

ACTS
He Is Lord of All Acts
10:23b-48

Today we expound a section of Scripture which tells of the first conversion of Gentiles as a group to Christ. What happened in Acts chapter ten is sometimes referred to as the Gentile Pentecost since the exact things happened to these Gentiles when they believed in Christ and were made part of the Church as when the Jews in Acts chapter two believed in Christ and were made part of the Church.

Acts 10:23-48 is a very exciting portion of Scripture and gives us the wonderful account of how a sovereign God was working all things after the counsel of His own will to open the door of the gospel to Gentiles. Remember it had been at least eight years since the Apostles and the first Christians were given the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Eight years after our Lord told His disciples that they were to be witnesses to the remotest parts of the earth, the Lord set up circumstances for Cornelius, a devout and benevolent Gentile, to come into contact with Peter so Peter could give Cornelius and his household and friends the gospel.

God, in His sovereign drawing, was preparing the heart of Cornelius to receive the message of salvation in Christ. Cornelius, while a devout man, a good man, a sincere man, a God-fearing man, a family man, a witnessing man, a religious man and a praying man, was not a saved man. He was not a Christian man. “. . . and he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (Acts 11:14). Cornelius was a seeking man and he was desperately searching for the truth of salvation and a vital relationship with God but he had not found it. God gave Cornelius a vision and told him to go and find Simon Peter who would give him a message. While God was preparing Cornelius's heart for the reception of the gospel, He was also preparing Peter's heart so he would faithfully communicate the gospel to this Gentile. God had to remove the prejudices in Peter's heart towards Gentiles before he could give Cornelius the message of salvation in Christ. Therefore, God gave Peter a vision of a sheet let down from heaven with various kinds of clean and unclean animals, birds and reptiles in it, and told him that all were clean and he was to kill and eat them. This was God's way of showing Peter that Gentiles were no longer unclean. The message of Christ was for both Jews and Gentiles. Cornelius sent for Peter by three messengers and Peter consented to go to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius.

CHRIST IS LORD OVER CIRCUMSTANCES (Acts 10:23b-33)

The Situation When Peter Arrived (10: 23b-27)

“And on the next day he arose and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am just a man.’ And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled.” -- In this incident between Peter and Cornelius, we clearly see how the Lord is in control of the circumstances and is bringing these two men together for an eternal transaction. We cannot miss the sovereign, providential hand of God in this historic meeting of a converted Jew filled with prejudice and a seeking, searching Gentile. When Peter left Joppa for Caesarea, he took six Jewish Christians with him. Surely Peter wisely took these Jewish Christians with him so they could be witnesses to the events that were to take place and give an accurate report to the Christian headquarters in Jerusalem.

Cornelius was an activist for he gathered his family and friends together to receive Peter who would give them a message. There must have been a great deal of excitement in this Gentile household. This situation was a glorified evangelistic home Bible class. What did Cornelius do? He opened his home, he gathered together his relatives and friends; he probably had some refreshments, and he invited Peter to be the teacher and present the gospel. Evangelistic home Bible classes are still one of the best means for reaching people for Christ.

Cornelius, still retaining some of his pagan ways, when he saw Peter, fell at his feet and worshiped him. Perhaps Cornelius was so hungry to find God that he was willing to worship a Jew if that was what it took. Even though Cornelius was wrong, it took a lot of humility for a proud Roman to fall before a Jew. Then Peter said, "Stand up; I too am just a man." Peter was probably embarrassed for he knew men should only bow to and worship Christ who is God come in the flesh. Peter would not accept any kind of worship or acclaim for he was only Christ's instrument. Roman Catholics, who hold that Peter was the first Pope and all popes since him are successors from Peter, could take lessons from this incident. Peter refused to accept homage from Cornelius and would not allow him to give it. Notice Peter did not ask Cornelius to kiss his foot or his ring. Praise God for Peter who said, "Stand up; I too am just a man." This teaches that all men are fallible, even popes. It says that Peter entered Cornelius's home. What a step of faith that was! It was the first time Peter had been in a Gentile house. He still was probably a little baffled about God's command to meet with Cornelius.

The Explanation of Peter's Vision (10:28)

"And he said to them, '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.'" -- Peter probably gave a long description of his vision of the sheet with clean and unclean animals and how he was told to kill and eat them. However, Dr. Luke, led by the Holy Spirit, probably gives us a shortened form and stresses only the results of that vision. It should be noted that the Old Testament does not teach that Jews were to have no association with Gentiles. It is true that they were not to intermarry with Gentiles nor were they to eat the unclean food of the Gentiles, but the idea that they were never to talk to or associate with Gentiles came about through Jewish tradition, not the Old Testament. There is a prayer in the Talmud which shows the insidious prejudice of the Jew against the Gentile: "O Lord, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, that I'm not a slave, that I'm not a woman." A practice of no social intercourse with Gentiles by Jews was based on tradition not scripture.

Peter had four days to think about his vision and he makes a profound statement, "God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean." His Gentile prejudices were being broken down. He was ready to accept Gentiles as people and potential candidates for salvation. Prejudice barriers were torn down because God showed Peter the truth about Gentiles and Peter obeyed. All cultural prejudices, man-made traditions and human fears come crashing down when a man comes face to face with Jesus Christ.

The Question of Peter (10:29)

"This is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask you for what reason you have sent for me." -- At this point Peter probably had a fuzzy conception of why he was sent to Cornelius. He knew he was to give a message but he needed to know the whole situation so he could effectively communicate to these Gentiles.

The Explanation of Cornelius's Vision (10:30-33)

"And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'" -- Cornelius explained to Peter about his vision and how, in obedience, he sent men for Peter to come to Caesarea.

The first observation from this section is that God does hear the prayers of the unsaved. Quite often you will hear men say, "God never hears the prayers of the unsaved," and they base this on John 9:31 which says, "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him." It is true that God does not hear the traditional, stereotyped, rote prayers of the unsaved man who does not pray from the heart, but God does hear the prayer of a sincere, seeking soul. Apparently all of Cornelius's prayers were given that he might come to

know God in a personal way. If a man prays the seeking sinner's prayer seriously and honestly, God will get him the gospel of Christ somehow as He did in the life of Cornelius.

The second observation about this section is the captive audience Peter had for the preaching of the gospel. This was a commendable congregation. They were ready, reverent and responsive to the Word of God. They were eager to hear all that Peter had been commanded by the Lord. This displays the right attitude every Christian and every congregation should have when the Word is preached. They were there to hear what God commanded and Peter was only the instrument for the message. These Gentiles wanted to hear what God had to say through His servant, Peter. They were more interested in the truth which came from the instrument than the instrument himself. They got their eyes off the personality of Peter and listened to God's message. How unlike these Gentiles are many modern day Christians. They say, "We are going to hear Jay Adams, or J. I. Packer, or Cornelius VanTil, or Billy Graham or Bill Gothard," and they forget these are but men. It is quite common today to go to conferences to hear speakers and forget they are speaking God's Word. It is possible to get so wrapped up in the personalities and dynamic of great men that we miss God's message.

CHRIST IS LORD OVER SALVATION (Acts 10:34-43)

The Description of God's Workings (10:34, 35)

"And opening his mouth, Peter said, 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality (no respecter of persons), but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.'" -- Acts 10:34-43 gives us the message Peter preached to these Gentiles that day. It is my personal opinion that Dr. Luke gave us an abbreviated form of the message Peter preached. In fact, this was probably only the introduction to Peter's sermon but before he could finish his message, these Gentiles were converted and there was a Gentile Pentecost with accompanying supernatural phenomena.

Through the vision and through his contact with Cornelius, Peter had learned some tremendous lessons about God's dealings with people. Peter learned that God shows no partiality or is no respecter of persons. God saves Gentiles as well as Jews who believe in Christ. There are no external factors which God considers in the salvation of a soul. It is true that God makes a sovereign choice of men to salvation but this choice is not based on anything external to man. It is by the pure grace of God that any man is saved and God accepts all who truly believe in Christ by faith. God saves the poor as well as the rich, the uneducated as well as the educated, the common man as well as royalty. God receives anyone, anywhere, from any background, race or social class. All kinds of men who believe in Christ are saved because God is not a respecter of any human external factors in man.

Peter then makes a statement which has been very confusing to many sincere Christians. He says, "But in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him." Some folks believe this teaches a salvation by works or merit; that is, if men live up to the light they have, they will be saved apart from receiving Christ as Lord and Savior. This kind of reasoning is totally contrary to the whole argument of Acts chapters ten and eleven. Cornelius, while a religious, benevolent and seeking man was not a saved man. He had received much common grace but had not received special grace from God which regenerates the whole man and saves the soul from sin. What Peter is saying is that a seeking man in any nation will be led to someone who can tell him about Christ and he will believe and be saved. God recognizes an honest, seeking heart and will finally bring that person into a saving relationship to Jesus Christ.

The Summation of the Message (10:36)

"The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) . . ." -- The message of Jesus Christ was in the Old Testament and was preached to the nation of Israel. This message was to believe in the Messiah, Savior and King who was to come, even Christ. There was a preaching of peace through Jesus Christ. The message in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that men can find peace with God through Jesus Christ. This is a world filled with sin, trouble, distress, bloody warfare, grief, pain, sorrow and death. How can a man find peace in the midst of a sinful world? How can a sinful man find peace with God? How can a man find peace of mind? Only through faith in Jesus Christ can a person find real peace. This is the message the

world needs today - peace through Jesus Christ. The reason a person can find peace is that Christ is Lord of all. He has a sovereign plan; He has everything under control; He has died and rose from the dead to give men peace.

Peter did not hesitate to preach the Lordship of Christ. He does not call Him Savior but Lord. It is imperative that a man receive Jesus Christ as Lord as well as Savior. As Lord, one is saying Christ has the right to rule in his life. He is our commander as well as our deliverer. To be truly saved, a person has to surrender his will to the Lordship of Christ with the attitude that he wants Christ to reign as King in his life.

Rev. Frank Barker tells of a young lawyer with whom he was having supper. Frank asked him if he had ever really surrendered his will to Jesus Christ. He said, "No. But I grew up in a Christian home. I memorized the Shorter Catechism. I have taught Sunday School classes. But I don't believe you have to surrender your will to Christ to be saved." "Yes, you do!" Frank said. Then the lawyer said, "Let's have the blessing." They bowed their heads and the lawyer said, "Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for this food. Bless our time here at the supper table." When he finished, Frank told him he had not prayed correctly. "Why not?" he asked. "Because God is not your Heavenly Father." The young man replied, "Yes, He is!" Frank said, "No, He is not because you have never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ by your own profession. Until you do that, you have no Heavenly Father. He wants to be your Heavenly Father but you yourself must be willing to surrender your life . . . your will . . . to Him. He's my Heavenly Father and He will be your Heavenly Father provided you meet His conditions of both faith and repentance - a real surrendering of your life to Christ."

The young lawyer was obviously perturbed with Frank and he went home. While lying in bed, he came under great conviction that he had not surrendered to Christ. He got out of bed and onto his knees and accepted Christ as His Lord and surrendered to Him. The next morning he called Frank and was so excited. He said, "Frank, now God's my Heavenly Father."

The Communication of the Gospel (10:37-43)

In the next seven verses Peter gives us in summary form the basic message the early church declared to the non-Christian world. My personal opinion is that Peter elaborated these facts in detail to Cornelius but Dr. Luke only recorded the highlights of this message for us.

This section is very important because it tells us what the gospel content really is and what the Apostles preached as gospel truth. What the Apostles preached, we today should also preach for the gospel has not changed.

The Preparation for Christ (v. 37): ". . .you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism John proclaimed." -- Christ's ministry was set in motion by the preparatory work of John the Baptist. He was the ambassador for the King. John the Baptist preached repentance to Israel in light of the fact that Messiah was coming, and baptized people when they identified with the Messiah to come.

Manifestation of Power in the Ministry of Christ (v. 38): "You know of Jesus of with power and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him." -- Jesus Christ was the anointed Messiah, being both God and man. His ministry was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Christ went about doing good, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, etc.

Crucifixion of Christ (v.39): "And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross (tree, wood)." -- This Christ who was sinless in acts and thoughts was put to death by sinful men. He was put to death by the most shameful means possible. Cicero, the Roman orator, said, "The cross is so terrible that it should not be mentioned in polite company." Christ was hanged on a tree which was the sign of one being cursed. Christ died in the place of sinners and bore their curse, sin, judgment and hell. God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

Resurrection of Christ (v. 40, 41): "God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should 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." -- Men put Christ to death but God raised Him from the dead. This act of

resurrection had eye witnesses, and it was no hallucination or ghost-like, spiritual appearance because the witnesses actually ate and drank with Christ after His resurrection. The resurrection was an authentication of all that Jesus Christ said and did. The resurrection was God's "Amen" to Christ's finished work for sin.

We have not really preached the gospel unless Christ's resurrection is proclaimed. There is not one sermon preached in the book of Acts which does not mention the resurrection. Why? Because one's relationship to a risen Savior determines one's eternal destiny. "He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

The Commission to Preach Christ (v. 42a): "And He ordered us to preach to the people, . . ." -- Christians have been commanded and ordered by Christ to preach the gospel to all men. Jesus Christ is not dead. He is alive and Christians are to preach Christ's availability to all men everywhere.

While preaching is not an essential part of the gospel, it is important to explain to all men why Christians share Christ with everyone. They are under orders to do so.

The Consummation of Judgment by Christ (v. 42b): ". . . and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead." -- Jesus Christ, as Lord, will judge this world in complete righteousness. No one, absolutely no one, will escape judgment and every person will ultimately have to confront Jesus Christ. ". . . because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). What a person does with Jesus Christ in this life will determine his eternal destiny. If He is accepted as Lord and Savior, one will escape God's judging wrath. If He is rejected as Lord and Savior, one will be judged with eternal perdition.

The gospel has not been preached unless judgment for sin is mentioned. This is the major weakness in the Four Spiritual Laws put out by Campus Crusade for Christ. If you are going to use the Four Laws in your evangelism, please insert judgment somewhere in the second law.

The Remission of Sins by Christ (v. 43): "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins." -- Peter appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures, namely the prophets, to show that Jesus Christ forgives sins. Every prophet bore witness to the fact the only way a person can have sins forgiven is through Christ. Isaiah 53:6 says, "But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Isaiah 53:11b further states, ". . . the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities." Daniel 9:24 says that Christ will "make an end of sin." Jeremiah 31:34 says clearly, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Micah 7:18 states that God "pardons iniquity" and He does this on the basis of the finished work of Christ for sin. The Old Testament further claims that God wipes out our transgressions and He removes our transgression "as far as the east is from the west," putting them "behind His back" and dropping them "into the depths of the sea." There is forgiveness of sin for all who believe in Christ. There is forgiveness for guilt. Guilt plagues every human heart and it makes the heart so very restless. Guilt oppresses us and causes us to build high walls around our souls. The primary need of every human being is to know he is forgiven for his multitude of sins.

Who may find forgiveness? Everyone who believes in Christ. Whosoever will trust Christ shall find forgiveness. All a person must do is believe in Christ to be saved.

What about repentance? Peter does not make mention of repentance. Is repentance not a necessary condition for salvation? Peter does mention repentance but not in these verses. When Peter is giving an explanation in Acts 11 of what happened to Cornelius and to the other Gentiles, he makes the clear statement that repentance is a definite aspect of believing in Christ.

"If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? And when they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well, then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life' (Acts 11:17, 18).

There is no eternal life bestowed by Christ without repentance. The gospel has not been preached unless repentance is mentioned. What is repentance? Repentance means a change of attitude about God, Christ and one's old lifestyle. Faith means trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Repentance means a real surrender of one's life to Jesus Christ.

In his book, Born Again, Charles Colson tells how, in the middle of the Watergate affair, he visited in the home of a successful businessman. This businessman told him of the change Jesus Christ had made in his own life. He gave Colson a copy of C. S. Lewis's book, Mere Christianity, and challenged him to go home and read it. He tells of being so unnerved by the encounter that as he drove from the man's house he stopped his car and said, "And then I prayed my first real prayer. 'God, I don't know how to find You, but I'm going to try! I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to You.' I didn't know how to say more, so I repeated over and over the words, 'Take me.' I had not 'accepted' Christ - I still didn't know who He was. My mind told me it was important to find that out first, to be sure that I knew what I was doing, that I meant it and would stay with it. Only that night, something inside me was urging me to surrender - to what or to whom I did not know."

Then as he read Mere Christianity the gospel was communicated to him. He bowed his head and prayed, "Lord Jesus, I believe you. I accept You. Please come into my life. I commit it to You."

CHRIST IS LORD OVER THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 10:44-48)

The Reception of the Holy Spirit (10:44)

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message." -- Before Peter finished his sermon and perhaps before he finished his introduction, the Holy Spirit sovereignly fell on those who were listening to him preach the gospel. Notice that there is no mention of the Gentiles believing. The emphasis seems to be upon the sovereign moving of the Holy Spirit. We may assume that the Gentiles did believe, but they believed because the Holy Spirit sovereignly moved into their lives.

Our task, as Christians, is to take the message of salvation to all men and it is God's work to bestow His Spirit as we take the message.

Did you notice that at this Gentile Pentecost the Holy Spirit refused to wait for the altar call to save men?

The Reaction of the Jewish Christians (10:43, 46a)

"And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God." -- As on the Day of Pentecost, the outward sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit was the gift of tongues or foreign languages. God gave this supernatural phenomenon of tongues as a sign to the Jews present that the gospel was now going to the Gentiles. These Jews who had grave doubts about whether Gentiles could ever be in the Church could not deny the reality of this fact when they saw these Gentiles speaking in tongues. Without this supernatural phenomenon, the Jews present may never have accepted the Gentiles in Christ on an equal basis with the Jews in Christ.

Speaking in tongues is not necessarily an evidence that one has the Holy Spirit. In all cases, the Holy Spirit enters an individual the moment he receives Christ and this is not accompanied by signs. However, this was a special case in Caesarea because the Christian-Jews needed proof that God's blessing was upon Gentiles coming into the Church. It is interesting to note that since the Day of Pentecost when the first occurrence of tongues appeared there was a gap of eight years until tongues occurred to these Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. There may have been one other occurrence of tongues in Acts 8 when the gospel went to Samaria, although tongues is not specifically mentioned. In eight years, there were two or three occurrences of tongues and it is always connected with a new extension of the gospel. Therefore, we may conclude that tongues are not that important in the book of Acts, and people today who stress tongues as an evidence of salvation, the presence of the Spirit or the filling of the Spirit, do not have the biblical emphasis.

It should be noted that this was a public demonstration of tongues for a special occasion and there is little evidence for a private use of tongues in the New Testament.

The Decision to Baptize Gentiles (10:46b-48a)

“Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” -- Because these Gentiles had been baptized by the Holy Spirit, they were to give outward demonstration of this fact by water baptism. What a key decision for these Jewish-Christians to have these Gentile-Christians baptized. Because they had believed in Christ so as to receive His life, they were to give outward evidence of this fact by water baptism. Water baptism is an outward symbol of the inward possession of salvation in Christ. It is a public testimony that one has received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

It clearly says that Peter ordered or commanded these believing Gentiles to be water baptized. Water baptism is not an option for Christians. It is a necessary step in their obedience to Christ. The New Testament way for a believer to publicly testify to his saving faith in Christ is not by raising his hand, walking an aisle or signing a card but by being water baptized. Water baptism, therefore, is not just nice to do but is necessary, not for salvation, but in obedience to a believer's part in the fulfilling of the Great Commission.

The Union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (10:48)

“Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.” -- All the barriers between Jews and Gentiles in Christ came tumbling down. They were one in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, and they lodged together as brothers in Christ.

Do you know that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the God-Man? That He was sinless in thought and acts? That he went about doing good? Do you understand that Christ died on the cross as the sinner's substitute for his curse, sin judgment and hell? Do you realize that death could not hold Christ and He was resurrected from the dead so that men may now share His resurrection life? Because of Christ, you, an undeserving sinner, can have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

How can you get forgiveness from Christ? Believe that Christ is your Lord and Savior and repent or change your attitude about Christ and your present lifestyle. What happens if you will not believe? What happens if you fail to repent? You will be judged for all eternity by the eternal, sovereign Christ.

However, you do not have to perish. Christ's salvation is open to anyone and everyone who will receive Him as personal Lord and Savior, for it is promised by Him who is Lord of all, “Everyone who believes in Him has received the forgiveness of sins.”