

Acts chapter 10 is one of the great turning points in the story of the early church. Up to this point, the good news of Jesus has been spreading from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, mostly among Jewish people and Samaritans. In this chapter, God makes it unmistakably clear that the Gospel is for all people—Jew and Gentile alike.

Jesus had already given the blueprint:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Acts 10 shows the beginning of that final step: “to the end of the earth.”

1. Cornelius: A Devout Seeker Who Needs the Savior (Acts 10:1–8)

Luke introduces us to Cornelius:

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” (Acts 10:1–2)

Cornelius is:

- A Roman centurion—over about one hundred soldiers, a man known for courage and discipline.
- Stationed in Caesarea, the Roman capital on the coast.
- “Devout,” a “God-fearer”—a Gentile who has turned away from pagan idols to worship the God of Israel.
- Generous to the poor and faithful in prayer.

He is walking in the light he has. He believes in the one true God, but he does not yet know about Jesus Christ and the full message of the cross and resurrection. Religious devotion, generosity, and prayer are good, but by themselves they do not save. God, in His mercy, now gives Cornelius more light.

One afternoon, around the ninth hour (about three o’clock, a Jewish hour of prayer):

“He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, ‘What is it, lord?’ So he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.’” (Acts 10:3–6)

God has heard his prayers and seen his giving. The angel does not preach the Gospel himself; instead he directs Cornelius to a human messenger—Peter. God is about to connect a sincere seeker with a prepared servant.

Cornelius obeys immediately. He calls two household servants and a devout soldier, explains the vision, and sends them to Joppa (Acts 10:7–8).

Practical application

- If you are walking in the light you have—responding to what you know of God—He is faithful to give more light. He does not ignore genuine seekers.
- But sincerity is not enough. Cornelius needs to hear about Jesus—about the cross and the resurrection. God does not tell him, “You are fine as you are.” He arranges for him to hear the Gospel.
- God sees your prayers and your generosity. They do not earn salvation, but they do matter to Him.

2. Peter in Joppa: Walls Already Starting to Crack (Acts 10:9–16)

Meanwhile in Joppa, about a day’s journey away, Peter is staying with “Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea” (Acts 10:6).

A tanner constantly handles dead animal skins, which, under the Mosaic law, made him ceremonially unclean. Many Jews would avoid close fellowship with such a man. Peter staying in his home already shows some of his old barriers starting to crumble.

The next day, as Cornelius’s messengers approach the city:

“Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’

But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’

And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’

This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” (Acts 10:9–16)

Peter’s reply is a contradiction in terms: “Not so, Lord.” If He is truly Lord, the only right answer is “Yes, Lord.” When we say “no” to God, we are acting as if we are lord, not Him.

The vision is about more than food. The sheet full of unclean animals is God’s way of preparing Peter to accept people he once called unclean. God is getting ready to send him to a Gentile household.

Practical application

- We often cling to our traditions and prejudices and answer God, “Not so, Lord.” We want Him to fit our categories instead of letting Him reshape us by His Word and Spirit.
- When God shows you something He has cleansed—whether a person, a group, or a work He is doing—do not call it common or unclean just because it does not fit your comfort zone.

3. God Working on Both Ends (Acts 10:17–29)

While Peter is still puzzling over the vision:

“Behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.” (Acts 10:17–18)

They stop at the gate, not wanting to defile the house by entering. At that moment:

“While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.’” (Acts 10:19–20)

God is working on both ends—speaking to Cornelius in Caesarea and to Peter in Joppa, bringing them together at exactly the right time.

Peter goes down, identifies himself, and asks why they have come (Acts 10:21).

They explain:

“Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” (Acts 10:22)

Peter does something that, for a strict Jew, is shocking:

“Then he invited them in and lodged them.” (Acts 10:23)

He hosts Gentiles under the same roof. The next day he travels with them to Caesarea, accompanied by some Jewish believers from Joppa.

Cornelius, meanwhile, has not kept this to himself:

“Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” (Acts 10:24)

He is so eager to hear from God that he fills his house with people hungry for truth.

When Peter comes in, Cornelius meets him and falls down to worship him. Peter quickly corrects this:

“Stand up; I myself am also a man.” (Acts 10:26)

Peter then addresses the gathered group:

“You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” (Acts 10:28)

He explains that he came without arguing once he understood God was directing this (Acts 10:29), then asks why they sent for him. Cornelius recounts his vision and finishes with:

“Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” (Acts 10:33)

What a congregation: “We are all here before God to hear whatever He has commanded you.” That is the right attitude for every Bible study and church gathering.

Practical application

- God often confirms His leading from both directions. If He truly wants you to do something significant involving others, He is able to speak to them as well.
- Never base your life decisions only on someone else’s claim that “God told me this for you.” Seek the Lord until He confirms His will to your own heart through His Word and Spirit.
- Spiritual leaders are not to be worshiped, idolized, or treated as if they are more than human. All glory belongs to Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to give you the heart Cornelius shows: eager to hear whatever God has to say, gathering your household and friends to hear the Word.

4. Peter’s Message: Peace and Forgiveness Through Jesus (Acts 10:34–43)

Peter begins with a confession:

“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” (Acts 10:34–35)

God does not accept people on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, or social status. He looks at the heart. Yet reverence and good works by themselves still are not the Gospel; they prepare the ground. You can fear God and seek to do right, and still need to hear about Jesus and believe in Him for forgiveness.

Peter then preaches Christ:

“The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:36–38)

He points to:

- Jesus’ ministry of doing good and healing the oppressed.
- The anointing of the Holy Spirit on Him.
- The reality that God was with Him.

Then he moves quickly to the cross and resurrection:

“And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” (Acts 10:39–41)

Jesus truly died—“hanged on a tree” in fulfillment of Scripture—and truly rose again. He even ate and drank with His disciples after His resurrection, proving it was not a mere vision or symbol; He was physically alive.

Then Peter declares Jesus’ present role:

“And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:42)

Every person must one day stand before Jesus Christ as Judge. The question now is: how will you respond to Him before that day?

Peter finishes with the promise of the Gospel:

“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

All the prophets point toward Him. The offer is universal: “whoever believes in Him.” The gift is clear: “remission of sins”—the full forgiveness of the guilt of sin, because Jesus shed His blood on the cross in our place, and His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

5. The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles (Acts 10:44–48)

While Peter is still speaking—before he can even finish his sermon—the Lord Himself confirms the message:

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” (Acts 10:44)

The Jewish believers who came with Peter are stunned:

“And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” (Acts 10:45)

How do they know?

“For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.” (Acts 10:46)

The same kind of spiritual manifestation that marked the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts chapter 2 now appears among Gentiles. They are speaking in other tongues and magnifying God. This is God’s clear way of saying, “I have accepted them on the same basis as you.”

Peter draws the only possible conclusion:

“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47)

If God has already given them His Spirit, how can the church refuse them baptism in water and fellowship? So:

“He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 10:48)

They urge Peter to stay a few days, and a new multi-ethnic work of God is born in Caesarea.

Practical application

- God sometimes interrupts our plans to show that He Himself is at work. Peter did not engineer this; the Spirit fell while he was still preaching.
- The same Jesus who saved Jewish believers now saves Gentile believers by the same faith and the same Spirit. There is one way of salvation for all.
- When God has clearly received someone, we must receive them as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if they do not fit our old categories.

A Challenge for Believers

Acts 10 challenges every follower of Jesus:

1. Are there people you still consider “unclean”?
Maybe it is a nationality, a social class, a political group, or people whose sins disgust you. God told Peter, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Will you let the Lord confront your prejudices and teach you to see people as He does?
2. Are you willing to say, “Yes, Lord,” where you have been saying, “Not so, Lord”?
Has God been nudging you toward someone you would rather avoid? To forgive someone you would rather resent? To serve in a place you would rather not go?
3. Do you believe the Gospel is truly for “whoever believes”?
That includes the religious person like Cornelius who still needs Jesus, and the irreligious person who has made a mess of life. The cross of Christ is sufficient for both.
4. Will you be like Cornelius in your hunger for truth?
He fasted, prayed, and gathered his household to hear the Word. Are you cultivating that same hunger—for you, your family, and your friends?

An Invitation to Those Who Do Not Yet Know Christ

You might see yourself in Cornelius:

- You believe there is a God.
- You try to live a moral life.
- You may even pray and give to others in need.

Those are good things, but they cannot wash away your sin. You still need what Peter preached: forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world, lived a sinless life, went about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil, and then willingly went to the cross. There He shed His blood for you, bearing your guilt and taking your punishment. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Scripture promises:

“Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

That “whoever” includes you.

If your heart is stirred and you want to respond to Jesus, you can turn to Him right now. Your own words are best, but here is a way you might express your heart to God:

“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, shedding Your blood for me, and that You rose again from the dead. I believe that You are God, Savior, and Lord. I turn from my sin and ask You to forgive me. Please come into my life, make me new, and teach me to follow You. I give myself to You.”

If you truly turn to Him in faith, He will receive you, forgive you, and give you His Holy Spirit. Just as He did for Cornelius and his household, He will begin a new work in you—a work of peace, cleansing, and transformation that reaches all the way into eternity.