

Acts 059
Gentile Salvation, Part 4
Acts 10:23b-33
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Let us take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 10:23. We will be starting with the second part of the verse. Luke, as our author, is writing this book to Theophilus. In so doing, he is explaining the birth and the growth of the early church. We are really at a key point in the Book of Acts, because what we are about to see is something that the Jewish leadership of the church—the church's leadership was still predominantly or completely Jewish at this time—we are about to see something that they did not even think could ever happen. That thing that is about to happen is the conversion of the first full-fledged Gentile.

Our primary converts at this point are Jewish (Acts 2), half-breed (Acts 8), proselytes which would be Gentiles that converted to Judaism, like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Now you have someone who is a member of the Roman occupying army, someone that the Jews looked at as dogs. He is about to get saved, and his family.

There are two full chapters in the Book of Acts explaining this. One of the things to ask yourself is, why in the world do we need two full chapters to get this point? This whole occurrence starts at the beginning of Acts 10 and really does not finish until Acts 11:18. A lot of times we focus on the what question, but another good question to focus on is the why question. Why would Luke give us almost two full chapters, spanning a lot of verses, covering this?

I think the answer relates to who he is writing to. He is writing to Theophilus, a Gentile who is questioning his own salvation because the Bible looks very Jewish and he is a Gentile. He is wondering if this whole Christianity thing is for him, too. Luke includes these chapters, I believe, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, and gives us all this detail about Cornelius' conversion as an edifying ministry to Theophilus, who also is a Roman member of the military.

When you read this, what you see very clearly is that Christianity is for everyone. God wants everyone to be saved, whether they are Jew, Gentile, American, non-American, whatever they are. God wants all people to be saved. That is His heart. Whether people get saved or not—they have to respond to His provision—His desire is that all people should be saved.

Peter is very instrumental in all of these events. Remember, Peter was given the keys of the kingdom. It is Peter who is going to reach Cornelius with the gospel. Peter, who is critical to all of these events, is going to write in his own book several decades later:.

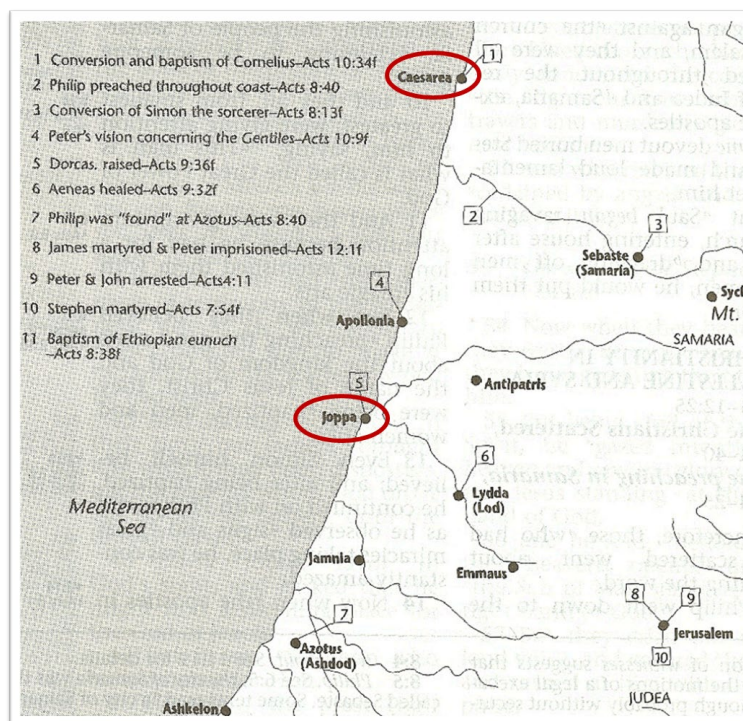
"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

How could Peter write that with such conviction? Several decades earlier, he saw what God did, how God literally moved heaven and earth to get the gospel to Cornelius.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, of these chapters we are studying says this:

"This chapter in the Book of Acts is crucial or is a crucial turning point because the salvation of uncircumcised Gentiles began here. Notice how much it took to get Gentile salvation started: First, it took an angel coming to Cornelius; second, it took a voice out of heaven, speaking three times to Peter; third, it took the Holy Spirit speaking audibly to Peter; and, fourth, it took two visions, one for Cornelius and one for Peter."¹

Why did God go to all this trouble? Because God loves people. God had that much love for Cornelius. "So, Theophilus, as you read it, do not question whether Christianity is for you." This is, I think, the point.



That circle up above is a place called Caesarea. That is where Cornelius is. The circle down south, down below, is Joppa. That is where Peter is. Peter, at the end of Acts 9, under God's power, has just performed two miracles in Joppa. One was a person that was bedridden for eight years, and Peter healed him, as Christ was working through

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 235.

Peter from the right hand of the Father. Peter actually said to this bedridden man, "Get up and make your bed." It sounds like my mom when I was growing up. The second miracle was Peter bringing Dorcas back to life.

Now the name of the game is to get Peter from Joppa, where those two miracles occurred, up north to Caesarea, where he can get the gospel to this man named Cornelius, this uncircumcised Gentile. We have been studying this massive block of material: Cornelius has had a vision, and Peter has had a vision. The vision by Cornelius has been applied as he sent men, three people from Caesarea down to Joppa to fetch Peter.

Cornelius' Salvation (Acts 10:1-11:18)

IV. Caesarean Ministry (10:23b-33)

- A. Peter's journey to Caesarea (23b-24a)
- B. Cornelius' anticipation (24b)
- C. Peter and Cornelius' meeting (25-27)
 - 1. Cornelius' reaction (25)
 - 2. Peter's reaction (26)
 - 3. Peter enters house (27)
- D. Peter explains his presence (28)
- E. Peter's question (29)
- F. Cornelius' response (30-33)
 - 1. Angelic vision (30)
 - 2. Angelic message (31-32)
 - 3. Cornelius' obedience (33a)
 - 4. Cornelius ready to hear Peter (33b)

In Acts 10:23-33, Peter is going to make his way from Joppa to Caesarea. It is in Caesarea that he will meet Cornelius, and Cornelius will have a completely open heart and say to Peter, "Okay, tell me what you know." The soil is going to be perfectly prepared for the transmission of the gospel to this Gentile convert.

As we look at this, the first thing we see is Peter's journey to Caesarea (Acts 10:23-24):

"And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. On the following day he entered Caesarea" (Acts 10:23-24).

Peter leaves Joppa, and he makes that trajectory northward—I think that is about 30 miles between those two coastal cities. It says that he took some brethren with him from Joppa to Caesarea. Now, when the story is recounted for the benefit of the Jerusalem leadership of the church, a little detail is going to be added in Acts 11:12:

"The Spirit told me to go with them without any misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's [Cornelius'] house" (Acts 11:12).

As Peter leaves Joppa and makes his way up north to Caesarea, he is bringing with him six people in addition to the three that came and got him. The question is, why would you bring six people? I think Peter is bringing them as witnesses, and they are going to be actually very important witnesses. These witnesses are going to explain to the Jerusalem leadership that this guy Cornelius really got saved. In fact, his salvation was just as real as was the Jewish salvation in Acts 2. There is going to be a Gentile Pentecost that is going to happen in Acts 10 to validate the truth of this, the veracity of this. These six people that accompanied Peter will become very important.

You look at the second part of Acts 10:24, and you see Cornelius' anticipation:

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

Cornelius knows they are coming. He does not know what the message is, but he knows it is from God because the Holy Spirit or an angel made that clear to him. He knows whatever message Peter is going to bring, it is going to be very significant.

What would you do if you knew someone was coming to your house with a very important message? You would not keep that to yourself, would you? So he gathers those that are close to him.

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

He wants them to be blessed as well. That is how it is in our relationship with Jesus. We do not keep the whole thing to ourselves. If someone gives you the cure for some kind of disease that humanity cannot get rid of, you discover the cure, you do not just hide it for yourself. You want to share it with as many people as possible. That is our posture with Jesus. That is how we are, and that is how Cornelius is, he just does not know the name Jesus yet.

Peter makes his way up, and now in Acts 10:25-27, Cornelius and Peter connect. God has prepared both hearts and both men with separate visitations from Him. Peter and Cornelius meet for the very first time in Acts 10:25-27. Watch Cornelius' reaction, and this is a problem:

"When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him" (Acts 10:25).

That is a problem because God is not interested in sharing His glory with another. Cornelius does not know any better. He is a Gentile; he does not have a lot of knowledge of God. He has some, but not a lot. He knows Peter is very important and he just falls to his face and worships Peter.

I think it was Billy Graham who said that there are three things that will short-circuit you in ministry. These all begin with the letter G, by the way. These are three things you are not to touch, and if you touch any of these three things, something is going to happen which is going to short-circuit your ministry: The first thing is, "Do not touch the girls"—sexual immorality; the second thing is, "Do not touch the gold"—that would be financial embezzlement, financial scandal, things like that; and the third thing is, "Do not touch the glory"—do not take for yourself glory that rightfully belongs to God.

We have a very sad litany today—in my Christian life, I have watched it all develop, and it has been going on for a long time—of ministers that fall. When you hear the stories, it is always the same thing; it is one of those three things. They either got involved in sexual immorality, they got involved in financial, scandalous behavior and they did not play by the rules, or they took way too much credit for something that God had done, and they touched the glory.

In this church we our elders and deacons serve in a rotation. We, as elders, take nominations from the floor as to someone who might be a good elder or be a good deacon. What kind of person do you nominate? First Timothy 3:1-13 gives you the criteria that you should look for. It is interesting that none of it has anything to do with talent, intelligence, good looks, or popularity; it has to do with character. That is what all of those things in 1 Timothy 3 are dealing with—character.

It says this in first Timothy three verse six concerning a potential elder.

"and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6).

What is the condemnation incurred by the devil? There are only two Old Testament passages that deal with that: Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17. In both instances it describes how Satan, who originally was not Satan but Lucifer which means "light bearer, was an extremely attractive being. Are we not told by Paul that Satan comes as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14)? He was absolutely beautiful, particularly as he reflected or refracted the glory of God. I think that was one of his purposes, but he was just lifted up with pride.

In fact, in the Isaiah passage, there are five "I will" statements that Satan makes. One of those is:

"I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14).

When he said that, or even when he thought it before he said it, he lost his position in the heavenlies and he fell. Today he can enter heaven, not to worship and serve as he once did as a high ranking angel, but only to communicate and to accuse.

That is why you do not put someone who is green or a brand new convert into a position of leadership in the church, because they do not have the character yet to handle a lot

of the adulation and praise that comes your way—some justified and some not—as a minister of God. There is a temptation amongst the uninitiated or the immature to scoop a little of the icing off the top of the cake for themselves, as people are glorifying God. "Gee, God, what would You do without me? God, You are so lucky to have me on Your team. How did You ever get by without me?"

The thing is, when your life is used by God, people have this tendency to want to praise you. The temptation is very strong where you start to say, "You know what? I worked really hard on that sermon, did I not? I paid the price. I went to seminary. I learned the original languages," and all this kind of stuff. You wake up one day taking more credit than what you deserve, not understanding that God can speak through a donkey.

Do you remember what Jesus said as He was riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? The Pharisees said, "Shut the disciples up." Jesus said, "If they are quiet, the rocks will praise Me" (Luke 19:40). So keep that in mind when people give you more attention than what you deserve. God can use a rock and He can use a donkey, which means He can use us. I can qualify, I can apply for the job.

The problem is people do this kind of thing: they are blessed by you and they want to attract praise to you. I have a little formula that I use when this happens to me. I just say, "Praise the Lord." That way I am giving attention back to God where it belongs. I am glad God used it, but praise the Lord. It is not, praise me. It is, praise the Lord. That will keep you out of trouble, because that is the G you do not want to touch. You do not want to touch the glory of God. God does not share his glory with another (Isaiah 42:8).

Cornelius, who knows nothing about these things, wants to praise Peter to the point where he is falling at his feet and worshiping him. Look at Peter's reaction in Acts 10:26:

"But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up; I too am just a man'" (Acts 10:26).

"What are you praising me for? I am a human being, just like you." This same thing is going to happen later on in the Book of Acts with Paul as he is going into Lystra, southern Galatia, on his first missionary journey.

"When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have become like men and have come down to us. And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men, just the same as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, "who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them"' (Acts 14:11-15).

"Do not worship us, worship God," Paul says. "Because I did not create anything, I did not create the heavens and the earth." Man does not even show up till day six in the creation week, long after most of the work of creation was over. Man is not even a consultant; he does not exist. A man never died on a cross for you and rose from the dead. The God-Man, Jesus, did.

A pastor, an elder, or a missionary has never done anything like that for you, so the proper reaction to the servant of God is: worship the Lord, do not worship us.

John, as he is writing at the end of his little epistle in 1 John, says,

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

An idol is something that we worship instead of God. What is interesting is that John, who wrote that, did not follow his own advice. Later he received the Book of Revelation, and at the end of the Book of Revelation, John was so enthralled by the vision, that he worships the angel that gave him the vision.

"Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he [the angel] said to me, 'Do not do that'" (Revelation 19:10).

This is what Peter is saying to Cornelius; it is what Paul is saying to the inhabitants of Lystra. If you will not do that, you will not last long in ministry because you are touching one of the G's. Do not do that.

"...I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold to the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10).

John learned his lesson, right? No, he did not, because he did it again a few chapters later, at the very end of the Book of Revelation, it says,

"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he [the angel] said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God'" (Revelation 22:8-9).

Whenever you want to put someone on too high of a pedestal, all you have to do is go talk to their spouse and they will tell you the truth about that person, myself included. You get a little snapshot of me behind the pulpit, but if you really want to know what I am like, you can talk to my wife and she will talk you out of worshipping me really quickly.

It is great how Peter so aggressively deals with this when it happens. We would be really wise to do the same thing, because the natural man has a real difficult time

distinguishing the power of God versus the vessel that God uses. It is hard for them to make that distinction. If you are not mature in the Lord, you will want to take some of the credit because it feels good; it feeds the flesh. But if you start to feed the flesh in that way, God, I think, places a limitation on a person's ministry.

It is at this point that Peter enters Cornelius' house (Acts 10:27).

"As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled"
(Acts 10:27).

Now that is a big deal, because you have a devout Jew in Caesarea—still within the borders of Israel—who is walking into the house of a Gentile. That was not a regular occurrence. That was almost unknown. Peter knows he can do this because God showed him the vision of the sheet: "Arise and eat," showing that the age of the Law was being set aside. "You are in a new age now, so you are not bound by those prior restrictions."

It is in Acts 10:28 that Peter explains his presence in Cornelius' house:

"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'" (Acts 10:28).

Where did this idea come from that the Jews cannot go into the house of a Gentile? It is not in the Mosaic Law. Rather, it is part of Pharisaical tradition that was added alongside the Mosaic Law for centuries.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes concerning this verse:

"These were Gentiles living in a Jewish country, and they knew about the Jewish practice of not entering the home of a Gentile, as it was unlawful to do so. This practice was not part of the Mosaic Law, but it was part of Pharisaical Judaism not to associate with or visit one of another nation."²

This is something that is new here. Pharisaical tradition, which was added on top of the Law, said, "Do not even go into the house of a Gentile." But God, in the Law, never actually said that. As you go through the Old Testament, you can see examples where Jews come into contact with Gentiles. The Gentile gets saved and wants to follow Yahweh—the technical name for such a person is a "proselyte." One of the most famous proselytes in the Bible was Ruth, who lived in Moab, which is east of the nation of Israel.

It says in Ruth, one of the oldest books of the Bible that we have:

² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 239.

"But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God'" (Ruth 1:16).

As Ruth the Moabitess is speaking those words, she is making it in reference to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth was a believer and she wanted to follow Yahweh, so she submitted herself to the customs and the laws of Israel to grow as a newfound believer in Yahweh.

This idea that a Jew cannot go into the house of a Gentile, is something the Pharisees made up. It is not really part of the Mosaic Law. That is how these Pharisees operated. They built what is called a fence around the law. They started to require things that the law never said not to do.

For example, they knew that violating the Sabbath was a big deal. So they started to pass all these extra-biblical regulations that you could not do anything on the Sabbath. If your animal fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, you could not pull it out. You could not feed your disciples on the Sabbath. That is why the Pharisees really did not like Jesus, because He would do all these things on the Sabbath. He would even heal people on the Sabbath.

Jesus would say, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5). I know what the Sabbath is about. I am here to follow the Sabbath in its original intent, not all of your man-made rules that you have laid on top, to prevent Sabbath breaking." They were so afraid of breaking the Sabbath that they passed all these rules, indicating what you could do and could not do on the Sabbath. That moved the Nation of Israel, by the time of Christ, into legalism, because the rules became more important than what the Law actually said. The tail started to wag the dog, so to speak.

When Peter says, "It is not normal for us Jews to go into the house of a Gentile," he is not commenting on the Law. The Law never laid down that restriction. He is commenting on the Pharisaical fence that was put around the Law, because they were afraid of violating the Law.

The very first legalist in the Bible is Eve. Remember what she said concerning the Tree of Knowledge? God gave some very simple instructions: Do not eat from it.

"From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

As that commandment was handed down to her through Adam, maybe Adam did not relay it correctly. When that commandment was given, Eve did not exist yet. When Eve was formed out of man's side after Adam was put to sleep, as Satan came and tempted Eve, she says,

"But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die'" (Genesis 3:3).

Wait a minute. God never said anything about touching it. What did she just do there? She built a fence around the Law. "I am so afraid of violating God's commandments that I am going to add an extra-biblical restriction." This probably initially was done out of pure motives, but the problem is, as you continue through biblical history, the restrictions become more important than what God actually said. That is what the Pharisees did, and that is called building a fence around the Law.

We as Christians have the ability, unfortunately, to move in that legalistic direction. There are two extremes Satan wants to push you into: he either wants to push you into licentiousness, doing whatever you want, appeasing the sin nature, or he wants you to push you into legalism where you are really not obeying God's truth anymore, instead you are obeying man's rules designed sign to keep you in the "right lane." The funny thing about rules is that over the course of time, they end up becoming more important than what God said. That is Christ's whole conflict with the Pharisees.

We have to always be on guard against the two. I do not want to be licentious, but neither do I not want to be a legalist. I want to follow what the Bible says, but this idea of a Jew, not going into the house of a Gentile was never made by God. He never put that off-limits.

In 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 there is someone named the Queen of Sheba. Most believe that Sheba is Saudi Arabia. She made a trip of 1,200 miles to sit at Solomon's feet and learn of his wisdom. There was never any restriction that Solomon could not minister to her. Any restriction that came over the course of time was man-made.

These Gentiles are called "proselytes." Jesus said this concerning proselytes:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

In other words, "What you have done with this poor proselyte is you have dumped on him or her all kinds of extra-biblical regulations, and they have become just as legalistic as you are." The Nation of Israel had an evangelistic strategy. It was a "come and see" strategy. That is why there is so much information about the temple and its beauty. The goal was that the Gentile nations would come and look at the temple and be attracted to God on account of all of these beautiful artifacts in Israel. That is why Jesus is so upset when He goes into the temple and finds them turning it into a place of commerce and overturns the tables. This was ruining the testimony of God to these Gentiles.

Our evangelistic strategy as the church is not a "come and see" strategy; it is a "go out and evangelize" strategy. Our commands concerning evangelism are very different from

Israel's. We are supposed to get outside the four walls and evangelize, and you come into the four walls to be equipped to evangelize the lost.

I think some of the megachurches—and I am not against megachurches per se, just because they are megachurches—but this particular church where we had our graduation ceremony when I graduated from Dallas Seminary twice was like Six Flags over Jesus. I could not believe what a beautiful place it was. Any type of accoutrement you could ever need was in this church. It was just huge. You look at a monument like that, and you say to yourself that these are people that I do not think understand that we are not going to be here for very long, number one. And number two, they are going back to Israel's strategy: "come and see God."

That is what God did through Israel, but His instructions for the church are: "I will send you out to evangelize." Because Israel had that "come and see" strategy, God never put a barrier between Jews and Gentiles. The Pharisees did that. So Peter, as he is walking into the house of this Gentile, is having to explain that doing this is erasing centuries of Pharisaic Judaism.

Then you go down to Acts 10:29, and Peter has a question. His question is, "What am I doing here? God told me to come. What do you want me for?"

"That is why I came without even raising an objection when I was sent for" (Acts 10:29).

In Acts 10:20, he was told by God to go with these three Gentiles from Joppa to Caesarea: *"...accompany them without misgivings"* (Acts 10:20). Peter does what he is told, and now he is asking Cornelius and his group, "Why am I here?"

"So I ask for what reason you have sent for me" (Acts 10:29).

"What am I doing here? The Holy Spirit has led me here, but He has not given me the exact reason I am here. I am doing something very important here. I am even walking into your house and setting aside centuries of Pharisaic Judaism in the process. Okay, I am here now. Why did God send me your direction?" This is his question.

Then Cornelius gives a response. He says, "The reason you are here is because I had an angelic vision."

"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'" (Acts 10:30).

"Four days ago I had an angelic encounter. It was this angelic encounter that prepared me for your visit. I knew that you were coming with a very important message because an angel made me aware of this."

Now, you will notice that it says Cornelius had this angelic encounter or vision "four days ago." What does "four days ago" mean? It means "four days ago," right? It does not mean 4 billion years ago. Everybody understands four days as normal, 24-hour days here, but when they go to Genesis, suddenly the days become like Silly Putty. "Let us just make them 6 billion years." That is a bunch of people trying to jam evolution into Genesis 1. They are trying to make the two harmonize.

I know all about it because I did it for a number of years when I was a new Christian. I went through the public school system, Kindergarten through 12th grade. They taught me that evolution was a scientific fact. Then I got saved, and you are reading God's account of Creation in Genesis 1, and how it is different from evolution. So you try to mix the two together. The more I tried to mix them together, the more it was like mixing oil and water. They do not go together. They are two different ways of thinking entirely. So eventually I had to get to the point where I was going to jettison evolution. I should write a book about it: "Why Evolution No Longer Made a Monkey Out of Me."

"Four days' means "four days," and "six days" in Genesis 1 means "six days." Do not play games with the Bible; let the Bible say what it wants to say. We understand that we are not here to correct the Bible. The Bible is here to correct us.

"Four days ago, I had this manifestation. In fact, this angel appeared to me," Cornelius said, "He was wearing shining clothes." Did you catch that?

"...a man stood before me in shining garments" (Acts 10:30).

Remember when Jesus ascended back to heaven and the disciples were looking upward, and two men appeared and said, "What are you looking upward for? This same Jesus is going to come back just like He left" (Acts 1:9-11). In other words, "Do not sit and look into heaven, but Focus on what He told you to do, which is to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

These two men, who I think were angels, that said that on the Mount of Olives, were also in shining clothes:

"And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them" (Acts 1:10).

Those guys have white clothes on, and Cornelius, when he sees a vision, sees almost the same thing, but slightly different. He describes them as shining—this angel had shining garments. What did this angel tell Cornelius to do?

"And he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your arms have been remembered before God'" (Acts 10:31).

This raises an interesting question: Does God hear the prayer of an unbeliever? Remember, at this particular point, Cornelius does not know the name of Jesus Christ;

he is unsaved. We know that because when Peter recounts the whole story to the Jerusalem church, he will say this in the next chapter:

"And he will speak words to you by which you [Cornelius] will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 11:14).

Cornelius had not even heard the gospel yet. Yet he was seeking God. He wanted to know the truth. He was offering up prayers and alms to God. Apparently, God received those because it says here:

"...your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God" (Acts 10:31).

I was raised as a Christian in a tradition that taught me that God never hears the prayer of an unbeliever. God cannot hear the prayer of an unbeliever until the person is actually a believer in Jesus Christ. Obviously that cannot be true, because here is Cornelius as an unsaved person, praying to God. God is hearing him. I am not trying to say Cornelius is saved yet, because clearly he is not, but we have to go a little more gently on this idea that God never hears the prayers of unbelievers. Cornelius' alms and his prayers were heard before God.

That in and of itself is not going to save Cornelius; he needs to believe in Christ alone, whose name he does not even know yet, but God loved Cornelius enough where he listened to what he was saying. He saw in him someone that really wanted to know the truth. Look at how God moved things around to get the gospel to Cornelius.

Acts 4:12 makes it very clear:

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Cornelius is unsaved because he does not know the name Jesus Christ yet. That is all true, but to categorically say that God never hears the prayer of an unbeliever is obviously an overstatement of what the Bible says. As you are going through the Bible, let the Bible adjust your theology. If you find yourself believing something that is not in the Bible, and the Lord shows that to you, do not fight it. Say, "Lord, I am not here to correct You; You are here to correct me." We are to have our minds conformed and transformed constantly, are we not? We are always in that mental renewal process.

Then you go to Acts 10:32 where an angel said something to Cornelius concerning Cornelius, and now the angel says something to Cornelius concerning Peter. That is how Cornelius knew that Peter was coming:

""Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea"" (Acts 10:32).

"There is coming one to Caesarea, to your house, from Joppa." Notice how the angel distinguished one Simon from another Simon, as Peter was staying at the home of a tanner. What is a tanner? It is not someone who goes to the tanning salon. A tanner is someone who works with the skin of dead animals. Which was forbidden by the Mosaic law. The Lord, having Peter stay at the home of a tanner in Joppa, was breaking him away from the Mosaic Law.

When he was staying at the home of this tanner in Joppa, there were two Simons in the house. You see that at the end of chapter 9:

"And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon" (Acts 9:43).

We have Simon A, the tanner's name, and Simon B, Peter, which is his Hebrew name. Peter had three names: Simon, his Hebrew name; Petros, his Greek name; and Cephas, his Aramaic name. When the angel says that Simon is coming, he throws in the expression "Simon Peter" to distinguish Simon A from Simon B in the tanner's house. It is interesting how the angel made that distinction.

""Therefore send 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"" (Acts 10:32).

Cornelius, through a vision, knew that Simon Peter was coming. We see that right here. There was an angelic manifestation, and that is why Cornelius sent three Gentiles back down south to Joppa to fetch Peter. At the same time that was happening, Peter had his own encounter with God:

"While Peter was reflecting on the vision [of the sheet], the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself'" (Acts 10:19-20).

Do you see what God is doing here? He is working on both ends. Cornelius has his own encounter with the angel. Around the same time, the Holy Spirit is speaking to Peter. Long before Cornelius' group, the three Gentiles, showed up in Joppa, Peter knew that they were coming.

This is a big deal because, as I have mentioned before, a lot of people in your Christian life will come up to you—a lot of it is well intentioned—and they will want to give you God's plan for your life through them. "God told me to tell you..." Has that ever

happened to anybody? The first time you hear that, it is kind of intimidating because you are thinking, "I better not resist this, because who would want to resist God?"

The truth of the matter is, you do not have to believe someone about anything just because they say, "God told me to tell you." God does not work that way. If God is really speaking to you through that person, He will confirm it on your end as well. God has a lot of tools at His disposal to use. Usually when someone comes to me and says, "God told me to tell you," I will say, "Thank you for that. I am going to pray about it. If you are right, God is going to impress that, in some way, somehow, on my heart."

"God told me to tell you that on Wednesday nights you should never wear a blue shirt." "Thank you for that. I am going to take it to the Lord. If the Lord does not want me to wear blue shirts on Wednesday nights, then He is going to get the point across to me somehow." Maybe my closet will catch on fire and destroy all of the blue shirts. Something is going to happen because the Bible says that a matter will be confirmed by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15); It says this all the way through the Bible. That is the neat thing to see how God is working on Cornelius' end, and He is working on Peter's end, and he is bringing the two together.

Then you come to Acts 10:33 where you see Cornelius' obedience to the angel:

"So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come"
(Acts 10:33).

What does Cornelius mean when he tells Peter? *"You have been kind enough to come."* "You were kind enough to uproot your own comfort in Joppa and come to me. You were kind enough to break through centuries of Pharisaic Judaism, which said, "Do not come into my house," and you came into my house anyway. Cornelius attributes these things to Peter's kindness. In other words, Peter was the kind of person that was willing to set aside what was normal to him in order to reach a lost person.

Many of us—and I will be honest with you, I have a finger out and three coming back at myself—do not want our comfort rearranged that much. "God is going to have to move my job location to another city so someone could be reached with the gospel?" "Lord, I am comfortable in this city. I am comfortable in this job. I do not really want to go." But when you have a heart that says, "I will go if You want me to go," then God uses you to somehow reach a lost person.

That is actually a servant attitude on your part, because you are willing to set aside your own comfort, your own normal way of doing things, for the benefit of somebody else. That is really how we should be; that is how Peter was. Cornelius acknowledged this in Peter's character.

We conclude this evening with the second part of Acts 10:33. This is so great, because Cornelius is now ready to hear the truth.

"Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10:33).

In other words, "Our ears are open; whatever you say, we are going to hang on every word."

Do you remember the "Parable of the Sower" that Jesus talked about as the Kingdom was being set aside by Israel in the first century? In Matthew 13, Jesus outlined the course of the Inter-Advent Age, while the Kingdom is in postponement. He told eight parables, and one of the parables He told was the "Parable of the Sower." When the kingdom comes, the knowledge of God is going to fill the whole earth (Isaiah 11:9). In this parable, Jesus says that as the Kingdom is now postponed, because the leadership would not accept the King on the King's terms, there is a new age of time called the Inter-Advent Age.

He began to outline in eight parables what would happen in the Inter-Advent Age: The earth would not be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. He said that the Kingdom is like a sower going out and scattering seed. He described four different types of soil. The seed germinates according to how the soil has been prepared. In most of the soils there is not a lot of fruitfulness in germination, but there is that batch of soil that has been prepared and the seed is going to hit it, and it is going to grow into a harvest.

That is who Cornelius is: the seed that the gospel is about to hit, and it is going to have tremendous fruit because the soil has been prepared. Cornelius' heart has been prepared, and he is sitting on the edge of his seat in total anticipation of what Peter is going to say.

James 1:21 tells us that that should be our attitude when we come to church. One of the things I pray for people that come to our Bible studies, is that during the week, the Lord will prepare their hearts so that when the seed, the preaching of the Word of God, hits the soil, the human heart, it will bear fruit. Preaching is very difficult and unfruitful when you are just casting seed on unprepared soil.

"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

Lord, please prepare the hearts of people, so that when I have the opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, it would be like seed hitting that soil that has been prepared so that it yields a harvest.

That is what is going on here with Cornelius. He does not know the name Jesus. He is, as far as I can tell, an unsaved person (Acts 11:14), but God has so worked in this man's heart that he is almost sitting on the edge of his seat, waiting for Peter to say something.

What happens next in Acts 10:34-43, which we will cover next week, is Peter starts to talk. He starts to give the gospel. He mentions Jesus and it is very interesting that Peter cannot even finish his sermon. He gets a few points in, but you can tell he has a lot more to say. The seed hits Cornelius' heart, and with what limited information he has, he believes on it. Peter is using the key that Jesus gave him to open the gospel to the Gentiles.

What happens at the end of this chapter? I will just call it a Gentile Pentecost. The same events that happened on the day of Pentecost for the Jews in Acts 2, now happen with Cornelius and his group there. This is so profound that Peter, at the end, has to go back to Jerusalem and explain all this to the leadership in the church, people who do not even think a Gentile could get saved (Acts 11:1-18). Peter is going to say, "Yes, he got saved, because the same thing that happened to us on the day of Pentecost happened to him and his entourage at Caesarea."

That is the direction we are moving in. I would encourage you to read Acts 10:34-43 for next time, and we will see how Peter shares the gospel with Cornelius, and how eager Cornelius is to receive it. Peter barely gets out the word "believe," Cornelius does it, and you have one of the one of the great conversions in the church. It is not just a conversion, but now the door is open to the Gentiles. It is a tremendous story.