

## INTRODUCTION

This is an earth-moving event as God works by His Spirit to add Gentiles to His church. Last time we saw the preparation that God had to do in order to get both Peter and Cornelius in the right place and with the right attitudes. We also saw the obedience of both these men to the Lord, which was not easy as what they were being commanded to do went against their natural instincts and upbringing.

However God works to convert Cornelius and as a result Cornelius gives Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel to the Gentiles that he had gathered into his house in expectation of Peter's coming. So Peter takes this opportunity and begins to preach the gospel to his Gentile audience.

### 1. PETER PRESENTS SALVATION TO THE GENTILES (vs. 34-43)

In contrast to Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost and his bold defences before the Sanhedrin, Peter here is led by the Spirit to give a simple gospel presentation. There are some situations that call for a robust defence of the gospel and some situations need a historic presentation before the hearers can understand or appreciate the gospel. It is the same gospel but our hearers dictate how we present that gospel message. I might present the message in a different way to university students than I would to those who have learning difficulties, but it is the same message the situation decides how one should preach it.

Peter is proving here to be very flexible when it comes to presenting God's word to others in many and varied situations. The phrase "began to speak" (v 34) is a colloquial Greek expression marking the speech out as important. Peter no doubt looking around at his improbable audience declares that now he knows that God does not show favouritism (v 34).

He now sees before him the astonishing truth that God accepts people from every nation, those who are described as "fearing him and doing what is right" (v 35). The fact that Peter now understands the wonderful truth of God welcoming all sinners to him is something that for Peter was a truth that he had learnt through his vision but now he is witnessing that truth for himself.

In fact Peter should have already knew this truth before his vision because the Old Testament teaches that God does not show favouritism (Deuteronomy 10:17). Now however after his vision Peter experiences that reality as he stands before his Gentile audience. The church of Jesus Christ includes all people who put their trust in Jesus.

It does not matter what country people come from or what skin colour they have or what language they speak or what sex they are or how old or young they are or whether they are highly educated or not educated at all. If anyone submits to Christ in faith then God welcomes such ones in His family and His kingdom. Likewise the church should also welcome all people who are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a great testimony to the world when people see all people being accepted within the church and when God sees a church at harmony with one another even though there will be different personalities and cultures and even languages spoken.

We must not however take this truth that God does not show favouritism and push it to mean that God accepts everyone into his kingdom. There are some people who use this verse to teach what is known as universalism. That is that God accepts all that are sincere and do what is right (v 35). But that view is inconsistent with what the Bible consistently teaches. Peter tells us in verse 43

what he means by those “who fear him and do what is right.” It is those who believe in Him that receive forgiveness for their sins through Jesus Christ.

What Peter is saying then is that when sinners believe in Jesus they are forgiven and one of the signs of their acceptance is that they fear God that means to have reverence for Him and they will do the right things. They will reflect something of the person of Christ in their attitude towards God and in their works towards others.

It is such people who have believed and are showing clear evidence of a changed life that God accepts. The Greek word for “accept” (v 35) is a word that is used in 2 Corinthians 6:2 where it talks about the acceptable time of salvation. So what Peter is saying is that the day of acceptance by God is the day when we were saved and we were saved when we believed and received His forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

This means that salvation is available to anyone who will only believe and receive it. There is no barrier to salvation on the basis of race, language, social strata or sex, the only barrier to anyone receiving God’s free gift of salvation is our failure to believe. We love our sin and we love going our own way, rather than believing the gospel and receiving God’s salvation. No one will be able to say that because they were born in a certain country or spoke a certain language that they could not be saved. They can, if they believe.

Of course this truth places a responsibility upon God church to spread this gospel and to take this message to nations that have not yet heard and we as a little church should do our part both here in the Dales and the UK and throughout the world. For us it will involve praying and doing evangelism in the Dales.

It will involve praying for gospel success in other nations and it might involve giving financially to enable others to go to other nations with the gospel. For some here today it might be that one-day God would call you to go to another nation and another language group in order to live among the people so that you can share this gospel with them.

Who knows but in God’s good timing God might use someone in our church to bring other people from other nations to saving faith in Him.

Now having made it clear this gospel is for everyone Peter now tells his audience what that gospel message is. It’s a message that was first of all sent to the nation of Israel and it is the same message that is now being sent to the Gentiles. A message that is good news for it tells how one can have peace through faith in Jesus Christ who is Lord of all (v 36).

Every person ever born since Adam and Eve fell into sin is born enemies of God and at war with Him. But Jesus Christ through His death brings peace between repentant sinners and God, he did that by paying the price for sin and therefore he is able to reconcile sinners to himself. The one who died is Lord of all and therefore He is able to offer His salvation to all types of people (v 36).

But just in case there were people present who failed to understand who Jesus was, Peter tells them (vs. 37-38). God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power and as a result He went around doing good and healing many that were being controlled by the power of the Devil. Jesus set people free from the power of the devil because God was with him.

Of course Jesus did not just release those who were demon possessed but Peter probably has in mind every aspect of the devil’s work including his work of blinding the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). We are told by John that Jesus came into our world to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The way that He destroyed the devil's work was to die for His people so that they could have their eyes opened to the truth and be set free from the grip of the Evil one. Jesus ministry could be verified by the apostles' (v 39) who ate and drank with him.

They could clearly testify to the truth that Jesus was killed but that God raised him from the dead and many people saw Him after his resurrection and are therefore reliable witnesses of these facts (v 40). Of course not every person saw the risen Jesus and that is not important because God had it all planned.

He chose certain people to be clear witnesses of Jesus death and resurrection and some of those witnesses have recorded what they saw and those statements are included in the bible.

These witnesses were commanded to preach this truth of Jesus death and resurrection to the people and they were to testify clearly to everyone that this one who died and rose again is the one whom God appointed to be the Judge of both the living and the dead. (v 42).

Therefore the implication is very clear. Jesus Christ is both Saviour and judge and each person will know his judgement but not everyone will experience him as their Saviour. For it is only those who believe in Him and willingly receive his salvation through faith that will know the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone who refuses to believe and accept God's salvation will experience Jesus Christ, as judge and He will condemn such people into hell. Therefore should there be any today who have not accepted God's salvation through Jesus then let me encourage you to believe because God's salvation is open to all people who believe (v 43).

This simple truth is not new because even the Old Testament prophets testified about the one who was to come and who would bring salvation to all who believe and received Him (v 43). But this salvation does not come automatically we must believe that is how a sinner receives God's saving grace, it is through faith in Jesus Christ who lived, died and rose again to pay the price for sinners. If anyone believes then the wonderful assurance is that we will receive forgiveness for all our sins (v 43).

What a joy it is to know God's forgiveness, to have the assurance in our hearts that all our sin has been dealt with through Christ's death and resurrection and as a result we have a heavenly home to look forward too. Do you have that assurance? Have you believed? Are you forgiven? If you are then take a few moments now to thank Him for his salvation.

A salvation that we do not earn or deserve but which God graciously gives to us freely through believing in His name.

## **2. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES UPON THE GENTILES (vs. 44-48)**

While Peter was still speaking his sermon was suddenly and dramatically interrupted by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all those who heard Peter's message. That is Luke's way of saying that these people believed the message that they were converted. For no one can believe the message or be converted without the work of the Holy Spirit. The mark of a believer is that they possess the Holy Spirit and the person without the Spirit is an unbeliever. Of course there was the exception of the Samaritans in chapter 8 who had to wait until the arrival of Peter and John before the Holy Spirit came upon them. As we said, when we dealt with that passage, this happened for the benefit of the unity of the church.

So that the apostles could sanction the work among the Samaritans and therefore the Samaritans could be seen as belonging to the same church that the Jews belonged too.

Here that delay is unnecessary as Peter and John are already present and are witnessing the conversion of many Gentiles and so they too are included in the one true church for Christ only has one church. Now notice that the Holy Spirit came upon them as they listened to the gospel being preached for that is God's way of saving sinners. His Spirit and His word are always linked together.

God gives life to dead souls through the preaching of His word. The church's task is to preach the gospel the task of every Christian is under God to witness of God's goodness and grace as the opportunities arise. But it is God's task to give the Holy Spirit. If we keep that in mind it will stop us from getting frustrated when we see little fruit for our labour. But it will also help us to be dependent upon the Lord in the work of the church, for ultimately all our plans and efforts will achieve nothing unless God by his Spirit breathes life into dead souls.

This wonderful coming of the Spirit upon Gentiles amazed those who had come with Peter (v 45), they were amazed that God in his mercy had sent His Spirit upon the Gentiles and that is evidenced by the fact that they spoke in unlearned languages and were praising God.

They were amazed to learn what Peter had to learn, that God's church was not to be exclusively Jewish but was to include Samaritans and Gentiles as well. That of course went against the natural Jewish grain at the time but they cannot deny that the Spirit has come for it is obvious from the signs that accompanied His coming.

Now that it is clear that the Gentiles have been converted by the grace of God then surely there was nothing to stop them being baptised (v 46). Once again we see that baptism follows salvation it is the outward expression of what has taken place in the sinner's heart. The Holy Spirit has come upon them; they have believed therefore they ought not to be denied baptism. Perhaps there were some Jewish Christians who wanted to deny them this ordinance but Peter makes it clear that the qualification for receiving baptism is the receiving of the Spirit.

I have said it before I will say it again, every Christian should be baptised for it publicly declares to others that we have received the Spirit and it is a means of grace to the one being baptised in which God strengthens their faith through the work of His Spirit.

Following their baptism the Gentile believers asked Peter to stay on for a few days (v 48). No doubt they wanted to be taught by Peter, they had much to learn and they were from a different background than the Jews so how could they relate their faith to their own circumstances.

No doubt they wanted Peter to stay on so that they could enjoy his fellowship, to enjoy the company of those who shared the same faith and who loved the same Lord. Now once again we have here genuine marks of the work of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. Christian people will want to be baptised in obedience to the command given by the Lord Jesus. They will want to learn from those who have been in the faith for longer and from those whom God has given the gift of teaching too. Every Christian will want to have fellowship with other Christians because they will enjoy the company of those who believe the same things as they do.

So this important earth-shattering chapter comes to an end. We have witnessed the inclusion of the Gentiles as equals into God's church. The barrier between Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles has been finally abolished through the death and resurrection of Jesus and now His death has been applied to Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore let us be an inclusive church and welcome all who have received the Spirit and let us encourage one another to walk faithfully before God in obeying his command in baptism and in

wanting to learn from those that God has appointed as teachers. Finally let us all desire fellowship with others who share the same faith.

What God has joined together let us not separate? (Mark 10:9)

Amen