

Full Prejudice Fully Unraveled

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Acts 10:1-33

No barrier of man with withstand the saving work of Christ's mighty hand

Introduction

Each of us receive information and process it in a certain way. It is one of the ways we are different from each other. I am the guy who when it is time to go somewhere has to do a map study of the route. Where is it I have to go? Okay, well what does it look like to get there? I pull up a map program on my computer. I look at satellite imagery of the destination. If freeway travel is involved I take a look at the exits, their orientation, and so forth. Many of you probably think this is so outdated, this method of figuring out how to get to my destination. You might think just throw the address in the phone and hit start – follow the line and you will arrive. Miss a turn, no big deal the phone will reroute you. How many of you prefer this second way of navigating?

Now I understand this tendency. I even back myself up at times with this method. But I don't like it; primarily because it doesn't give me the bigger picture. Much of the time the GPS function only shows a quarter of a mile down the road. I need more than that to go off of. Each of us receive information and process it in a certain way.

In our passage this morning information is being presented, revelation is being given, and it is being received. We will see Cornelius is directed a certain way by the angel of God that he saw in his vision. Similarly, Peter is going to be directed by the vision the Lord provides to him. The outcome of God's directing of these two men to meet is a monumental event in the life of the church. The previously held idea of gentiles being outside the possibility of being saved, even the idea of it – really a substantial barrier to the early Christians sharing of the gospel with the gentiles – this barrier gets completely undone in chapter 10 of Acts.

Peter isn't given a whole lot to go off of. He is basically having to follow the blue line on the GPS device not really knowing where it is leading. It is safe to say he is unaware of the bigger picture, he is perplexed, and I think fair to say a little bothered by the situation. But he is willing to follow the path being laid out before him because the Holy Spirit told him to do so.

Cornelius, has little to go off of other than directions given in his vision. Like a good soldier he doesn't ask questions beyond "What is it Lord?" He plugs in the address and hits start route. Trusting whatever God is directing will be best for him and those closest to him.

The bigger picture in our passage is that God is about to upend major prejudices that had been held against the gentiles for millennia. Even with the gospel made known to Peter and the others this barrier still remained. They had prejudices against the gentiles. Now I don't want you to think this is just a them problem. We also have prejudices. *Our prejudices stand in the way of our full acceptance of the gospel. Without a full acceptance of the gospel ourselves we become reluctant to share it with others, or we narrow our view of who we share it with. In doing this we artificially impose boundaries to salvation that God wants to see abolished all together.* The lesson that Peter learns and the one that stands out as necessary for us to learn is that: **No barrier of man will withstand the saving work of Christ's mighty hand.**

As we have been working through Acts many barriers have already crumbled. The gospel was taken into Samaria where unlikely converts were converted. Similarly, the Ethiopian Eunuch, a man who was desiring to worship God but due to Jewish law had to maintain a level of separation – that is until Philip made the gospel known to him (**Acts 8**). Then of course the dramatic conversion of the persecutor of the church, the man who was zealous to see The Way disbanded completely – Jesus intervened in Saul's life and Ananias shared with him the good news about the Christ (**Acts 9**). Today, with Acts 10 the toppling of another barrier begins, because **No barrier of man will withstand the saving work of Christ's mighty hand.**

Cornelius is Devout Yet Still Without vv1-7

1. **vv1-2** "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort..."
 - a. In this short introduction we are told some things about this man.

- i. He is a non-commissioned officer in the Roman army. He has a position of authority, most likely in charge of nearly a hundred men. He is stationed in Caesarea, a coastal city. A Roman enclave in the land of Israel.
- ii. He has become an observer of monotheism. Living in the land of Israel he had no doubt been influenced by Judaism. But he had not become a proselyte. In another words he didn't convert to Judaism.
 - 1. Even though the text describes him as a God fearer – a devout man.
 - 2. A man who was leading his family to be like him – devout.
 - 3. Allowing his fear of God and devotion to impact his practices, giving alms to the poor – giving generously.
 - 4. Devoting time to pray to God, here we see that he prayed continually.
- b. Whether you focus upon his title as a Centurion or the description of his devotion, you cannot overlook the reality that he is what all the Jews would have considered a Gentile. A Gentile. Uncircumcised. Not part of the covenant – separate.
 - i. And although Christianity is growing in the region, it has still maintained a finely held boundary; a boundary that is traceable along the line of those who associated with God by practicing the law of Moses and those who do not.
 - ii. Although this line is observed by men, it is even rightly described as a barrier, it is not a barrier that keeps the mighty hand of Christ from working.
- 2. **vv3-6** *“About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him,..”*
 - a. This is a terrifying experience for a battle-hardened Centurion. But the message is one that instills hope and rapid obedience. Just look at the next two verses.
- 3. **vv7-8** *“When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier..”*
 - a. What has happened to this man? He is going through his normal routine of praying to God, having conformed to the same pattern as the practicing Jews all around him. He is not at a synagogue praying, but rather in his home - we learn that detail from v30. And while he is praying he clearly sees a vision of an angel of God.
 - b. The angel is not only seen by him, but just as messengers of God throughout Scripture speak, he speaks a message for Cornelius.
 - c. **Now how many of us have been deep in our devotional prayer time and have had an angel visit us? Not a lot of hands.** But fellow Saints we have Christ! The Holy Spirit has been granted to those of us who believe. Yet here in Scripture it is a Roman Gentile Soldier that has this experience.
 - i. In light of this let me ask what might be a difficult question for some: Does Cornelius' encounter with the angel prove that he is saved?
 - 1. We can easily see why he is described as a devout man and as a God fearer. But what about his salvation? Looking at his assignment is helpful in answering this question. He is to send for Peter. You see church, Cornelius is devout – but he is still without. He needs to hear the gospel. His barrier is a lack of knowledge concerning Christ.
 - a. Paul says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith.”* (**Eph 2:8a**)
 - b. Paul writes specifically in **Gal 2:16** *“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ,..”*

Transition: Cornelius is commendable, that is what the angel of God tells him. The things Cornelius does are commendable, but he needs to hear what Peter has been entrusted with. Cornelius needs to hear the gospel, but as we will see next Peter still has some barriers to overcome.

Peter's Misguided Devotion Sovereignly Redirected vv9-22

1. **vv9-13** *"The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up..."*
 - a. Luke is weaving together this narrative, the story of how Cornelius and Peter are going to meet. So, just 18 hours after Cornelius' vision nearly 40 miles to the north in Caesarea, we are brought to Simon the Tanner's house where Peter is praying.
 - b. Peter is shown this vision of what we might think of as a large picnic blanket being let down from where? From heaven! On the large sheet are all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds. The implication is that the animals are ceremonially unclean, or by their close proximity to unclean animals they are all unclean.
 - c. With that small background, consider the words that the voice speaks to Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."
 - i. To us we may think nothing of it, apart from the fact that most of us are far removed from the actual processing of the meat we eat – but aside from that the dietary laws that were so important to Peter and the rest of the Jews is hard to fathom.
 - ii. **Leviticus 11** describes in detail what the people of Israel could eat and not eat. What they could touch and not touch. The law was setup to distinguish them from among the peoples as set apart.
 - iii. Peter is watching this sheet like blanket descending, at God's command mind you, descending from heaven and as he looks he sees it is full of animals that he believes are wrong from him to even touch, let alone eat. It is from this mindset that Peter answers.
 1. **v14** *"But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything..."*
 2. At this point you might be thinking Peter is always doing this – going against what the Lord is saying. Do you remember when Peter makes his great confession of faith about who Jesus is and then turns around and rebukes Jesus when the Lord says he must die (**Matt. 16:22**)? Similarly, when Jesus beautifully washes his disciples' feet, when he came to Peter – Peter said he should not wash his feet (**John 13:8**). And now here, he is not going to do it – he will not defile himself by eating these provided animals.
 3. This is where it seems Peter's devotion is misguided. He is getting a command from the Lord, and yet he is trusting in the traditions and the law. He walked with Jesus, Jesus who fulfilled all the law and ushered in the new covenant with his very life. In the new covenant it is Christ that makes one clean from sin – not dietary laws, not sacrificial system, not purity rituals and ordinances. It is the blood of Christ that washes away sin and makes all things new.
2. **vv15-16** *"And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made..."*
 - a. This is the answer he gets, the offer appears to be repeated, and Peter apparently sticks with his answer – "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Then at once the thing with the animals was taken up to heaven.
 - b. What was it that the Lord said? "What God has made clean, do not call common." Peter has a barrier. In the vision that he has it is related to food, but that barrier is soon going to be tested in regard to his prejudice towards gentiles.
3. **vv17-20** *"Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean,..."*
 - a. Here is Peter. Shaking his head trying to figure out this vision. Perplexed. Then we have recorded the word "behold" – just at this very time! The Lord's orchestration of Peter's meeting with Cornelius is

advanced. “Behold” the men that Cornelius had sent are suddenly there, having traveled at their master’s command to find Peter.

- b. Now the vision Peter is pondering, is coupled with a word from the Spirit that says, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”
 - i. Instead of rise Peter kill and eat – it is rise and go down and accompany them. God has been preparing Peter for this very thing.
- 4. **vv21-22** *“And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for...”*
 - a. Peter obeys. He does what the Spirit directs.
 - b. He will immediately recognize that the men are gentiles. But the Spirit told him that they have been sent by him! The Holy Spirit has worked out the details of this encounter – and Peter is to trust and obey.
 - c. But Peter wants some more details, so he asks why the men are there. They relate to him about Cornelius, much of what we covered earlier – but at the end of their explanation they say Cornelius wants to hear what Peter has to say. Peter knew what to say before in **Acts 4:12** before the High Priest, the Scribes, and the Pharisees, he said *““And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.””*

Transition: But is Peter going to be able to overcome his barrier of misguided devotion to ceremonial practices kept by the Jews, practices that Jesus did away with by ushering in the New Covenant? Is he going to be able to deliver the gospel to the gentiles, starting with Cornelius and his whole household?

The Last Barrier is Ready to Fall **vv23-33**

- 1. **v23a** *“So he invited them in to be his guests...”* You might be thinking this is the significant change in Peter. He is inviting this group of gentiles in to the house where he is staying. But even in this type of environment he would be able to control the diet, the sitting arrangements at the table as the host.
 - a. The work is already happening in Peter and you careful observers of the text you might have already picked up who Peter is staying with. A man named Simon, who does what? He is a tanner. A tanner of hides. One commentator said he would have been in a state of constant uncleanness regarding the Jewish law due to his profession. This is who Peter is staying with. Most likely a Jewish Christian man there in the city of Joppa.
 - b. But more work is yet to be done in the life of Peter. More barriers are to be made low by the power of the gospel.
 - i. **v23b** *“The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers...”*
 - 1. This journey is different. The circumstances of the two visions was likely discussed throughout the evening and when Peter gets ready to go he is accompanied by 6 men, a detail revealed in Acts 11:12. These brothers will act as witnesses as to what happens.
- 2. **vv24-25** *“And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called...”*
 - a. Cornelius with great expectation of Peter’s arrival had gathered together an assembly, a congregation of relatives and close friends to hear what Peter would have to say. We would all do such a thing I believe if an angel of God came to us and told us to summon someone so they might speak.
 - b. Cornelius does something that is unexpected though as well. As a God fearer and a devout man, he wants to worship. However, he misplaces that worship at the feet of Peter.
 - i. This happens in other places in Scripture too, **Rev 19:10** John records *“Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”*
 - c. **v26** *“But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.””*

- d. Now Peter has come to this place. He has touched this gentile. He declares their common bond as men created in the image of God. What I see happening here is the barrier that had existed, one of prejudice against non-Jews is eroding quickly.
3. **vv27-28** *“And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them,...”*
- a. It is at this point Peter fully voices the dilemma he is facing. Unlawful and yet not to be called common or unclean. He is speaking plainly about his concerns.
 - i. *What about you? Are you able to have this same level of candor with your struggles in relating to people of a different ethnicity? Politics are never too far removed from a conversation, are you able to show love and impartiality to someone of a different political persuasion? If you are like me you probably don't think you have much in the way of prejudice against others. Let me challenge you to think about this more critically this week. Think about different people groups that you might come in contact with and how you would do if you were invited into their living space. This exercise might reveal some areas of prejudice that you didn't know were there. Confess these in your community groups or in your home and seek to grow in love for fellow image bearers. Whatever their skin color, nationality, or economic class to name a few common barriers.*
 - ii. Why is thinking through this important to your understanding of the gospel? If you think someone is unreachable what is that revealing about your understanding of the power of the gospel to save?
 - b. This encounter with Cornelius has a profound and lasting effect on Peter, on Cornelius, and on the church. Peter brings it up later in testimony at the Jerusalem council in **Acts 15:7-11**
4. The Jerusalem council is still yet future as we are working through this passage in chapter 10. Peter is perplexed here. Carefully considering the vision that God put before him in Joppa and all the events that have transpired since then.
- a. That is why he states in **v29** *“So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why...”*
 - i. This is something Peter really wants to know. Why was he summoned? He didn't ask this question when the disciples called him to Joppa because of the death of Tabitha. But here amongst the gentiles he is asking. Why?
 - b. **vv30-33a** *“And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house...”*
 - i. Church, both of these men were praying. The sovereign Lord was receiving their prayers and working his will to be done. Sending Peter where he would otherwise not have gone. Using Cornelius, a devote man, a God fearer to prepare the way for the gentiles to receive the good news. Just look at the last sentence of our passage.
 - c. **v33b** *“Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been...”*

Transition: The meeting between Cornelius and Peter has been orchestrated by God. The barriers that would otherwise have kept them apart were unable to stand the working of Christ.

Conclusion

As we finish our time of looking at this passage together this morning. It is always good to ask what relevance this passage has on us as a church and on us as individual believers. Look around this place, and at each other. If you can say the barriers between us have been overcome then praise God for the work he has already done. But look also at who is not here. Imagine them. People who have come in the past but come no more. People who would likely never come. Picture them in your mind. Church, how do we apply the healing salve of the gospel to those areas of division that still exists? My heart yearns for those barriers to be done away with in Christ. As we continue to live out the gospel and preach the good news I am convinced that **No barrier of man will withstand the saving work of Christ's mighty hand.**

Family

Table Talk



August 19, 2018

Family Discussion

1. One of the greatest things about being young is how much you get to discover every day. Sometimes new discoveries can make you feel great, even exhilarated, but other times you discover things that cause you to have doubts. Do you remember the first time you went to a playground where you heard children speaking a different language? Did you talk to anyone about that observation?
2. Peter was greatly troubled by the vision God gave him. He was used to doing things a certain way, and he was being told to change. Correction can be difficult. Are you working on changing any areas in your life right now?
3. Do you see how barriers can be made that prevent you from interacting with others? Maybe from a misunderstanding of language or observed cultural differences. In the end we are often the individual responsible for putting up or maintaining a barrier that prevents us from sharing the good news about Jesus. Can you identify such a barrier? Are you ready to let the Lord work through you to tear it down?

GOD'S TRUTH

No barrier of man can withstand the saving work of Christ's mighty hand!

Key Verse

"yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified"
Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into God's Word...

1. Acts 10:1-4, Galatians 3:28
2. Acts 10:9-14, Leviticus 11:1-31, Proverbs 4:20-27
3. Acts 10:27-28, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Matthew 28:16-20



Scripture Memory: Acts 10:42-43

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)