

Acts 10

by Bill Gallatin

God's plan to break down barriers of tradition and prejudice is revealed through Peter's vision and the story of Cornelius, reminding us of the importance of yielding to God's plan for our lives.

Duration: 1:01:47

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1, Joel 2:28, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 25:1-13, Acts 10:34-36

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Peter and Cornelius from the Bible. Peter is shown to be unsure of the meaning of a vision he had seen. Meanwhile, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is shown to be sincerely searching for God. God intervenes in both of their lives, giving Peter a vision and sending an angel to Cornelius. The speaker emphasizes that God works in mysterious ways, often setting up coincidences to bring people together and reveal Himself to them.

Transcript

This Bible study was recorded at Calvary Chapel of the Finger Lakes and was taught by Pastor Bill Gallatin. This evening we're in the Book of Acts, beginning with verse 1 of chapter 10. At this particular time, Paul's probably in the Arabian Desert, very possibly on Mount Horeb, where Moses has been put in the cleft of the rock, and very possibly the very place that Elijah, when he fled into the cave, ended up.

And so the story now turns back to the Apostle Peter, I think, until we get to chapter 12 or 13. But now you remember in the Book of Joel that he prophesied that in the last days that the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out upon all flesh, not just the Jews. And we know that it's happened on Pentecost.

And one of the most difficult things for the Jews, and for many people, is to get tradition out of their lives and replace it with doctrine. It can truly be so ingrained, tradition, that it's a difficult thing for the Lord. And what's amazing to me in this chapter 10 is that the Apostle Peter has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, he's experienced Pentecost, and it's some ten years later, and it doesn't seem to bother the Lord that he's still got some of these prejudices and these traditions that have to be worked out, and God is picking this point now to free Peter.

Now, he's already been free to a point. You remember that he stayed in chapter 9, as we ended chapter 9, he was in Joppa. That city remains today.

It's a great little city near Tel Aviv. We visit it every time we fly over. And he stayed in someone's house named Simon the Tanner.

Now, those people were of such contempt in the Jewish tradition, or the ritual law, that they were not allowed to build even their homes within 50 meters of any city or town. Because they were constantly touching dead carcasses and animals with their trade, they were considered unclean. In fact, if a woman was betrothed to be married and they discovered that her husband-to-be was a Tanner, they would null and void the wedding.

That's how despised Tanners were. The Jews would have nothing to do with their Jewish brethren if they were Tanners. But you remember now, since Jesus Christ has moved in their lives, the prejudice and the traditions and these attitudes begin to move out.

And so, Peter was staying in Joppa with Simon the Tanner. There's one area of his life that he could deal with, and the Spirit of God has set him free. But now, we're going to see that God's portion of the Scripture concerning Joel chapter 2 has to deal with Gentiles.

Now, another thing that the Jews, and Peter even up to this point, would not even associate with the Gentiles. In fact, if a Gentile entered a Jew's home and touched the furniture or sat on a piece of furniture, if a Jew sat on that piece of furniture, he considered himself unclean. They were so bigoted against the Gentiles.

The Jewish rabbis taught that Gentiles were created by God to stoke the fires of hell. They were used as timber to keep the flames of hell burning. And so, there was this extreme hatred, in fact, for some eight to ten years.

And this portion of the Bible is ten years after Pentecost. After these people had been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, had been with Jesus Christ some three and a half years before that with his personal teaching. Now, even though back in Deuteronomy, God said that they were to share their truth with the Gentiles, God had planned to save Gentiles.

But you see, the rabbis had taught in such a way and wrapped them up with the weaving of Judaism, far and beyond what the law meant, that this prejudice was ingrained within them. And so, Peter's coming to a point in his life where he's going to see that God not only is going to pour out his Spirit on the Jews, but also on the Gentiles, his love and his grace, and set him free even more. And it's interesting how Peter kind of reverts back to the old Peter some years ago, as he reacts to what the Lord does to him.

There was a certain man in Caesarea. Now, that's some thirty miles up the coast, north of Joppa. In fact, there's a tremendous city, great excavation going on there, and that's another place we visit.

There's an amphitheater there that we usually have a Bible study in, and it's quite possible that the place there in Caesarea is where Paul gave his testimony and his defense before Festus in the book of Acts. Later on, we'll come to that. But here he goes to a man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the band called the Italian Band.

So, remember, Rome ruled the world. Rome was ruling Palestine, and this powerful, and they were men of very extreme high character to be a centurion. They would rule over 100 of the top soldiers, or the marines of the Roman army.

They would have servants of their own, extremely wealthy and of high character. You remember back in Luke chapter 7, some ten years earlier, there was a Roman centurion that said he was a devout man. He worshipped God.

He gave much alms to the Jewish people. In fact, he even built them a synagogue, and he had a slave in his household that was extremely ill, ready to die, and he sent his servants to Jesus Christ. Remember, they came to Jesus Christ and they said, The centurion, our master, has sent us to thee.

His slave is dying, and he would ask you if you might do something for him. And Jesus responded after he heard that this Roman centurion had done so much for his people. You remember in Matthew chapter 10, I think verse 42, and then later on in chapter 25 verse 40, Jesus teaches that if you give so much as a drink of water to the least of my servants, one of these little ones, you've done it unto me, you will not lose your reward.

And then later on in the end of Matthew, he says, If you've done this unto the least of these my servants, you've done it unto me. And so, Jesus reacts to the love of this centurion and responds because of his attitude toward the Jewish people, even though he's ruling over them for the Roman empire. His decency and his love and his searching for God, even though it may be an ignorance, he was searching for God.

And he heard about Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus responded so quickly, just as he will to each one of us, just as he will to you, whatever your need may be, if you cry out to him. How quickly he responds because of his love for all of us.

So, he goes on his way back. And the centurion, before he even sees Jesus, as he hears that Jesus is approaching now, he sends out to more servants and says, Master, Lord, I'm not worthy that you'd even enter into my home. So, the high regard that he had for this Jewish Messiah.

And so, there was a man, there was a humility and a beauty about this man, even though he had authority. And he sends a message to Jesus, I'm not worthy that thou would come into my home. And I have power and authority.

And I tell this soldier to go here. I tell this servant to do this. And he does it.

And I know you have that same authority, that same power, far superior to mine. If you'll just speak the word, I'm not worthy that you'd come into my home. But if you'll just speak the word, I know that my servant will be healed.

And Jesus just marveled at this man, this centurion. And so, he spoke and he healed the slave, the servant. Jesus made the statement, I have not seen such faith, not ever, in the whole state of Israel.

I haven't seen this kind of faith that this gentile has within my own people. So, the character of these people. Now, here's another Roman centurion, in Caesarea.

Now, here's a man who is devout. He is not of the Jewish faith. He's not a Christian.

More than likely, you see, he's worshipping Aphrodite, Diana, Zeus, or one of the many pagan Roman gods. And yet, he's devout. He's sincere, but sincerely deceived.

And it's interesting how God, when someone is searching for him in something false, with all of their heart, how Jesus Christ will reveal himself to whoever. It doesn't matter what kind of a cult or false religion, until

someone has really heard the truth concerning Jesus Christ, and they're beginning to ache for God, how Jesus responds to that. And so, here we have this devout man.

One that feared God with all of his house. So, his servants, the soldiers under him, maybe he was married, but he had this tremendous devotion to God with everybody around him, and they responded to him. He was such an example.

He gave alms to the people, much alms, and he prayed to God always. He saw in a vision, evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him and saying unto him, Cornelius. So, some three o'clock in the afternoon, as he's praying to a God that he doesn't know, to a false God, and here Satan is thinking he has this man trapped in all the pantheism of Rome.

Yet, his heart is yearning, his heart is searching. He's sincerely deceived, and Jesus Christ gives him a vision. God's going to open his eyes and reveal himself to him, and it's interesting how he's going to work.

And God usually does do something like this, working in two places at the same time setting up such wonderful, what we would call coincidences. Always working, usually with both parties at a distance. So, when he looked upon him, he was afraid.

And he said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God. Your sincerity has reached the throne of God. I believe that if we are sincere with all of our, no matter what our sin is, what our failure, what our fears, what our experience, if we're sincerely seeking God, he is so faithful to be there.

Remember, Jesus said, and I love this, He who comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out. And I don't know what your problem is tonight, or your situation, but if you have a desperate need, and you really do need help from God, if you would cry out to Jesus Christ before this night is over, he'll respond to you if you're sincere. That's how much he loves you.

And he has the power to help you, to impart his grace to you. So, thy prayers have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.

He lodges with one Simon a Tanner, whose house is by the seaside. He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." And so, here God's working, and as he's working in Caesarea, he's going to respond to this Roman centurion. He's going to work at the same time thirty miles to the south with Peter.

And I like that about God. The omnipresence and the omnipotence of God. They can work all over the world all at once.

We have to get to a telephone, get to a computer, send email. We think email's fast. God's a lot faster than email.

In fact, I'm really not into it. Everybody in the church is into their computers, and it's just amazing the technology. And they keep saying, Bill, have you got a laptop yet? Are you into it yet? I said, no, I'm not into it yet.

I just, I don't even want to go into the learning curve. My Bible's enough. And so, my only defense is, if I can find a computer that's faster than the Holy Ghost, I'll start getting into it.

That's my only defense. And I haven't found a computer yet that can go faster and quicker at the same distance as the Holy Spirit can. And so, here he's working thirty miles apart.

When the angel which spoke unto Cuneus was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them, and waited on him continually. And when he declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey in Judea and to the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

That would be twelve noon, Jewish time. Now, it's interesting, again, still they maintain many of their Jewish traditional times of prayer. Morning, noon, and afternoon prayer.

Three p.m. in the afternoon, when the afternoon, the evening, or the afternoon sacrifice is taking place on the temple in Jerusalem, they still maintain many of those traditions. Remember, it's only been about eight to ten years after Pentecost. And just because somebody is born again, and comes out of his old religion, is filled with the Spirit of God, and has the gifts of the Spirit, that doesn't mean that God's going to go and turn them inside out, and then correct everything, wash all the tradition out immediately.

And all of a sudden, they see clearly. God is very patient with us. Just as he's been with many of you.

He's been patient with you, he's been patient with me. I can recall the denomination I came out of, and it wasn't instantaneous that I just quit and dropped some of the excess baggage that isn't even biblical that I've been taught for holiness and sanctification. Thank God that God was patient, and it didn't stop God from blessing me, because I still maintained some of those things out of fear, because of what holy men had drained in me in that denomination.

But praise the Lord for reading the Bible, and God begins to work in the Spirit of God like water. That living water begins to flush out and replace with the truth, and as Jesus said, who the Son makes free, is free indeed. And you begin to know the truth.

It's the same as it was then. So as Peter went out to pray, he was very hungry, would have eaten, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance. So he's not given a vision, maybe like Cornelius, but he goes into some kind of a trance as he's praying.

And he saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet, knit at the four corners and let down to earth. Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, entreating things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord. Now, remember some thirteen years or twelve years earlier, when Jesus was saying he must go to the trough, and he was going to give his life, Peter immediately said, Not so, Lord, and began to rebuke the Lord, and actually, in his ignorance, try to stop the redemption of man. How quickly, you see, we can go from revelation to our own stupidity.

And I can relate to it so easily. Remember, earlier than that, just a day earlier, moments earlier, Jesus said, Who do men say that I am? And Peter blurted out suddenly. He said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And he said, That's correct, Peter, but flesh and blood does not reveal this to you. It's not your own understanding, your knowledge. This is divine revelation, but my Father which is in heaven.

And he said, And upon this statement, upon this declaration, this revelation that you've been given, the church will be built upon that rock, that declaration, I am the Son of God. The church is based on Jesus Christ, his deity. You're a little stone, you're Petra, but this Petra, this massive, wonderful Petra rock and foundation.

And then shortly thereafter, maybe still flushed with his revelation, he's trying to stop the redemption of man. He's telling you, Not so, Lord. He began to go to the cross.

No suffering. Well, I'm not into that doctrine. And you remember, as he went on, he denied the Lord three times.

And this is what I find interesting. When Jesus restored Peter in that perfect love before all, showing the other apostles what they make the mistake that they will God could never use Peter again. He denied him.

He failed. So what does Jesus do in his perfect love? He takes Peter before the rest of the apostles in the Galilee before he returns to the Father, and he recommissions Peter in a loving, wonderful way before them all that they would see it. God's not finished with man just because he failed.

Because Peter truly was broken. He truly was broken. It wasn't the tears of Esau.

He wasn't sorry for something lost like Judas and so tormented, committed suicide. No, he was broken for what he'd done. He denied his Lord and it broke his heart.

And there was true repentance. And so Jesus restored him before them all. And it's interesting.

He said, Peter, love has found me because Peter denied him three times, as you recall. And so Jesus drew him back into fellowship. Love has found me.

And remember when he said, Yehohot, thou knowest that I love thee. He said, now feed my lambs. Make sure you have a good Sunday school.

If you're going to feed my sheep, the most important thing is the little lambs. That's the next generation. Then he said, love has found me, Peter.

He says, now tend my sheep, take care of them, feed them. And then the third time he recommissioned them. Now, I really believe that the Lord dropped the sheep three times and probably the third time Peter's saying, oh no, here I go again.

Here I go again. I mean, he could have dropped it once, I'm sure. But three times he lowered it because that tendency in Peter to blurt out the impulsiveness because I don't understand it.

Not so, Lord. I'm not going to do it. It's not right.

I'm going to be a faithful Jew, even though I believe in you. So he dropped it three times. Then it was received up into heaven.

Peter had been instructed what I call clean. Don't you call unclean. And the Lord wasn't referring to food here, even though there was a dietary laws of the Jewish people.

The Spirit of God had changed that the church after Pentecost. And if you look at Paul's writing, hey, you can pray over anything, eat whatever you want. Nuggets, Doritos, peanut butter cups.

I mean, depending on what culture you're in, to be a faithful missionary is to eat what's put before you. And certainly you do learn to pray. I've been in places where I've prayed.

Really prayed. I've prayed in my understanding. I've prayed in tongues.

Prayed so long it got cold. But I'll tell you, I survived. And it blessed the people I was with.

And so what he's saying here is, now you've got this, you're starting to fellowship with Jews within your own society. You know, you're breaking down the caste system, so to speak. But you still have something about another race that's down deep inside.

And we're going to deal with it. And you see, there is no room for that, is there, in the body of Christ. There's absolutely no room for that in the body of Christ.

Because we're all from Adam, and the last Adam came to redeem us all. We're all created in God's image. He says, God is no respecter of persons.

He loves everybody equally in every race, every type of person is important in God's eyes, and equal. And so God will deal with that. Here it is in Peter.

Peter's never had to deal with it. It's for all these years. And again, spirit-filled.

Gifts of the Spirit operating his life. Ten years after Pentecost, yet this deep, ingrained thing down deep inside. And God's saying, now we're going to deal with it.

And it could be there's something in your life that may not be prejudiced. It may be something else in your life God's never even dealt with yet. And you've been filled with the Spirit for so many years.

And now God's beginning to put the pressure on your life in some area, and it's time to yield. It's time to be free from it. You've had it buried down inside, kind of like Achan.

And you remember in the book of Joshua, that thing he had buried had stopped everybody from moving forward. It could be stopping the blessings of your family, your home, your own life. And God's saying, now it's time to deal with it.

I'm going to set you free. So it's time for Peter. Well, Peter doubted himself what this vision which he had seen should mean.

Behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate. Peter's probably still up there wondering what to eat, you know, and what he should do. I'm sure he's not exactly sure.

When you drop that sheet, it reminded me, I heard pretty interesting today, about the panda that walked into the restaurant to get something to eat. I don't know if you've heard that story. I certainly haven't shared it with you.

There's this luncheon place or, you know, like a delicatessen in the city of Rochester, and it's that place where everybody, all the yuppies run out every day about twelve o'clock at the same time, the people from Kodak and Bosch and Long. And they all kind of knew each other, and they're having lunch, a quick 40-minute lunch before they go back for the afternoon work. And they're all sitting there eating, and a

panda walks in.

Walks up to the counter and orders a salad and a glass of water. Eats the salad, drinks the water, pulls out a gun, and blasts the ceiling. Empties the pistol in the ceiling.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Just eight shots. Gets up and walks out. Everybody's screaming, hitting the floor.

What the heck is going on? Why'd that panda do that? Can't figure that out. And they all leave. Makes the papers, and the next day they come back, and they're still talking about lunchtime again, you know.

And they drift in for their lunch, and they're talking. Says, man, wasn't it a crazy thing? Never saw anything like that in my life. A panda coming in here, eating like that, and then shooting holes in the ceiling and walking out.

And the owner says, well, I did a little research, so I can understand. There's nothing new about that. We should expect that with a panda.

They say, why? What do you mean? What are you talking about? That's not normal. They say, look, pandas, it's normal. I got to thinking about that, and I went and got an encyclopedia Britannica.

I looked up panda. It says it's an animal. It's from China.

It eats, leaves, shoots, or eats, shoots, and leaves. Eats, shoots, and leaves. So now they're standing before the gate, and they called, and they asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men to you. Notice how God's working now. And the Spirit of God as a personality is a person with a voice.

So you have this third person of the Trinity speaking audibly. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing. For I have sent them.

So the deity and the personality of the Holy Spirit working in this. And then Peter went down to the men who sent unto him from Cornelius, and he said, Behold, I am he whom you seek. What is the cause whereof you are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man and one that feareth God and of good report.

Man, isn't that something? A man that had such a good report. Now, the Jews hated Rome, because they were under the dominion of Rome. They'd lost the scepter.

They'd lost the authority of their own nation. But this man was such an example, just in his devotion to seeking God. He was an example to the whole nation.

He had good report. Would be God that we would live such a way that all who knew us would say, There's such a good report about that person. A good report among all the nation of the Jews.

And he was warned from God by a holy angel to send for thee unto his house and to hear words of thee. And then called he them and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. So up the coast they go, Peter being obedient. And Cornelius waited for them and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

And so here's this whole contingent of Gentiles, and Peter's finally in his life. He's going to have to deal with it. God's working in his life.

And as he was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. Just to give him homage. He had such a high regard.

And certainly because he had a vision and an angel appeared. And here he comes up the coast. He's overwhelmed.

And most pagans do get overwhelmed and they bow down before humans. And notice Peter didn't say, kiss my ring or stick his foot out and say, kiss my big toe. I'm the pope.

He's a true servant of God. Peter took him up saying, stand up. I myself also am a man.

It's a terrible thing what's happened in the church. And this happens a lot, I think, with maybe baby Christians, immature Christians. As they begin to see God using somebody, they become more enamored with the instrument that God is using than God himself.

Because they haven't learned to walk by faith. And so so much is by what they see. And so they see the man or the woman, the instrument that God's using for his own glory.

And the man or the woman may be being faithful also in the ministry. And but don't ever allow someone to put you on a pedestal, because God has ways of knocking this off. That's the tragedy of the church.

God began to use people in the church and they allowed themselves to be placed on the pedestal. And then they're being called reverend. And the Bible says there's only one person who's reverend, and that's God.

It says holy and reverend is his name. So then he made a little higher pedestal, and then it's the right reverend. Then he got a little higher pedestal, and they liked that height.

And so they allowed themselves to be called the very right reverend and the very holy right reverend. Then they started calling them cardinals and blue jays and robins and all the other things. It's a tragedy that these men have allowed that to happen and allowed people to do that.

But in the early church, two servants of God will not allow that. There's only one person that should be exalted, and that's Jesus Christ. That's our precious Lord.

He's holy. He's reverend. And so Peter quickly refuses homage or adoration or adulation.

He refuses to allow somebody who is ignorant to place them on a pedestal just because God is using them. He refuses to touch the glory. And as he talked with him, he went in and he found many that were come together.

So now he's exposed to the Gentiles. A Jew mingling with the Gentiles. And only the Holy Spirit could cause a man to do that.

Again, there can be such ingrained prejudices and fears, but only the Spirit of God, the love of God, breaks down every barrier there is. It says perfect love casts out all fear. It says he who fears is not made perfect in love.

The wonderful love of Jesus can cause us to mingle with anybody in his grace. He said unto them, You know how that is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or to come unto one of another nation. But God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

And again, the thing that just strikes me, this is ten years after Pentecost. So it shows you, even though you may be filled with the Spirit, have the gifts of the Spirit, it takes a lot longer to start to develop the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. Many people get tongues, have miracles in their lives, can prophesy, teach, have the gift of help, do many, many things, and still not have love.

And Paul devotes that whole wonderful chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, that greatest is love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. That's the love that God has for all of us.

And he's asking us to have that kind of love for each other, the love of Jesus. And there's no such thing as a common person. There's a common face for every person, as you tell us.

There's no such thing, though, as a common person in the eyes of God. And that means that everybody here, you see, you are very valuable, very important in the scheme of things. God loves you, has a plan for your redemption.

He has plans to bless you. His thoughts towards you are precious. It says, His thoughts towards you are more than the sand of the sea.

Now, stop and think how many grains of sand there are in all the seas and the beaches. Here's some folks right here that have quite a bit just where they live, just up and down the coast of Florida. But that's just one tiny little area.

Now, just stop and think, how many different thoughts do you think you could have? Try and spend the next hour with a different thought every second. Try to spend the next 24 hours with absolute new thoughts for 24 hours without repeating yourself with a thought. But God, his thoughts toward you are more than the sand of the sea.

He knows more about you, cares more about you than you can even conceive. The sand of the sea. Beside that, it says His mercies are new every morning.

Now, stop a minute. Come up with new mercy tomorrow. Have somebody do something against you.

Start to check. Get your list out. Think of new mercy every single moment for somebody who's done something against you.

Don't repeat the mercy. How much new mercy can you design? We get to a point and say, that's it, no more mercy. You've done it.

You've pulled the plug on it now. That's it, no more mercy. God's mercies are new every morning.

He has even given you the same mercy since you've been born again. He hasn't given us what we deserve since we've been born again. He's given us mercy and new mercy.

He's given you new mercy today, and he'll give you new mercy tonight. He'll give you new mercy tomorrow, if you need it. They're new every morning.

What a wonderful Lord. Wonderful God. And he doesn't see anybody unclean, because with his touch, you see, he can make whole.

He can cleanse. Therefore came I unto you without gain, saying, As soon as I was sent for, I asked therefore for what intent you have sent for me. And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and I really believed truly that this man was sincere in giving aid, building synagogues, and seeing something in the Jewish religion, seeing the example of maybe a Jewish believer.

But God honored that, and he did. Whoever he gave that cup of cold water to, as a Roman centurion, not having any prejudice or bigotry. And here's a pagan.

He wasn't of the household of faith. He wasn't of the Jewish race, but Jesus rewarded that. And that's why I believe it doesn't matter what culture, what jungle, what maze of buildings in the city caught up, if someone's heart begins to try out and consider and seek after God, no matter what Satan tries to deceive, if that heart is sincere and yearning, Jesus Christ is there to rescue us.

We're the brand plucked out of the fire, remember? The Bible speaks of us as a brand plucked out of a fire. How many of you would stick your hand in a fire to get a burning brand? Nothing but a piece of old, burnt, charred wood. You think it's worth it? How many of you would do that? You saw an old, dirty, twisted piece of wood glowing red, white, hot in a fire, and you see something valuable in that old piece of dirty, burning wood.

You stick your hand in the fire and pull it out, simply so it wouldn't burn up. You see, that's what God did for you and I. We're the brands plucked out of a fire. The fires of hell that we're facing, the wrath that comes because we're damned.

We're outside of Christ, and God, in his love and mercy, reaches down to put his hand and pulls us out, worthless as we were, because he saw something wonderful, what he could do with his love, his regeneration, his salvation. And so, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard. Thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Send, therefore, to Joppa and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodged in the house of one Simon the Tanner by the seaside, who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. And immediately, therefore, I sent to thee, and thou hast well done that thou art come.

Now, therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God? I want to hear." And then Peter opened his mouth and said, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. He's the Prince of Peace.

He preaches peace. I like what it says about Jesus, you remember, in the synagogue. I think it's in Luke, when Jesus spoke, and it says that after he was finished, he said, We've never heard such gracious words.

He spoke with such peace, such love, as he read Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1, declaring who he was, the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. And after they heard that, he said, We've never heard such gracious speech. Now, stop and think.

Again, if you know this, I think I've shared this before, the Jews have cyclical readings. They have seasons where they read through the Torah every year, through their seasons in the synagogues. These Jews, they were godly Jews that attended the synagogue regularly in Capernaum, and so they would hear this text taught every single year by their rabbi.

When Jesus taught it, it was so different. There must have been such love, such truth, such devotion, such sincerity, when Jesus said, We have never heard it taught like this before. We've never heard such gracious words.

That word, I say, you know, which was published throughout all Judea and began from Galilee after the baptism of John the priest. 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. If you feel oppressed tonight, it's from the devil.

If you're a child of God and you're oppressed, it's from Satan, because there's no condemnation of those that are in Christ Jesus. God will never condemn his own. The Spirit of God may convict you, may try to soften you, may draw you back to the Lord, but he'll never oppress you, never condemn you.

All oppression for the child of God is from Satan, and Jesus came to deliver you from that, to free you from that. So if you're going around oppressed, rebuke it. Rebuke Satan in the name of Jesus Christ.

God hasn't designed your life to be under that cloth. His yoke is easy, his burden is light, and Jesus Christ took all the oppression. He took the curse upon himself on Calvary that you might be freed.

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. How him God raised up the third day and showed him openly. Now, it's interesting, in John chapter 2, verse 19, Jesus said, No man taketh my life, but I lay it down and I taketh it up again.

So Jesus raises himself from the dead, the text tells us, in John chapter 2. Here it says that God raised him from the dead. Romans 8, 11, it says that the Spirit of God raised him from the dead. And in Galatians chapter 1, verse 11, God the Father.

So you've got the whole trinity declaring their part in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How they all work together. And notice who he showed himself to.

Not the skeptics. Jesus doesn't have to prove anything to the unbeliever. He only appeared to believers.

That's why it's so foolish for someone to say, well, Jesus is really God. Have him do something right before my eyes and then I'll believe. Really, it's nothing but the announcement or some kind of verbiage from a skeptic.

No sincerity whatsoever. And Jesus will not even respond to that. But those who believed, those who needed their faith rewarded, those who did love him.

It says, 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. And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he which is ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the living and the dead. To him, give all the prophets witness that through his name, whosoever is believed within him shall receive the remission of sins.

The question is, if you believe in Jesus Christ, you believe he's the son of God, the Savior of the world, the only answer for redemption. The only way to reach heaven and have the sin issue taken care of. There's no ritual.

There's no sanctifying process. There's no organization. There's only one way to heaven.

That's believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging our sin. Lord, I'm a sinner. You came to die for my sin.

You came to raise yourself from the dead to give me victory over death, to give me the promise of eternal life. If I put my faith and my trust in you, I'll have eternal life. My sins will be forgiven.

If you have that in your heart, you believe that with all of your heart and that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved, the Bible says. It may be you come to Calvary Chapel and you haven't really asked the Lord into your heart. You haven't made a real decision.

Jesus, I'm a sinner. Please forgive me my sin. You're the Savior of the world.

Come into my heart. I realize that just by going to Calvary Chapel or being water baptized or being involved with the church doesn't make me saved. You remember, Jesus teaches clearly in Matthew chapter seven in that last day, multitudes will stand before him and they'll say, Lord, Lord, we've even said your name openly.

We've referred to you as Lord, Lord. We've done wonderful things, not evil things. We've performed miracles.

We've cast out demons in your name and you'll say, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you. They were never really born again.

They never really had Christ in their heart. They were like the five virgins with no oil. They weren't sealed with the Spirit of God.

There's no indwelling person of the Holy Spirit. So Peter's saying, if you really believe with all of your heart, much like Paul said to the Philippian jailer, if you believe with all of your heart, thou shalt be saved. And if he's preaching redemption, much like he did on the day of Pentecost, notice what happens.

Peter didn't know this was going to happen. They weren't pumping things up, trying to shove the dove and work a crowd into hysteria to get them emotionally high to respond to something. Peter's just teaching.

He's sharing the truth of God. And that's the wonderful thing about the Lord. You never know when he's going to just step in and invade our space and create some kind of a blessing unexpected for your life.

All he's asking for is obedience, without doubt, with an open heart. Not asking why. You know, Peter didn't wrestle with, why should I go up and see this guy? Send someone else.

Philip's up in that area. Why am I busy? I'm on the roof praying. Thank God they didn't have phones.

He might have called an elder or an associate pastor, but he responded in obedience and he went and God had this marvelous thing that none of them knew was going to take place. God in his grace, in his sovereignty, in his providence, pours out the spirit and he's fulfilling more of Joel chapter two, verse twenty eight. Now, all flesh, the Jews received it on Pentecost ten years earlier.

Why he waits ten years? I don't know. I don't know these things about God, but he did it. He fulfilled it all and now the Gentiles are receiving the Holy Ghost and it fell on all them which heard the word and not one person fell on the ground.

And again, it must be that even after ten years after Pentecost, God's spirit maybe didn't have the power he has today, but then I think on the day of Pentecost, the greatest outpouring of the spirit of God, with exceptions of this, to fulfill Joel 2.28, not one person fell out of their seats on the ground. And there was no barking like dogs, or living around the ground like snakes, or jerking spasmodically, because the spirit of God is not the author of confusion, but of peace as in all the churches, no matter what their preference of worship or style is. Paul said, as in all the churches of God, he's a God of order and decency.

And when the spirit of God comes on someone, there is self-control. And here the spirit pours out and not one person falls on the ground, yet they're responding to the work of the spirit. They of the circumcision which believe were astonished as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You don't have to pay for it. It's a gift. All the things of God are such gifts.

Now, this is what's interesting to me that we see creeping in the church today, demonic things that the church is not discerning. The church, I think, is so starved and doesn't know what personal relationship with Jesus is, and there isn't that fulfillment in real relationships that they need so many experiences. They need a new thrill, because they're not fulfilled with Christ Himself.

Like Paul said, that I may know him and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of the suffering, not as well naming and claiming, but the fellowship of the suffering being made conformable into his death. That's all Paul lived for, and it's curious to me that these people are saying that, well, God's spirit is moving their revival and people are barking like dogs. You realize in Deuteronomy chapter 23 that God says that there shall not be any money even come into the house of God from a sodomite or a homosexual, and he calls them dogs.

I don't even want the money of a dog, a homosexual, in the house of the Lord. In Philippians chapter three, Paul says, Beware of dogs. In Revelation chapter 22, 15, it says the city's gates are opened all, but without the city, no opportunity to come into the new Jerusalem without our dogs.

So if the spirit of God is causing revival and moving, I don't think he'd have people acting like dogs in his house. The church is not discerning. The fruit of the spirit when someone is baptized and filled with the spirit is self-control, meekness.

See, didn't Jesus have the same problem when he showed up the first time with the scribes and the Bible teachers and the Pharisees? He said, You do always err for you know not the scriptures. It's so important to read the scriptures and allow the spirit of God to increase your power of discernment to protect you, to keep the church pure. They heard them speak with tongues, glossolalia.

They began to just...and notice, they magnified God, and there's the continuity and the beauty of the text again in the book of Acts. It isn't God giving messages to man. It's man speaking to God, the glorious works, the wonderful works of God in here.

As they got the gift of tongues and they bypassed their intellect, they're giving perfect praise and adulation, the wonderful works, the mighty works of God. And it's exactly what Peter taught in Acts chapter 2. Believe me, it's a powerful and a wonderful gift to have, even though it's one of the least of the few. It's a blessed gift.

I don't believe anything God wants to give us should be just set aside and ignored and say, Well, I don't know if I want it. I'll bet you there's not one person here that at Christmas time you're going to see a package all wrapped up and say, I don't think I want it, and just ignore it. I'll bet you you're going to unwrap every gift that's sitting before you, and that's a gift for man.

And you'll probably have to pay for it in January because it's on the Visa card. God's gifts are free, and they're perfect, and you don't have to pay anything. Lord, I want all the gifts you have for me that will cause my life to glorify you.

Whatever gift you have for me, Lord, if it's going to help my prayer life, if it's going to bring glory to you, if it's going to have lasting fruit, if it will touch lives and point them in your direction, oh, Jesus, I want whatever gift you have for me. I don't care what it is. I want to glorify you.

And he says, if you ask for his gift, he's such a loving father. He won't deceive you. He won't give you a serpent or a stone or a scorpion.

He'll give you what you need. You don't have to fear, and you can be filled with the Spirit. You can ask God to fill you with the Spirit.

Now, notice the order here. Now, look at it already. We're only in chapter ten, the first ten years of Pentecost.

Notice you can't put God in the box. Now, on the day of Pentecost, remember, they went around and they spoke with tongues as they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Tongues of fire resting upon their heads.

Remember that. Then you remember here, Paul, earlier, he got saved. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

He didn't speak in tongues. He got a healing. Ananias said, Brother Saul, receive me the Spirit.

He laid hands on him, and the Spirit of God came on him and filled him with the Spirit. He didn't speak in tongues. Paul didn't get that gift until later on in his life.

It says, scale, so he got healed. So, you see, you can't pattern what's going to happen to you when God fills you with the Spirit. And there's no order.

A lot of people say, well, it only happens one way, so they form this denomination. You're baptized in the Holy Spirit the day you accept Jesus Christ. It didn't happen that way with Paul.

He got saved on the way to Damascus. He didn't get filled with the Spirit until he got into Damascus. And he got water baptized after he was filled with the Spirit.

Some people get water baptized and are filled with the Spirit at the same time. Some people get water baptized and aren't filled with the Spirit until later. You can't put God in the box.

And here we have a different here again. Here they're speaking in tongues. They've been saved.

They've responded to Peter's message, filled with the Spirit. And then notice what takes place. Water baptism here comes last.

Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? So, you see, they got saved first, responded in their heart, filled with the Spirit, and water baptized last. When John was preaching the kingdom, they're getting water baptized right away, before Pentecost. The thing is, have it all.

I don't care what order it is. Make sure you get it all. Make sure you're saved.

Make sure you are filled with the Spirit, that you're not ashamed of Christ, that you have the boldness and the power to declare Christ openly, not just with a bunch of Christians, you know, when we gather together, feel safe in. But see, that's the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It gives us that power.

It frees us from the fear. We can be a witness. And then Jesus said, well, prove that you're not ashamed of me.

Openly declare your identification of my death, my burial, my resurrection. Get water baptized. Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? We know that they were already saved because the Holy Ghost won't count it as dead.

There's a beautiful type in Genesis. Remember, God judged the earth. There's death everywhere.

The water hadn't receded enough, but Noah knew that the ark was beginning to settle down. Maybe the waters were settling, as God had moved everything in all the great depths in the new mountain ranges. The Himalayas were established, the new land masses, and he could tell as the waters were not swishing back and forth in new ocean basins and things were settling down.

Remember, Noah sent a dove out of the ark and a raven. And he knew that a raven was a carrion, a bird of carrion. It would eat dead flesh.

And he knew a dove would not land on anything dead or rotting. And sure enough, the dove came back. There was nothing to light upon.

But the raven didn't come back. He started hopping around on dead, floating dinosaurs, having a feast. So Noah knew since the dove came back, it's not safe to leave the ark yet.

There's no life. The dove does not land on anything that's not alive. And the dove is a symbol of the Holy Ghost.

You're not going to be filled with the Spirit and be touched by God's Spirit until you're saved for his life, until you're born again. So to go somewhere and say, I want this tower to run down and have some experience, you're thinking you're getting saved because you experienced some power and you haven't been born again. That order is wrong.

You must be born again. When Jesus met Nicodemus, when Nicodemus came to him, he didn't say, Nicodemus, you must be filled with the Spirit. No, he said, you must be born again.

That's the first and most important thing. You have to have new life. And then God says, I'll put my dove upon you.

We'll find out later that some people were water baptized before they were baptized in the Holy Ghost. Again, God is changing the order, so he's trying to keep us from forming our denomination. This is the only way God does it.

He'll do it anyway. The important thing is, has it happened to you? If you've been water baptized, are you really saved? Are you filled with the Spirit? Does your life magnify God? That's what we want in our lives, to magnify God. And the Spirit of God enables us.

Paul wrote, you remember, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 and 13, work out your own salvation with fear and coming forward as God, which work is in you to will and deal with good pleasure, working in you through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to glorify God and to enjoy Christianity. So, he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, and prayed they him to tarry certain days. So, Peter's set free.

He realizes that there's nobody that God calls common, that God loves everybody, and he's not going to have some sort of an attitude that God's going to save a certain people before another people, or quicker, or have a higher regard for a certain race. You see that tragically in the United States, you know, with white people, thinking that God has some special favor for the white Anglo-Saxons. There are probably more saved Africans than there are Americans.

There are probably more saved Chinese than there are Americans. You consider the population, and you hear the reports and the beauty of God's spirit moving. Remember, God started saving people in Africa 400 years before the United States even existed.

So, there's a heritage over there far before the white people over here. So, some people believe some wrong reports, and you look at the population of China, the way God is working in China, the way God's working in the Soviet Union. God's got his 7,000, his perfect number, his wonderful people everywhere.

And so, Peter, his ministry is just becoming more dynamic. He's just growing in the Lord. And again, the Bible is so faithful to show that just because someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, that doesn't mean we've arrived.

We're constantly learning, constantly learning. Oh, Lord, open my heart. Change my life by your love.

Broaden my horizons. Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, that they might grow in the knowledge and the love of Jesus Christ. That's the most powerful, effective force in the universe, the love of Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank you for your surprises, that we don't have to fear them, that if we'll just be obedient and trusting, Lord, you can break in and do something wonderful in our lives through the power of your Spirit, your grace, your love. And Lord, we'd ask you to continually work in our hearts, in our lives, your grace and love. May we glorify you, Lord.

And may there be one person on our pedestal, and that person Jesus Christ. Lord, don't let us rest until you free us, until we're ready to face up with the things we need to let go of and turn over to you. We desire to be free, Lord, from our own fears, our own doubts, and we desire to bear fruit for you, Lord, that remains.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Farmington, New York, 14425.

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