

Double Vision
 Acts 10:1-11:18
 Michael Felkins
 Grand Avenue Baptist Church
 Ames, Iowa
 Nov. 7, 2021

This morning we will return to our journey through Acts. We left off in Acts 9:32-43. If you remember, I told you that the miracles of the healing of Aeneas and the restoration of Dorcas' life were not the main points. These miracles were to point people to the message of the gospel. When people saw those miracles or heard about them, they realized that they should listen to the message of the gospel.

Remember, I told you that you will most likely never heal someone or restore life to someone who has died. Yet, you will most likely sit with someone who is sick and even stay beside the bed of a friend or loved one who is dying and hold their hand as they die. Then in those moments, you will be able to be a witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ. We will be witnesses to the doctors, nurses, staff, and whomever we meet. Little did I know that in less than 24-hours and for the next three weeks, that I would be living out my own sermon application with my mother.

This morning, in Acts 10:1-11:18, we will continue to see the irresistible march of the gospel to the ends of the earth. In this morning's text are some potholes that Christians sometimes step in as they take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

It is said that C. S. Lewis had a conversation with his father when he was about six years old that went something like this: "*Daddy, I have a prejudice against the French.*" "*Why?*" asked his father. To which the young Lewis triumphantly replied, "*If I knew that, it wouldn't be a prejudice.*"¹

This is typically how prejudice works. We get just enough facts to support our position, and then we dig our heels into our fixed position. I know this is perhaps an oversimplification, but the fact is that it often works this way. A more insidious position on prejudice is one that we grow up with over time, and we become completely blind to it. It is ingrained in us from a young age, and it perhaps is loosely based on truth but mostly based on emotion.

Prejudice and racism are hot topics in our current culture wars. You do not have to read much news to see accusations of prejudice. Some of those accusations are legitimate, and some are not.

In the text we will look at this morning, we will see how prejudice is one of the potholes we face as we seek to see the gospel spread to the ends of the earth. We need to know if we have these kinds of blind spots in our own lives. We need to know if potholes keep us from sharing the gospel or keep us from going to the ends of the earth with the gospel.

We have a long story to cover, so let's do a walk-through of our narrative and then draw out the principles from the story. Since the story is so long, I want to look at the story in five movements.

First Movement: The Visions (Acts 10:1-33): In Acts 10:1-33, we learn about the two visions. These two visions are the foundation of the narrative. *They serve to confront Jewish prejudice that then becomes the catalyst for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.*

¹ N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1*, 161-62.

Cornelius' Vision: In vv. 1-8, we have Cornelius' vision. Cornelius was a Roman Centurion in the Roman army. He was a devout man who was what the Jews called a God-fearer. In other words, at some point in his life, he became convinced the Judaism was right, and so he and his whole household began to follow Yahweh. However, as a Gentile convert to Judaism, he could only go so far in Judaism. In other words, his Gentile race would always keep him at arm's length from full worship of God.

This did not matter to him. He still loved God, and so he still prayed and gave generously to the work of the Lord and to help the poor. It was during prayer that he had a vision of an angel who told him his prayers and giving had become a memorial before God. In other words, like the grain offerings of the Old Testament, Cornelius' prayers were like a sweet-smelling aroma before the Lord. Cornelius' relationship with the Lord was obviously one of sweet fellowship, and the Lord loved it.

In the vision, the angel tells Cornelius to send for Simon Peter, who was in Joppa. When the vision was over, he immediately sent for the Apostle Peter.

Peter's Vision: Luke then cuts away from Cornelius to Peter, who was in Joppa. Peter goes up on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house about the sixth hour to pray. While he was praying, he became hungry and fell into a trance. In this trance, he had a vision of a great sheet being let down by its four corners to the earth. Look in vv. 12-13:

In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat.

Peter was shocked by the vision. He was also shocked that the voice told him to *kill and eat* because the sheet contained all kinds of animals and reptiles that were forbidden for Jews to eat because of their dietary laws. He responded by saying:

By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

Verse 16 tells us this happened three times. The significance of the vision happening three-times meant that the vision was from the Lord.

Next in vv. 17-23, we see that Peter was troubled by the vision. And as he was still trying to determine what the vision meant, Cornelius' servants arrived. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said:

Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.

Peter invited the men in, and then they explained who Cornelius was and that he had a vision of an angel who directed him to send for Peter. As a result, they had come to fetch him.

They left the next day. When they arrived at Cornelius' house, Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet to worship him. Peter told him to stand up because he was a man just like him. Then as Peter began to talk to Cornelius, he realized that the house was filled with people who had come to hear what he had to say.

In vv. 28-33, they began to tell their stories to one another. First, Peter told them that the Jewish laws prevented Jews from associating with Gentiles. Look in vv. 28-29:

And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.

Then Cornelius explained his vision to Peter and why he sent for him at once. Verse 33 concludes the visions with Cornelius saying:

Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

Second Movement: The Interpretation (Acts 10:34-35): The interpretation is only two verses, but they are a weighty two verses. Look at vv. 34-35:

So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Peter tells us that now he finally understands that God no longer makes a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. He no longer is partial toward the Jews but now, and what the context teaches us is that He accepts all who come to Him through faith in Jesus.

However, I need to explain what v. 35 is not saying. Verse 35 is not saying that anyone who has sincere faith and sincerely fears God, no matter what their religion is, is now acceptable to God. So, v. 35 does not mean God gives this blanket acceptance to all religions. I say this because there are some who interpret these two verses this way. These verses do not mean this at all.

Bottom line: When Acts 10 began, Peter thought God still showed partiality toward the Jews and basically that a person had to become Jewish before becoming Christian. However, by the end of Acts 10, he realized he was wrong.

The Jews twisted the special privilege God had given them in that God brought salvation to the world through the Jews. They became prejudiced and elitist toward other ethnicities. So, God used these two visions to break Peter of his prejudice and elitism and thus teach the early church that salvation is a free gift of grace through Jesus alone.

Let me give you an illustration to help you think about the old Jewish laws to be separate and holy. Imagine a child wanted to cross a busy street, but the mother is standing on the other side of the street, giving the child instructions. The child is about to step out into the street when the mother yells, "Stop! Do not cross the street." The child stops, and then the traffic clears. After the traffic clears, the mother then says, "Okay, now you can cross the street."

Did the mother contradict herself when she told the child not to cross the street and then later said, now it is okay? No. The mother wanted the child to cross the street but at the proper time. This is kind of like what the old Jewish dietary laws and separation laws were like. God wanted the Jews to be witnesses to the nations and bring the nations in, but there was to be a time of preparation so they would come in at the proper time.²

² Ibid, 163.

That Old Covenant time was over. God was bringing the nations into His family through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ, He was killing the hostility that was between people groups. Through Christ, He was teaching us what He always wanted us to know about what it meant to love and serve those who were not of your race and ethnicity.

God never wanted His people to be prejudiced, but He did want them to be separate and holy. He never wanted His people to act superior and treat others with contempt. He wanted them to love and serve the least of these and love the sojourner. Sin took a good thing, be separate and holy, and twisted it into a wicked something. The problem today is that it still happens among God's people.

Third Movement: The Proclamation: So, we have the *Visions*, the *Interpretation*, and now we have the Proclamation of the gospel in Acts 10:36-43. Peter began to preach the gospel. He gave a very simple gospel presentation that was not very long, but it was enough while he was preaching vv. 44-48 tell us that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles and filled them.

Fourth Movement: The Confirmation: The Gentile audience began to speak in tongues and praised God. What we have in vv. 44-48 is what many call the *Gentile Pentecost*. It was evidence that the New Covenant had come to the Gentiles in the same way it came to the Jews.

These verses are descriptive and not prescriptive. It is not necessary that anyone who believes in Jesus speak in tongues. The gift of tongues was to show Peter and later the Jerusalem church council and the other apostles that the Lord was saving both Jew and Gentile by the message of the gospel. All the Gentiles needed to do was repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus. They did not need to convert to Judaism before becoming Christians. They were saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

Fifth Movement: The Affirmation: Finally, in Acts 11:1-18, Peter is called before the apostles and the circumcision party in Jerusalem because he had associated with and eaten with Gentiles. Then Peter retold the events that occurred to the council so that would understand what God was now doing. Listen to how he concluded in Acts 11:17-18:

If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"
¹⁸ *When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."*

When we consider a narrative that has visions, angels, prejudice, and speaking in tongues all woven into one story, it is easy to get sidetracked and get off in the theological weeds. Remember, Luke wrote to *Acts* to teach us about the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and how we are part of the mission.

So, with the main point of the book in mind, I want to point you to *three principles* found in our text.

I. It is gospel-revelation that leads people to salvation.

One of the key truths we need to learn from this narrative is that while God may give dreams and visions to people, they are not sufficient for salvation. Dreams and visions are not special revelations that save us. Dreams and visions are not God's usual way of working. However, God does use dreams

and visions to lead people to seek out people who will share the gospel with them. Bottom line: it is not *special revelation* that saves but *gospel-revelation* that saves.

Perhaps you have heard stories of people that have had dreams or a vision that pointed them to Jesus. When our humanitarian workers were here, they may have told you about some of the people that they work with having dreams of Jesus or learning where to go to hear the gospel. When you hear these stories, they often sound very similar to Cornelius' experience. When we hear these stories, what we need to remember is that dreams or visions do not save—only the gospel saves.

When we read our text, we learn that Cornelius was not saved because of his vision. He was a very devout man, but the vision nor his righteousness saved him. Cornelius needed what all lost people need. He needed someone to share the gospel with him. It was the hearing of the gospel that God used to create faith in Cornelius, and it is same for anyone.

Friends, when we talk with people about their conversion and all they can do is talk about a special experience, a dream, or a vision without explaining the gospel that led them to faith and repentance, we should wonder if they are truly saved. I'm not saying they are bad people, but it just may be that they have an incomplete understanding of the gospel. It may be that they are simply on their way to trusting Jesus and what they need is for you to explain the full gospel to them.

Finally, it is no different for us. If all you can do is point to an experience without explaining the gospel, then you may not be saved at all. We do not place our faith in an experience but in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

II. It is gospel-revelation that leads people to be baptized.

One of the key truths we learn in *Acts* is that after a person hears and believes the gospel, he or she is baptized. This is one of the key points that Luke keeps weaving through the book of *Acts*.

In *Acts* 10:44-48, we see the part of the narrative where Cornelius household has come to faith in Jesus. The people spoke in tongues, and for Peter, that was evidence of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. Peter now understands that God has granted faith and repentance to the Gentiles, so he concluded in *Acts* 10:47:

Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

Now, here is my warning when we read a text like this. There is no reason to conclude that babies were baptized in this situation. It says that *those who heard the word were baptized*.

The Greek word for *heard* in v. 44 means to hear and understand. It is a hearing that leads to faith. Babies do not hear with the kind of understanding that leads to faith. So, please do not read infant immersion or sprinkling into this text.

Here is what we should conclude is that when a person hears the gospel and gives evidence of a credible understanding of the gospel. That person should follow Jesus in baptism. Baptism means to be immersed in water. Baptism by immersion is a display of our repentance of sin and placing their faith in Jesus. It means we have died to our old way of life and been raised to a new life in Jesus. It is an outward display of an inner transformation of being born again with a new heart.

If you are here this morning and you have trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior by turning from your sin and placing your faith in Jesus, but you have never been baptized by immersion, then you need to be immersed.

III. It is gospel-revelation that leads God's people to sanctification.

The third principle we find in this text is how God uses the gospel to sanctify His people. Remember what was going on in the Apostle Peter's heart. He was still holding on to prejudice because he and the Jews misunderstood what it meant to be separated from God and to be holy to the Lord. What should have been a good quality of a holy life that led to being a witness had become a sinful way of viewing themselves as superior to others. Their understanding of God's good message had been twisted by sin.

However, notice what God did to change Peter and the circumcision party. He simply made a new law—right? He made a new law that said: *Thou shall not be prejudiced and racist*. God made this law, and it fixed everything—right? Wrong.

The Law never saved anyone, nor did it ever sanctify anyone. God did not make a new law. Instead, what He did was send His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus came, and He kept the Law perfectly. He never sinned, and yet, the Jews hated Him. They hated Him because He was not prejudice, nor was He racist. He ate with sinners and granted forgiveness to Gentiles. So, they arrested Him, beat Him, gave false testimony against Him, convicted Him, and sentenced Him to death on a Roman cross. Jesus was nailed to that cross, and on the cross, He asked God to forgive them of their sin. He died and was buried, but the grave could not hold Him. Three days later, God raised Him from the dead. Now all who come to Jesus in faith and repentance are born again to a new life. This new life breaks the power and penalty of sin over God's people and shapes them into the image of Jesus Christ.

You see, it is the new birth in Christ that changes us—not new laws. *We need new hearts, not new laws*. It is being born again that will break the power of prejudice and racism.

That was what the Holy Spirit used in Peter's life to help him see that he was being prejudice. The Spirit didn't give a new law; He simply showed him how the gospel saves both Jews and Gentiles through the person and work of Christ, and this understanding of the gospel broke the power of prejudice in Peter's heart.