

# GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

DEVOTIONAL READING: Acts 10:34-47

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:34-47

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:34-47

## I. Peter's Message

### Acts 10:34-43

**<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup> 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.**

**<sup>39</sup> "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, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who**

**believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."**

<sup>34</sup>. Peter realized that his own vision, had been timed to coincide perfectly with the vision to Cornelius. Peter therefore could draw no conclusion other than *that God does not show favoritism*—the gospel is for everyone.

<sup>35</sup>. Here, the word *nation* does not refer to political identity but to ethnic and religious background. People everywhere who *fear* God and who demonstrate that fear by obeying him are welcome. This was shocking to Peter and his compatriots.

We can imagine Peter's surprise to hear these words coming from his own mouth! This occasion marked the first time that an Israelite offered Gentiles the opportunity of becoming full beneficiaries of God's covenant without requiring circumcision.

<sup>36</sup>. Despite the nature of his audience, Peter did not hide the fact that Jesus' ministry focused almost exclusively on *the people of Israel* (Matthew 15:24). But at the same time, Peter noted that *Jesus*, who was the anticipated *Christ*—meaning "anointed one" (Acts 10:38)—of the Jews, to be the *Lord of all* people.

The *peace* Jesus preached referred primarily to peace between God and sinners. But in the context of Peter's sermon, it also included peace between divided people

groups (Gentiles and Jews) that becomes possible through common faith in Christ.

God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all nations. As the messenger of God's *message*, Jesus came to fulfill that promise. Old Testament prophets had looked forward to a day when God would bring peace to the whole world (Isaiah 52:7); Peter understood Jesus as the fulfillment of that prophecy. Jesus is the only way to have full peace with both God (Romans 5:1) and fellow humans (Ephesians 2:14).

37. The phrase *you know what has happened* indicates a certain level of prior knowledge on the part of Peter's Gentile audience (Acts 26:26). But there was still more to learn! So Peter framed his teaching by setting two reference points: one of geography (*throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee*) and one of chronology (*after the baptism that John preached*).

The gospel of Jesus became a historical reality in both place and time (Mark 1:9; Luke 4:14-20; 16:16; Galatians 4:4). His ministry was preceded by that of John the Baptist, who preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

38a. The designation *Jesus of Nazareth*, used often by Jesus' enemies, was well known by this time. Regarding *the Holy Spirit and power* by which Jesus began his ministry, see Luke 4:14-20.

38b. The primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was to provide evidence of his divine nature (John 14:11). Many people, sadly, didn't grasp that, choosing instead to focus on passing physical needs rather than enduring spiritual issues (6:26). And many who *did* see a connection between Jesus and the supernatural chose to identify him with the worst elements of the demonic realm (Luke 11:15). Even so, Jesus had authority to bring physical and spiritual liberation because *God was with him*.

39. Peter pressed to the heart of Jesus' ministry, having witnessed it firsthand. Indeed, to be *witnesses* was the task for which Jesus had chosen him and the other apostles. In this regard, Peter points a finger directly at *the Jews*, not the Romans, as being responsible for Jesus' death. Yet the testimony of Jesus' death doesn't end there.

40a. God's ultimate vindication of Jesus was the resurrection. It happened *on the third day* after Jesus was crucified, just as he had said would happen. All Jesus' teachings and miraculous works led up to this point. All Jesus' teachings and miracles would have been for naught had the resurrection not occurred. It is the resurrection that confirms Jesus to be the Son of God, who has the power over death.

40b. We can be certain of the resurrection because God *caused* the resurrected Jesus to *be seen*.

41. An interesting fact of the resurrection is that between that event and Jesus' ascension, Jesus is recorded to have been seen only by believers. They had seen the evidence of his miracles and had rejected him nonetheless. They had attributed his work to demonic power once before and could be expected to do so again.

This underscores the unique role of Jesus' followers. God chose specific *witnesses* to encounter his resurrected Son (Luke 24:45-48). For Peter, standing before Cornelius, this is where the gospel message became personal. God had put the stamp of approval on Peter and his message by means of the two visions mentioned earlier. That message was crucial to bringing Jesus to the Gentiles, starting with this household.

42. What we call the Great Commission, from Matthew 28:19-20, is worded this way. The verse before us might be seen to specify additional elements of method and message of that commission. The methods so specified are *to preach* and *to testify*; the

message is that Jesus was *appointed* by God to judge . . . *the living and the dead*.

When added to earlier references of Jesus' impartiality and his title of "Lord of all," the role of judge makes sense. The broad scope of Jesus' lordship is viable in his perfect impartiality as judge.

43. God fearers such as Cornelius likely had knowledge of the witness of the Old Testament *prophets*. Thus it was appropriate for Peter to refer to them here, while in other contexts it may not have been.

No specific prophets are noted, but the Old Testament provides examples of prophetic witness. Isaiah foresaw a day when people "will be forgiven" (Isaiah 33:24), through the one who "was pierced for our transgressions" (53:5), the "righteous servant" who would "justify many" (53:11).

In a similar vein, Jeremiah hoped for a day when the Lord would "forgive their wickedness" and "remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). Daniel spoke of a time that would bring the "end to sin" and the Lord would "atone for wickedness" (Daniel 9:24). In speaking to Cornelius and the other God fearers gathered, Peter emphasized that the person who fulfilled such prophecies had arrived.

We note that Acts 10:36-43 may be a concise summary of a sermon that went on for hours. Perhaps there were many pauses to answer questions.

## II. Two Outcomes

### Acts 10:44-47

**<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.**

**Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being bap-**

**tized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."**

44. On hearing Peter's message, these Gentiles could have doubted the message like so many before. But before *Peter* could finish speaking, *the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message*. If any further evidence was needed, that was it!

45. *The circumcised believers* refers to those Christians present who were of Jewish descent; those *who had come with Peter* were six in number (see Acts 11:12). To a man, they *were astonished* at God's giving *of the Holy Spirit* to the *Gentiles*.

As Peter would recount later, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). Those words are a key to the importance and rarity of such an outpouring. It obviously had occurred only once before: on the day of Pentecost.

46a. The Spirit worked with this Gentile audience in a way similar as on the day of Pentecost, allowing them to speak *in tongues*. This is only the second instance in Acts where Luke describes speaking with tongues, which is the ability to speak in foreign languages that one has not studied.

This was divine authentication of Gentile inclusion. For a Jewish audience who had experienced the outpouring of tongues at Pentecost, hearing of the same occurring among a Gentile audience would further stress that God is impartial.

46b-47. For the first-century church, baptism followed as a response to the gospel message and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:26-39). Consistent with this pattern, *Peter* asked why *no one can stand in the way of the new believers, being baptized*.

Having seen the Holy Spirit at work in Cornelius and his household, Peter didn't have to ask whether or not they believed. The presence of God's *Spirit* made this clear!

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

### Into the Lesson

What differences and social barriers do you see between people today?

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What kind of barriers, if any, should have a place in churches today and why?

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Today's lesson speaks to the subject of barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

### Into the Word

Read Acts 10:34-47.

How pivotal was it that Peter was addressing a room of Gentiles?

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What would it have been like for various segments of the Gentile world to be granted the same salvation opportunities as the Jews when the barrier of the Old Testament law came down?

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What are some differences and similarities between the events in today's text and the events of the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2?

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Consider the following Latin phrase found on a U.S. penny: *E Pluribus Unum*. What does the phrase mean in English?

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Leaving aside any discussion regarding its suitability as a motto for a country, of what usefulness is this slogan for the church?

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What should be the foundation(s) of church unity?

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### Into Life

Based on your experiences during the role-playing exercise described in the teacher guide, how can you communication of the Christian message improve?

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### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God doesn't discriminate; salvation is for *all* people—period.