A garrison city named after Augustus Caesar.
 - b. The administrative capital of the province of Judea.
 - c. Harbor to the city was built by Herod the Great.
 - d. Following the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the evangelist Philip had made his way to Caesarea preaching the gospel (Acts 8:40).
2. "A centurion of what was called the Italian cohort" (v. 1)
 - a. A 'cohort' (*speira*) consisted of six 'centuries' (100 men), each under the command of a centurion.
 - b. Ten cohorts made up a legion.
 - c. A centurion would correspond to a 'captain' or 'company commander' in our day.
3. "A devout man and one who feared God" (v. 2)
 - a. His influence upon his family is seen in the fact that all his household followed his example.

- b. He was generous to the needy.
- c. He engaged himself in regular prayer to God.

4. A Gentile

- a. It is difficult for us today to grasp the impassable gulf which existed in those days between the Jews on the one hand and the Gentiles on the other.
- b. This was not as God had intended
 - 1) He had told Abraham that it was through his descendants that all the families of the earth were to be blessed (Genesis 12:1-4).
 - 2) The psalmists and the prophets foretold the day when . . .
 - a) God's Messiah would inherit the nations (Psalm 2:7-8; 22:27-28)
 - b) The Lord's servant would be their light (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)
 - c) All nations would 'flow' to the Lord's house (Isaiah 2:2-4)
 - d) God would pour out his Spirit on all humankind (Joel 2:28-29)
- c. The Jews, however, had developed traditions which kept them apart.
 - 1) They had become so entrenched in their prejudice that no orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile.
 - 2) They wouldn't even invite someone considered to be a "God-fearer" into their own home.
 - 3) If Cornelius and other Gentiles like him were to become Christians, this prejudice first had to be overcome.

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B. THE VISION HE SAW

"About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God." (Acts 10:3-4, NASB95)

1. “The ninth hour” — three in the afternoon, the time of prayer among the Jews (Acts 3:1)
2. He saw “a man in shining garments” (v. 30), “an angel of God” (v. 3) who called him by name.
3. What he saw caused this battle hardened soldier to be “much alarmed” (NASB), “afraid” (NKJV).
4. The angel told him that God had taken note of his prayers and his offerings.
5. Now he must send some men to Joppa, a city about 32 miles to the south along the coast, to get a man named Peter who was staying in the house of a tanner by the name of Simon.

Slide 4**C. THE ACTION HE TOOK**

“When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.” (Acts 10:7–8, NASB95)

1. Cornelius selected two of his household servants and a devout soldier.
2. After explaining everything to them, he sent them to find Peter in Joppa.

Slide 5**II. An Apostle Who Needed a Change of Perspective****A. PETER, THE MAN**

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” . . .” And Jesus said to him” . . . “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”” (Matthew 16:16,17a,19, NASB95)

1. The apostle who confessed Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16).
2. It was Peter to whom Christ said He would give the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19).
3. He introduced those on Pentecost to Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Acts 2:36).
4. It was Peter who told the leading religious authorities in Jerusalem . . .
 - a. “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which you must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
 - b. “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18,19).
 - c. “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
5. It was Peter who along with John traveled to Samaria to pray and lay hands upon the new Christians among the Samaritans so that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17).
6. But to speak to the Gentiles about Christ was another matter — they were outside the covenant people known as the children of Israel.
7. No, before he would share the gospel with these people, God would need to change his heart.

Slide 6**B. THE VISION HE SAW (ACTS 10:10-16)**

1. On the day after Cornelius had seen the angel, Peter went up on the rooftop of Simon’s house at noon to pray.
2. He became hungry and wanted something to eat — while it was being prepared he fell into a trance.
3. He saw what appeared to be a great sheet being let down out of the sky.

4. Inside were all kinds of animals — four-footed ones, crawling creatures and birds — animals which according to the Law of Moses were considered unclean and which the Jews were not to eat.
5. A voice said to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” (v.13).
6. He refused saying, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.” (v. 14)
7. The voice replied, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (v. 15).
8. This sequence repeated itself three times before the object was taken up into the sky.
9. While Peter was trying to figure all this out, the three men sent by Cornelius arrived downstairs and began inquiring for Peter.
10. The Spirit of God told Peter, “Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself” (vv. 19b-20)

Slide 7**C. THE ACTION PETER TOOK (ACTS 10:21-23)**

1. Peter went down to the men and said, “Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?” (v. 21).
2. The men explained, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you” (v. 22).
3. He invited them to spend the night and the next day he and six other men from Joppa (*Acts 11:12*) set out with them to Caesarea.

Slide 8**III. The Gospel Is Shared**

A. THE INITIAL MEETING (ACTS 10:24-35)

1. Cornelius was waiting for them along with his relatives and close friends.
2. Upon Peter's arrival Cornelius did something which no Roman soldier would ordinarily do — he fell at the feet of Peter and began to worship him (v. 25).
3. Peter told him to get up for he also was “just a man” (v. 26).
4. What Peter said to Cornelius and his house indicates that he learned the lesson God had intended, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.” (v. 28).
5. Peter then asked Cornelius why he had sent for him (v. 29).
6. After hearing the explanation he 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 is welcome to Him” (vv. 34,35).
7. God has not changed.
 - a. It doesn't matter what our nationality might be, our level of education, whether we are very rich or very poor, He still does not wish anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).
 - b. His desire is that “all men . . . be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Slide 9**B. THE MESSAGE PROCLAIMED (ACTS 10:38-43)**

1. It was the gospel, the good news of what Jesus had done.
2. He began with the life and ministry of Jesus (vv. 38-39a).

“You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who

were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. “We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.” (**Acts 10:38–39a, NASB95**)

- a. “God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power” (v. 38)
- b. “He went about doing good” (v. 38)
- c. “God was with him” (v. 38)
- d. “We are witnesses of all the things He did” and thus can give firsthand testimony (v. 39a).

Slide 10**2. The death of Jesus (v. 39b)**

“They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.” (**Acts 10:39b, NASB95**)

- a. The authorities “killed Him” by crucifixion.
- b. Just as he had done in his earlier sermons (Acts 2:23; 5:30), Peter pointed to the significance behind this historical event .
- c. Behind the human execution lay a divine plan.
- d. Peter called the cross a ‘tree’ on purpose to indicate that Jesus was bearing in our place the ‘curse’ or judgement of God on our sins (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Slide 11**3. The resurrection of Jesus (vv. 40-41)**

“God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” (Acts 10:40–41, NASB95)

- a. It was a divine act — “God raised Him up”
- b. It was a datable event — “on the third day”
- c. It was a physically verifiable event
 - 1) “God . . . granted that He become visible . . . to witnesses chosen beforehand by God.”
 - 2) We “ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead”
- 4. It was this Jesus which the apostles were to proclaim as . . .
 - a. “He is Lord of all” (v. 36) — there is coming a day when “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and . . . every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11, NASB95)
 - b. He is “Judge” of all, both “the living and the dead” (v. 42)
 - c. Savior of all — “through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (v. 43)

Slide 12**C. THE MIRACULOUS RESULTS (ACTS 10:44-48)**

- 1. Before Peter finished speaking these words, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message” (v. 44)
- 2. Suddenly those who came with Peter witnessed something which had not happened since that first Pentecost.
- 3. God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles so that they began “speaking with tongues” (v. 46).
- 4. This was intended by God as irrefutable evidence that God desired even Gentiles to be saved.
- 5. Peter drew the inevitable conclusion — since God had accepted these Gentile believers, the church must accept them too.

6. Thus he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

1. What do we learn from this true account of a Gentile conversion?
2. First, even the best of people need the salvation found only in Christ.
 - a. Cornelius was devout, God-fearing, upright, sincere and generous.
 - b. But he still needed to hear the gospel, believe in Jesus (15:7), repent (11:18) and be baptized (10:48).
 - c. Only then did God through His grace (15:11) save him (11:14), give him forgiveness of sins (10:43), and life (11:18).
3. Secondly, we must rid ourselves of any prejudices we have as to who should hear the gospel.
 - a. Those who are different from us racially or ethnically.
 - b. Those who do not have the same standard of lifestyle we enjoy.

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4. As an old hymn declares,

“Of one the Lord has made the race,
Through one has come the fall;
Where sin has gone must go His grace,
The gospel is for all.”

— J. M. McCaleb