

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY THAT IS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE**Acts 10**

Intro: I'm glad that you read Acts 10 – at least I'm hoping you read it ☺. If you did will know the background for my message this morning. I asked you to do that for a couple of reasons: #1) It's a long passage and #2 This needs to be a short sermon.

The fact is, this is a short sermon from a long passage that is of huge significance. Here's why: When Jesus was born, an angel appeared to the most unlikely messengers. The first human messengers of the arrival of the Messiah were shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem. Shepherds were not second-class citizens nor were they even third class citizens – they were smelly who were given lots of space when they came to town. But God chose to send the message of a baby who was a Savior born in a stable. The message to those shepherds was this familiar passage, *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* Luke 2:10-14 ESV.

Now, I'm not preaching a Christmas sermon. I am preaching this: a message that was good news of great joy for ALL PEOPLE!

Let me say that again, the message of great joy was for ALL PEOPLE!

The promise is that God's favor rests on those who seek him.

Last week was Pentecost Sunday. On the first Day of Pentecost, Peter, who was known more for being a fisherman, preached a powerful sermon and as a result thousands were saved. In that sermon Peter quoted the prophet Joel with these words:

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*

*and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;*

even on my male servants and female servants

in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

the sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,

before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. Acts 2:17-21

The young will see visions.

Elders will dream dreams.

People will seek the Lord and be saved.

Today in our passage we have . . .

Two dreamers

- One who wanted to know and who found Jesus.
- And another one who should have known, because he already knew Jesus, and finally learned that what he had was good news of great joy is for all people.
- The first dreamer was Cornelius, a centurion in the Italian Regiment (or as my translation says, Cohort). There are a variety of descriptions for what the Italian regiment was, but it seems there were 32 of these cohorts and all were recruited from Italy and they were the Roman emperor's most faithful and elite soldiers.
- A centurion is the commander of a large cohort of men so Cornelius was not an insignificant person. It's interesting that the seven centurions who are mentioned in the New Testament, are all shown in a positive

light – we can't look at all of them today but, at your request, I can give you the passages where they can be found.

- Today I will briefly highlight Cornelius and two others. The first two were directly related to Jesus. One came to Jesus asking for healing for his slave, and Jesus healed the servant and then commended him in that he showed more faith than most Jewish people. The next one is found at the Cross as Jesus died, and the text says that the man looked at Jesus and knew that he must have been the Son of God.
- Cornelius is the third centurion mentioned in the New Testament and he is described as a very good man who served God better than your average, run-of-the-mill, Jew. He was, in fact, a God-fearer. This meant that he practiced all the things that Jews practiced with the exception of being circumcised and thereby submitting to being a full-fledged proselyte.
- As Acts 10 begins we find Cornelius fasting and praying and he has a vision about a man who can teach him about being closer to the one and only God. He quickly sends word to request a visit from Peter who is staying at a tanner's house about 30 miles away in Joppa.
- The second dreamer was Peter and he wasn't fasting. His a dream, or vision (or trance, as some translations, like mine, render it) came when he was waiting for lunch – it was about noon after all. Peter dreamed about food, but he wasn't dreaming about bacon. Well, maybe he was. You see, in his dream, something like a movie screen was lowered out of heaven and it has on it every kind of animal, including those that Jews are forbidden to eat. That list is extensive and it includes reptiles and pigs, so maybe he was dreaming about bacon. Regardless, as that movie screen is lowered down, a voice tells him to kill and eat. But Peter, profane as his upbringing probably was as a fisherman, was still a good Jew. His response was, and I paraphrase, "I have never eaten anything unclean, and I don't intend to start now!"
- You see, Peter was a slow learner, but the Lord is patient and infinitely persistent and the vision comes two more times. Each time Peter reacts the same way and flatly refuses. But then he's wakened out of his reverie by a knock on the door. The people who were knocking were Gentiles – that is, non-Jews, and they had a message from a Gentile centurion, whom they described as an upright and God-fearing man who is well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, and he wanted Peter to come to Caesarea and share the good news – whatever that was.
- Here's the good news that Peter was quickly learning: the good news is for all people because . . .

GOD HAS NO FAVORITES!

- Peter finally was getting it and he was soon on his way to knowing that God plays no favorites. Peter was already staying with Simon the tanner. Last week I ended my sermon by pointing out that Peter was staying with a person who was considered very unclean. Simon was definitely a Jewish tanner because a good Jew would never step into a Gentile home, let alone stay there. But a tanner was the kind of man who had to take a special bath every week before he went to synagogue. So it's evident that Peter was learning and as this story unfolds we can almost see the walls of separation crumbling in his mind.
- Peter submitted to the Spirit and went as he was summoned, in the same way he showed up for Tabitha's friends in the town of Lydda as we learned last week. Remember – Saints show up. As Peter arrives at Cornelius's home, the home of a Roman centurion, (Romans despised the Jews and looked down their noses at them) this commander of Romans soldiers actually fell to the ground and worshiped Peter.
- But Peter's response is beautiful. His heart was moved by this, in fact our text tells us, that *Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man."* Acts 10:26. This is significant for two reasons: 1) A good Jew would never touch a Gentile and yet the scripture clearly points out that Peter lifted Cornelius. And 2), don't you think that Peter could have, just a little, soaked up a little of the glory of having one of the conquering army groveling at his feet. But not Peter – he was getting it. and that's when . . .

Peter began to preach

- And not just to Cornelius. Nope, he was preaching to a crowd. You see, Cornelius didn't keep the message to himself. He brought everybody he loved and knew in to hear this good news of great joy for all the people. This is because Cornelius had a contagious faith. We already know how important this is. Having a contagious faith is what spreads the good news and that is what the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is all about.

- Peter preached his basic message that had worked every time before. You notice very quickly as he preaches in Acts 10 that it's very similar to what he preached on Pentecost, and to the Sanhedrin when he was arrested for healing the crippled man in the temple courts. He preached the same message, not because he was a one-sermon-wonder, but because it was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But this time he didn't even get to finish – F. B. Meyer points out, “*Peter never finished his sermon. It seemed as if the Holy Spirit put the apostle aside, saying, “You have spoken enough; leave the rest to me!”*”. The Spirit broke through before he finished and a Gentile Pentecost happened.

Conclusion: The awesome thing here is that we as Gentiles can trace our ancestry back to an obedient Roman soldier who knew that there was something more than pagan gods. Fortunately there was a reluctant evangelist who had his diet altered and his target audience expanded because God’s plan for humanity is good news of great joy for all the people.

That is our message. No matter how bad someone seems and beyond redemption, the message of good news of great joy is for them. We just need to be like Cornelius and have a contagious faith and like Peter who broke through personal prejudices and went against the culture and we too can share the good news of great joy. Amen