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**We Get the Full Version**  
**Acts 10:23-11:18**

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi shares that in his student days in England, he was deeply touched by reading the Gospels and was seriously considering converting to Christianity, for it seemed to offer a real solution to the caste system that had so divided his people of India. One Sunday he attended church services and decided to ask the minister about salvation and doctrines. But when Gandhi entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go elsewhere to worship with his own people. He left the church and never came back. "If Christians have caste differences also, he thought to himself, I might as well remain a Hindu"

The church has been described as one of the most segregated hours of the week. Folks that simply should not be. We need to be reminded to live and love others as Jesus loved people. Last week the apostle Peter first hand saw two miraculous physical healings of a man who had been paralyzed and a woman who had died. These were real life illustrations of what God wants to do in peoples life to bring spiritual healing. God wanted to remove the scales of paralysis that had coated over Peters heart. Those were the scales of prejudice, deep seated, prideful, exclusiveness and elitism and superiority toward a huge group of people called gentiles. A huge group of people that God loves that just happened to not be of Jewish origin. Peter needed to learn that God loves Gentiles too. And so God sets Peter up and teaches him a lesson that prejudice has no part in the kingdom of God.

In a dream Peter sees a sheet held up at the four corners but coming down out of the sky. Inside the weight of the sheet are all kinds of animals. Animals all mixed in together that had been declared clean

and unclean in the Old Testament food laws. These food laws are fulfilled and completed in Jesus. In the Old Testament they kept God's chosen people separate from the other pagan nations, but now they are not to be considered unclean. This dream Peter dreamed was not just about animals and what he could or could not eat. This was about people. God declared that people from all four corners of the compass; North, south east and west were not to be written off as unclean. Jews and Gentiles alike were to be granted equal privilege, equal status before God. Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are heirs of the promise."

I think we have forgotten the impact of that truth for us. I think we have taken for granted all the privilege that we have been given lost some of the first love and recognition of what an incredible thing it is to be afforded direct access and total, full privilege before God. None of us are regarded as second-class citizens of the kingdom. We, though we are Gentiles, though we are a people grafted it to the branch. God loves us so much we granted us salvation by believing in Jesus Christ through the repentance that leads to life. That's the main point of the story in Acts 10 and 11. God loves we gentiles too and has afforded us full and total privilege and access. The story of how God worked in the heart of Peter to overcome his deep-seated prejudice is repeated three times in these chapters. It spends 64 verses to tell the story over and over and over again. And I could stand here and read and read and re-read all the details of how Peter went to the home of a Gentile Cornelius. But I won't as long as you promise not to forget how important this is, not to forget the weighty impact of the incredible privilege it is that God so loved us that He wanted to make sure and override prejudice and bring the truth about who Jesus was to the Gentiles...bring the truth to us.

I think we in white Christian America have forgotten. We have taken for granted how we got in. We tend to view white Christian America

as kind of an exclusive Christian country club. We have our big churches and well-oiled programs. We have arrived and we think the rest of the world is just struggling to keep up. We actually as gentiles now look down on others who we feel just haven't arrived or don't have the resources we have to do church. We think we have an exclusive handle on Christianity and so we show up to church expecting not a message from God, but expecting to be entertained and expect the guy who is speaking to keep you awake with interesting stories or a funny joke. Folks that's not the way it was for the first gentile household that heard the good news about Jesus. This morning we need to be reminded of how we as gentiles got in...I want us to feel the weighty impact of what happened here in the household of Cornelius. I think we can also take some lessons from his response.

Lets pick up the story where we left off last week in Acts 10:23. God has been breaking down Peters walls of prejudice. Staying at an unclean tanners home, seeing this vision of unclean and clean animals that God declares clean. Welcomes in a small group of gentiles in the home. And now with 6 other men agrees to travel 35 miles north to the town of Caesarea and visit the home of a centurion named Cornelius. Pick it up in Acts 10:23-33 (READ)

This is a great story. I am really impressed by Cornelius. V.24 Peter makes the walk to Caesarea and Cornelius was already waiting for him. He had called all his relatives and friends together. V.30 So convinced was he that God was about to do something powerful and share the message of salvation. So convinced that his messengers were going to get to Joppa and actually find the tanners house and find this Jewish man named Peter and that Peter would actually drop what he was doing and come immediately and make the two days journey to Caesarea. Convinced by faith that all that would happen, Cornelius risked the embarrassment of any of those details coming together and brought his family and friends together to hear a message from God.

That is anticipation. That is obedience and a heart of faith that is seeking God. Cornelius had no way of knowing if Peter was even coming. They didn't have telephones back then. No telegraph. I know its hard to believe, but they didn't even have cell phones. No email from the servants saying "Things are going great down here boss. You wouldn't believe it we actually were invited to stay at a Jewish home last night. Have you ever heard that happening before. Well boss, its clear that God has been working on Peters end here too. He seem to know that we were coming and we will be leaving this afternoon and everything goes well, we should arrive sometime in the afternoon that next day. Cornelius never could have received a phone call like that. Yet, he so anticipated Peter would show up with a word from God that he was ready. With baited breath he gathered his friends and waited for Peter to walk in the door.

Do you come to church like with that kind of an attitude? Do you walk in the doors of this church or any church? Do you open up your Bible at home with an eager expectation that God is going to deliver a message to you that you need to hear? Do you come ready to hear from God? I think some of us are physically present, but not really ready to hear. Some come on Sunday mornings hoping to hear a certain person speak and maybe get disappointed when its not me. I've watched people walk out when its not the speaker they had hoped for. Some people come to church on Sunday morning thinking they are going to listen to a real great speaker or teacher and then go home and roast what he had to say over Sunday dinner. Or many walk out and say wow wasn't that a great speech today. He really did great. I think we ask the wrong question. We rarely ask the right question of "What did God talk to me about today?" How was God trying to challenge me? What did He need me to know? What was He trying to remind me of today?

We rarely ask those questions because we don't view our times with God, one of them being Sunday morning as a divine appointment.

We don't ask those questions because we focus on the messenger rather than the source giver of that message.

When Peter walks into the house Cornelius falls down at his feet and worships him. Peter quickly corrects him and raises him up and says; "Stand up, I too am just a man". The point Peter makes is that he is simply a messenger conveying what it is that God wants him to say. As your pastor, I am simply a messenger. I spend time in prayer and study before God and say. OK God I don't know anything about anything unless you show up and let me know. I am going to study this portion of your Holy Scripture and I'm counting on you to let me know what it is you want me to tell your people on Sunday morning. I consider that a trust and I do not take it lightly. I study and try to determine what the original author intended to convey, the meaning and interpretation and then what the timeless truths would be that could then be applied to today. But sometimes God steps in and impresses me, "Norm I know that this isn't particularly the main point, but I want you to mention this on Sunday. So sometimes you might hear me from the pulpit admit it is somewhat of a side note but someone needed to hear that truth this morning. And that next week often one of you will say, "That was for me...I needed to hear that." OK I'm glad God is still directing me what to say because that is what I'm counting on. I still work hard during the week, because I want to present God's truth in most compelling and palatable way I can. But I'm not the source. I am just the messenger.

Look down at v.33 we see that the military man Cornelius who understood chain of command...got it. He understood that Peter was just the messenger. "you've been kind enough to show up Peter. We are all here. We come BEFORE God, not before Peter. We come to hear what it is that God has COMMANDED you to tell us." When we come with that kind of anticipation. When we are here anticipating to come BEFORE God. When we are listening not to the words of some messenger, a man just like you and me, but listening to the words commanded by God.

Certainly I want to know if you feel I have missed something or distorted a truth. Absolutely, I don't claim to be a perfect messenger...but I am simply a messenger. And that is the way to come prepared to hear a sermon on Sunday mornings. That is the way to approach the Bible when we read. Anticipate and look for a message from God to you. Remember who is delivering the real message. When the preacher is prepared well and the listener is prepared well, great things will happen. We have the word of God at our finger-tips. Don't take the privilege lightly.

V.34 Peter sees this response of faith and anticipating obedience of listening to God and the full weight of what God was doing here begins to sink in. Ohhhh. Now I certainly understand. I get it. God loves the Gentiles too and is not about to exclude them from knowing the truth about Jesus and God wants to give it all to them. So Peter then begins to preach the truth. (READ v.36-48) Peter preaches that Jesus Christ is Lord of all v.36 and that Jesus was a real person, a man from Nazareth who was anointed by God. Jesus came from heaven as a man whom God worked in love and power. He didn't come to earth primarily to show off his power and deity, that was veiled. He didn't come to show us how God behaves. He came to this earth to show us how man behaves as God intended him to be when he is indwelt by God. You or I will never be the man or woman God intended us to be until we are indwelt by God. Jesus is God reaching out to lost, broken, sinful and failed man in order to restore him. Jesus healed people physically to prove that he could heal people spiritually. God was with him. Peter declares that he is a witness to all these things and that even though Jesus was a very good man, they still killed him on a humiliating cross. But three days later God raised up Jesus. And he raised him up bodily. Peter was a witness to seeing Jesus eat and drink. It was not a trick or ghost. It was Jesus raised bodily from the grave. It was Jesus that gave us the mission to preach this truth and good news to all people. He is the one the prophets

of the Old wrote about. V43 and everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins. That's the good news, that men have been given a way to be forgiven of their sins. That is our basic need. We are sinners flat, plain, simple and we know it. We don't need just a little makeover, even one of those extreme makeovers is not going to do it for us. We need a totally new spiritual inside that only Jesus can give us. And He wants to forgive us. Have you stopped and thanked God recently that your sins are forgiven?

In the middle of Peter's sermon, the holy spirit refuses to wait for an altar call and begins to move in people's hearts as they believe. V.44 "while Peter is still speaking, the spirit fell on all who are listening." Amazing what happens when the spirit shows up. Peter preaches this very simple sermon that tells the truth about Jesus in a plain and clear way and the Spirit just steps in and moves in power. I think that the Holy Spirit enjoys showing up when the truth about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is clearly and plainly presented to people.

I was talking with someone this week about the ministry of Billy Graham. If you've been to any of his crusades or listened to him on the TV his sermons are very simple, very clear and basic. He doesn't rant and rave and jump up and down. He is not particularly clever in his words. My friend described it almost like Billy Graham starts to speak and the spirit begins to move all around the coliseum and is working in people's hearts and Billy is up there preaching asking God, "OK do you want me to stop yet? No just a little longer I'm still working here" OK now. Go ahead and invite them to confirm the work I have done in their hearts. They are ready to respond in faith and salvation. And they come out of their seats in droves. The spirit enjoys showing up when the truth about Jesus is presented in a clear and plain way.

v.45 the 6 believing Jews who traveled with Peter to Caesarea were amazed when these gentiles responded in belief, received the forgiveness of God and then the gift of the Holy Spirit fell down on them. They even

praised God in languages they didn't know. They spoke in tongues just like what happened at Pentecost! It was obvious that God loved the gentiles and had brought the message of salvation to them. Peter wasn't about to stand in the way of what God was doing so in v.47 he says "These men are saved. There is no reason we shouldn't baptize them, as they need to be identified with the body of Christ.

I think we in white Christian America have missed the full impact of what this means for us. I don't think the writer of Acts wants us to skip over how important and earth shaking this was to the early church and ought still to be for us. It's repeated three times for a reason and we need to remember it. In chapter 11 Peter returned to Jerusalem, the hotbed of Jews including many priests that have turned to Christ. The word has spread. God has taken the gospel message to the Gentiles. But more than that v.2 the Jerusalem Christians take up issue with Peter not because he preached Jesus to them, but because he went to their house and had a meal with them. Peter's actions threatened their own deep seated prejudices that lurked in their own heart. How does Peter refute their arguments? He simply tells them what God has done. He recounts the actions of God as he retells the story of what happened with Cornelius. That is where our faith always rests, on what God has done. Peter told what God did and there was nothing more they could say.

v.17,18 If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? Well, then God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life. We are gentiles. We are the ones who have been recipients of God's grace. He didn't give us just a partial access. He didn't feed us a couple extra helpings of leftover grace. He didn't say that we could be part of the family but we still had to eat our dinner in the back room. He gave us gentiles full and complete and total privilege and access. Sometimes computer software companies will hand out demo versions of their program. Sometimes they will sell partial or light

versions that allow you only to use a certain number of features and block the real important ones with the hope that you will like it enough to buy the full version. The Jewish believers are amazed that God has not blocked any of the features to these gentiles. God's offer of salvation was full, complete, total inclusion. They didn't have to try and become Jews before they were saved, they could enjoy the full benefits of forgiveness of sin and indwelling of the Spirit.

So what difference ought that make in us? I think it ought to strip away some of the indifferent, proud, elitism, prejudice, exclusive attitudes that we have taken toward other people and toward the preached word of God. We ought get rid of our country club attitudes and be incredibly thankful that God has opened up the way of salvation to us. We need to take notes from Cornelius, the first gentile household, who came to hear Gods word expectantly and anticipating to hear what God has commanded the messenger to speak.

Harry Ironside tells about a conversation he had with his father. His father was dying and kept muttering something and the family who were all gathered around couldn't quite understand what it was. But finally they got it. Mr. Ironside had been thinking about the vision that Peter had where the sheet was lowered down from heaven full of animals clean and unclean in it. What he had been muttering to himself was, "A great sheet and wild beasts and, and, and..." he couldn't finished it. So a friend bent down whispered in his ear, "John it says "creeping things" King James Version. "Oh yes, he said, "That is how I got in. Just a poor good for nothing creeping thing. But I got in and I've been saved by grace." Do you see we all were once unclean before God, we all were gentiles, sinners, creeping things, but then the grace of God got into that sheet and we who believe in him are pronounced clean by the sheer grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Think about that. We got in. Only by grace can we enter. Only by grace can we stand. Not by our human endeavor but by the blood of the lamb. Into his presence He calls us. He

calls us to come. Into his presence He draws us and now by our grace we come. Next week come prepared ready to listen to what God wants you impress on your heart as we feel the full weight of the privilege we are given by the sheer grace of God.

Acts 10:23-11:18

Review from 10:28 You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him. Yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

Obedience of Cornelius: four days ago to this very hour. 9<sup>th</sup> hour 3 in the afternoon an angel appeared.

God's timing and orchestrating of events. Their obedience to join in his plan.

V 33 Now then we are all here present **before God** to hear all that you have been **commanded** by the Lord.

Expectant. Anticipation. Ready to hear from God. Some can be physically present but not ready to hear. Some come thinking they are hearing from a certain preacher or teacher then we go home to roast and pull apart what the man up front said. We rarely ask the real question. "What did God talk to me about today? How was I challenged? Do we view Sunday mornings as a divine appointment with almighty God? It is not about the person up front. If God can speak through Balaam's ass then He can speak through me.

How do I come prepared to hear the sermon on Sundays?

Note the military terms. God Commands Peter to speak. 10:25 “stand up, I too am just a man” Cornelius must have gotten it, understood that he is just a mouth piece. When you are involved in so much encouragement and the words of wisdom happen to come from your mouth. Its easy for other people to forget I’m just a man just like you, I just happen to be the mouthpiece of God who is commanded what to say. When I read the scripture I pray and ask God what it is He wants me to say to the people. Sometimes I know that what I say will offend certain people. I sometimes argue with God because I like to be liked. But He usually overrides that. I like to draw things directly from the text and preach the main point of what I feel the writer was saying. When I am preaching the word I feel far more comfortable. I have even in pride at times ripped other preachers for reading truths into a text that are found somewhere in the Bible but is stretchng a point to bring it out here. And yet there are sometimes when He commands me to say things that aren’t even mentioned in the text. OK. I try to listen and must assume that God needed to tell that to someone. I will usually mention that I am doing that. I’m not sure why I’m supposed to say that this morning but here goes. And invariable someone during the week will say, That was for me. That was exactly what I needed to hear from God.

10v.24 “He had called together his family and close friends.” So convinced was he that God was about to do something powerful and share a message they desperately needed to hear. He gathered a group together to hear a message from God. He was well thought of and respected enough to listen.

Do we ask our friends to come hear the truth about Jesus. Would you be more likely to if an angel appeared and it was obvious that God was bringing together and orchestrating a significant event. You just got to come. I’m not sure what it is but look what has happened.

Back up. They didn’t have telephones back then, not even telegraphs. V24 “Now Cornelius was waiting...” He was so convinced he saw an angel and gave specific direction that he sent a group to Joppa to find some guy he had never met named Peter. Cornelius was waiting. With friends. He knew how long it would take if they hurried there and then immediately returned. He called everyone together. He expected that God would show up and Peter would come even before he knew he was even on his way. The servants of Cornelius didn’t have a cell phone and called up. Things are going great down here boss you wouldn’t believe it we stayed at a Jewish home last night. God has been working on Peters end and we are going to be heading up there should arrive by tomorrow mid-afternoon. Get all the friends and family ready because I really think this is going to be big, real big.

v.27 “peter walked in and found many people assembled.” Faith.

Peter walks in with 6 brethren (Jews) 11:12. There is some faith on their part, faith that Peter wasn't just having a bad desperate dream when he was tired and hungry. Faith that he had heard from God, and what God had commanded him and a teachability to follow even though their message from God had come second hand through Peter.

v.34 "Now I most certainly understand that God is not one to show partiality." What reaffirmed Peter in this? He saw the people already waiting, anticipating, prepared, the teachability of Cornelius in being tempted to worship Peter but now correctly sees him as an instrument of God who commands and not the source. That reflected on a backdrop of all the events that God has brought together. Peter really gets it.

Peters sermon.

Jesus Christ is Lord of All

Historical review; after baptism by John

Jesus from a real place Nazareth

Healed people physically and spiritually

God was with him

I'm a witness to these things along with others

They killed him on the cross and God Raised him up on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.

There again I'm a witness to the fact, along with others that he was raised bodily...not just a ghost. He ate and drank. I saw him..

He gave us a mission to preach to the people. This Jesus he is the One God has chosen. He is the one whom all the prophets of old wrote about.

Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

Holy spirit fell (while Peter was still speaking) God can interrupt anytime he wants when people are ready to believe and respond to salvation offer.

People filled with the holy spirit began to praise God and speak in tongues. This was a sign to the Jews there that this was the real deal.

V45 "this amazed the Jewish believers who had come along with Peter."

Wow they get the spirit too? They get ALL the benefits of being in Christ?"

Its not just another salvation with half the features. Not salvation lite. No pop-ups that say; you have to get the full version to access that feature.

No it's the full version real deal. Not a partial demo that just gives a taste of what the program is like and then shuts down when you get to the part where it could be really useful. \*

Note the order: God's preparation; Preaching the truth about Jesus; Response of belief in Him; (implied reception of forgiveness of sins; Spirit indwells; Praise offered; Then baptism was not refused. If this was the full deal then of course baptism would be offered. Baptism was not necessary for salvation. It was a naturally response to those who had been saved. Obedience in baptism is a natural response affirming our commitment to God and what He has done in salvation.

## Chapter 11:

v.1 the word spread fast that the Gentiles also received the word of God. “Did you hear what happened at Caesarea. This is pretty wild stuff. Gentiles? Full-version? Not a half-way job the Jewish folks had offered those for proselytes. Court of gentiles that were allowed only limited access? No really it’s the full version? Holy spirit came down? Yep. I even heard them speak in other languages they didn’t even know saying praises to God. Incredible? Baptism? Yep. Full privilege. Total access.

v.2 the Jewish circumcised believers “took issue’ with him. Some didn’t agree with what Peter had been leading. A part of. To them it was scandalous. What part? Not that he shared the truth about Jesus.. but that he went and sat down and ate a meal with uncircumcised gentiles. Prejudice strikes again. Get back in line. Get back into the box. Have you forgotten who you are?

v.3ff Peter recalls what happened.

v.12 Peter mentioned the number of associates as 6 double the number needed by Jewish courts as a credible sure witness account.

v.15 and as I spoke. The spirit came “just as he did upon us a the beginning”