

Good News For All

Bible Background • Acts 10:34–47

Printed Text • Acts 10:34–47 | Devotional Reading • Acts 15:6–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will EXPLORE the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives, VALUE the leadership of Peter in the early church and his relationship with Christ, and SPREAD the Good News that Christ is for all who want to know Him.

In Focus

One evening Aisha and Malik hosted their career adult Bible study group at their house to watch Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. Their son Damon was home from college for the weekend and asked if he could join them with a teammate of his, Kyle, whom Damon had been trying to witness to. Kyle would be the only white guy there, but he liked movies, so it seemed like a good way to spark a spiritual conversation with him. Afterward the group ordered pizza and discussed the movie's emotional impact.

Kyle had really appreciated the movie's cinematography, but raised a question about the casting. "I wonder if it would have been as successful if Mel Gibson had portrayed Jesus as a brown-skinned Jewish Israeli instead of a white guy. What do you think?"

Malik chose his words carefully as he answered the question. "No doubt it would have made a difference for Mel Gibson's bank account. But personally, I have a problem with any portrayal of deity. Scripture states that we are not to create a graven image of God because images can divide and cause confusion. Yet since Jesus is both God and man, portraying Him based on His Jewish, non-White ethnicity is justified." Aisha nodded and said, "God is no respecter of persons. He knows the differences in gender and race and utilizes those differences to His glory, but He limits no one because of it! If we dwell on things like the skin color of Jesus, it limits the message of Christ."

Are you constrained by culture or can you witness to someone regardless of race or ethnicity?

Keep In Mind

"Then Peter replied, 'I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.'" (Acts 10:34–35, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Preach (Acts 10:42) Gk. Kerusso — To act as a herald, proclaiming the message of a king or lord

B. Baptized (v. 47) Gk. Baptize — A ceremonial ordinance of Christianity; practiced as a public testimony to identify new believers

Say It Correctly

Cornelius. core-NEE-lee-us.

Centurion. sin-TUR-ee-on.

KJV

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

NLT

Acts 10:34 Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.

35 In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

36 This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

37 You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism.

38 And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

39 And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross,

40 but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear,

41 not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead.

43 He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."

44 Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.

45 The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too.

46 For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked,

47 “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?”

The People, Places, and Times

Cornelius. With the possible exception of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39), Cornelius was the first Gentile cited in Scripture to hear the Gospel, receive salvation, and influence many to believe. Cornelius adhered to Jewish customs but was a Roman centurion, a high-ranking army official. Evidence of his piety was in the conversion of his whole household, giving alms to the poor, and praying to God in accordance with the Jewish ritual. However, because he was not a circumcised Jew, he could not worship in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish synagogue. He worshiped God on the fringes of his religious culture, but he still worshiped God, and God heard his prayers (v. 4).

Peter’s Vision. In a vision at a time of fasting and prayer, the Lord spoke to Peter. After showing Peter animals given for food of all species, God commands Peter to rise, kill, and eat. However, as a devout Jew, Peter refuses to eat that which his culture has deemed common and unclean. The Lord rebukes Peter, declaring that which God calls clean is no longer subject to being called unclean. Peter did not immediately understand the meaning of the vision; but as he thought about it more, the Spirit of the Lord gave him revelation.

Background

God used Cornelius to minister to Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples. Peter was surrounded by the cultural divisions between the Jews and Gentiles. Although he had heard Jesus preach salvation to all nations, Peter struggled to think outside the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. The contrast between Jew and Gentile was great and buttressed by many barriers—culture, language, prejudicial hatred, and geography.

Through a vision and instructions to join Cornelius’s entourage, the Lord helps Peter understand that His gift of salvation is available to the Jews, the Greeks, and all who believe. From this revelation, Peter vows never again to call any man common, unclean, or unworthy of the Gospel.

Why are all people—Jew, Gentile, male, female, any race—equal before God?

At-A-Glance

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39)
2. The Facts (vv. 40–43)
3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48)

In Depth

1. The Witnesses (Acts 10:34–39) Peter declares that God shows no partiality but accepts all people who revere Him and do what is right (vv. 34–35). The same Peter who considered non-Jews, and especially Greeks, as unclean now stands preaching the Gospel to a Greek congregation. He confesses the truth that God does not play cultural favorites, but that He favors people from any nation who reverence Him in righteousness.

Peter preaches the Good News of Christ to the people gathered with Cornelius (vv. 36–39). He tells them of the Gospel, John’s water baptism, Jesus’ anointing of the Holy Spirit and of the good works, healings, and crucifixion which would follow.

2. The Facts (vv. 40–43) But praise God, the crucifixion is not the end of the story. Peter affirms himself as an eyewitness to the truth that Jesus came to life again. Following Christ’s command, he preaches that Jesus “was ordained of God to be the Judge” (v. 42). The Good News does not consist of judgment only, though. Peter further affirms that Jesus—in fulfillment of prophecy—takes away the sin of those who believe Him, who submit to His leadership. The simple message, based on then recent historical facts, must have immediately moved the hearers to belief, because the next thing that happens is a sign of such.

How would you present a simple Gospel message to someone who had not heard it before?

3. The Baptisms (vv. 44–48) While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the people who heard him (v. 44). As the Word was preached, the hearers believed and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Jewish believers were amazed as they watched the Gentiles speak in tongues and worship God (vv. 45–46). This evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles could not be denied.

The Jewish believers had questioned the possibility of regarding the Gentiles as full members of the Christian church—namely, including them in the ceremony of baptism. Peter settles the questions, saying that any who received baptism in the Holy Spirit could not be denied the baptism by water. The baptism in the Spirit was indicative of an inward conversion; the baptism by water was indicative of an outward inclusion into the family of God. Therefore, Peter commanded that Cornelius, his family, and his friends—the Gentile converts— be baptized with water in the name of Jesus as they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Recall and share the story of your own baptism. Was it joyous? Bittersweet? Solemn?

Search the Scriptures

1. What happened as the people listened to Peter preach? (vv. 44–45)
2. After the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit, evidenced with speaking in tongues and magnifying God, what question arose among the believers? (vv. 47–48)

Discuss the Meaning

Divisions in the Church have led to the formation of new denominations, or worse, schisms within the professing Body of Christ that dilute our unified testimony and preaching of the Gospel. The circumcised Jewish believers questioned the extension of water baptism to Gentile believers who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. What do you believe are the purposes of the water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit? What does your church or denomination practice regarding them both?

Liberating Lesson

Like trees in a forest, Christians need to support one another. When we find Christians of dissimilar races, cultures, classes, genders, callings, and expressions of worship, we should become like a forest of trees and link up to nourish one another in the faith. Through our inclusion of all believers, the Church is fortified and God is glorified. Instead of excluding Christians who do not look like us or worship like us, we must extend our roots of righteousness to give what we have and get what we need to grow as the church until Christ returns.

Application for Activation

When was the last time you or your church had worship or fellowship with another body of Christian believers that you know has doctrinal differences? A good place to begin to know others in the body of Christ is through neighborly relationships. If someone in your family, workplace, or neighborhood belongs to a different church or denomination, ask them if you might accompany them to a fellowship or worship service, and extend a reciprocal invitation. Resist the temptation to rank or condemn the various styles of expressions of worship; but rather, seek to experience God through the eyes of another.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 10:34-47 34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Peter knew why he was where he was, so he went right to work. He began by acknowledging the truth which God had shown him in his own vision.

The truth is that Jesus was not kidding when He told Peter and the other original disciples to take the Gospel to “all nations” and to “the uttermost part of the earth” (see Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). The truth of God is that He does not care what color a person is nor what language they speak. God sent Jesus to die on the Cross for “whosoever” would believe (John 3:16). As a result of believing in Christ, God said that “whosoever” would not perish but have everlasting life (cf. Romans 10:13). In the event at Cornelius’s house, God was using a formerly prejudiced Peter to initiate opening up the Church’s Gospel invitation to Gentiles everywhere.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached.

Peter began to lay out the chronological progression of the Gospel. He told his audience that God started by sending Jesus (who is “Lord of all”) to preach first to the “children of Israel,” that is, the Jews (Romans 1:16).

Peter encouraged them by saying that they already knew about some aspects of the message which had been spread to areas beyond Jerusalem. He indicated that the ministry of Jesus began in Galilee after His baptism by John the Baptist. John preached a message of repentance from sin and water baptism (Mark 1:4). Peter is sure that those in Cornelius' house have heard at least that much of the amazing events of Judea in the past few years.

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.

Peter then tells his audience about the earthly ministry of Jesus, which might not have been as known to them. He says that Jesus was "anointed... with the Holy Ghost and with power" (v. 38; cf. Matthew 3:16). This phrasing recalls the very beginning of Jesus' ministry as Luke records it: "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:14). Then Jesus did good and miraculous works, such as healing people with all sorts of ailments (Matthew 8:2–3; 12:10–13; John 9:1–7).

Peter says Jesus was able to do these things "for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). In Jesus' time, some confronted Him with the accusation that He cast out demons by the power of demons (Luke 11:15). Jesus flatly and powerfully denied this (vv. 18–20), and Peter does not want his hearers to have any doubts as to where Jesus' power came from.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.

Next, Peter gives verification of all the events in Jesus' ministry by asserting his own presence on those occasions, saying, "We are witnesses of all things which he did." Peter gives eyewitness testimony of Jesus' ministry. Finally, Peter indicates that Christ was killed and took on our sin, saying Jesus is He "whom they slew and hanged on a tree." Under Mosaic Law anyone who died that way was "accursed," so Christ became "accursed" for us (Deuteronomy 21:22–23; Galatians 3:13).

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

"Him God raised up." Hallelujah! The odd word order is a reflection of the Greek, which places words that the beginning of the phrase to give them emphasis. Peter has been discussing Jesus and emphasizes this same man is the one God raised from the dead. After this miracle, God made Jesus' Resurrection public knowledge. In an epistle, Paul speaks of over 500 eyewitnesses to the Risen Savior, most of whom were still alive at the time (1 Corinthians 15:6). The detail that the witnesses ate and drank with the risen Jesus serves two purposes. First, consuming physical food seemed to allay fears among the Twelve that post-crucifixion that Jesus was a ghost or spirit of some sort (Luke 24:37–43). He was raised as a flesh and blood human again. Second, sharing a meal is a way to express and maintain deep connection among the people gathered, especially for the Jews of that day. Saying that Peter himself ate and drank with the risen Lord acts as a strong proof of the truth of his account.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Peter stands before the assembled household of Cornelius, proclaiming that he is doing just as his Master has commanded him: preaching and testifying. The verb "preach" (Gk. *kerusso*, kay-**ROOS**-so) means to act as a herald, proclaiming the message of a king or lord. We all act as royal ambassadors

when we widely proclaim the salvation that our King provides. The verb “testify” (Gk. *diamarturomai*, deeah-mar-**TER**-oh-my) means to be a thorough, fervent, and solemn witness. It is used widely in Acts to describe Christ’s early followers’ diligent and sometimes antagonizing work spreading the news of the Kingdom.

Peter is a solemn witness to the fact that God appointed Christ as Judge over the living (KJV: “quick”) and the dead. In recent lessons, we have discussed the implications of Christ as Judge, both the blessing He bestows upon His righteous followers and the destruction He imposes on those who do not follow His will. These righteous judgments may fall on those either living or dead, for Christ rules the present earthly kingdom just as much as He rules the heavenly realm. Christ acts as Judge for all, not just once in the end-times, but every day. One may also interpret the phrase spiritually to refer to Jesus’ judgment between those who are spiritually alive or spiritually dead. The spiritually alive will continue in abundant life with Christ, whereas the dead will continue in separation from our living, life-giving God.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Besides the historical miracle of the Resurrection, we can trust that Jesus is the Messiah because He fulfilled the prophecies. His lineage, His birthplace and the events surrounding His early years, His healings, His base of missions, and many details of His manner of death—all of these were spoken to God’s people as signs to distinguish the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled them all, and explained how He had to His disciples soon after His resurrection (Luke 24:25–27).

Peter lastly shares the final piece of salvation: believe the truth about Jesus (which will naturally place you under His Lordship, and drive you to lead a holy life), and you will receive remission (Gk. *aphesis*, AH-feh-sees) of your sins. This is a compound verb simply meaning “to go away from.” It is used in the New Testament to speak almost exclusively of the removal of sin (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:22), and is most often used by the author Luke, who wrote both the Gospel bearing his name and the Book of Acts. Remission of sins means the sin is removed from the believer, sent away so that they are left blameless and righteous in God’s sight.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

When Peter mentions that salvation came from belief in Christ (v. 43), “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” Apparently, the Gentile audience of Cornelius’ household believed on Jesus at that moment, because the Holy Spirit came (1 Corinthians 12:3). When the Spirit comes on them, they speak in tongues and praise God (v. 46). This is exactly how the Spirit made His presence known on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Peter had also personally witnessed many Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit (8:14–17), and knew it was a sign of true belief. Now the Church has spread to the Gentiles with the Spirit falling on the household of Cornelius.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Six of the Jewish believers from Joppa had gone with Peter to Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:23; 11:12). There is no doubt that they were Jewish because they were “of the circumcision.” Though Peter had confronted and resolved his own prejudice through a vision from God, apparently these other Jews still felt a modicum of superiority. They were “astonished” at the Spirit’s radical acceptance.

God is “no respecter of persons” (v. 34), playing no favorites. Since God was opening up salvation to “every nation,” this inaugural event with the Gentiles of the world was to have all the signs which the Jews experienced at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Jews could not say that Gentiles had a lesser salvation and, thus, not be as close to God. All receive the Spirit equally because all have received forgiveness equally.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

These verses show the completion of God’s stamp of authenticity on the Gentiles’ conversion to Christ. They spoke in tongues just like the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The first thing they do when they receive the Spirit is “magnify” (Gk. *megaluno*, meh-gah-**LOO**-no) God. This is another word used often in Luke and Acts, and means “to make great or praise.” It is the same word Mary uses in her joyous song to Elizabeth: “My soul doth magnify the Lord” (Luke 1:46). Of course, there is no way to make God greater than He already is, but when we magnify Him, we make a big deal out of Him. We talk about Him all the time. We think deeply about His Word. Our first thought is to live our lives by His principles.

Seeing this obvious outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter challenges his Jewish brethren to give a reason that the Gentiles should not be baptized. Many churches have deeply held beliefs about the exact order a believer must experience the aspects of salvation. Peter had just witnessed the order of belief, then baptism, and then receiving the Spirit after a prayer with the apostles (Acts 8:14–17). Here he sees belief and the immediate coming of the Spirit. Following this, these new believers will be baptized to show their initiation into Christian fellowship, but this event seals in Peter’s mind that no special lineage, no special prayer, no special baptism is necessary for salvation. He knows better than to second guess the obvious seal of Spirit.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Speaks to a Pagan King
(Genesis 20:1-7, 14-16)

TUESDAY

An Angel Speaks to Cornelius
(Acts 10:1-8)

WEDNESDAY

A Vision of Inclusion
(Acts 10:9-22)

THURSDAY

The Queen of Sheba Blesses God
(1 Kings 10:1-9)

FRIDAY

A Centurion Comes to Jesus
(Luke 7:1-10)

SATURDAY

Peter Enters Cornelius' House
(Acts 10:23-33)

SUNDAY

God Shows No Partiality
(Acts 10:34-47)