

A Global Mission

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[0 : 0 0] Well, in Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, which is called The Story of My Experiments with Truth, he tells of how he, as a young man, was struck by the Jesus that he read about in the Gospels in the Bible.

And he believed, as a young man, that the teachings of Jesus could be the solution to the caste system that divided his people in India.

And so he shares of a time in his book when he was in the UK and he decided to go along to a church service. And apparently he intended to speak to the minister about becoming a Christian.

But when he got through the door, the usher refused to give him a seat. And instead, the usher suggested that he go and he worship with his own people instead.

And so Gandhi left the church and he sentences also, I might as well remain a Hindu. And he did, it seems, remain a Hindu until his dying day.

[1 : 0 5] And I'm sure, as I am, you are shocked when you hear something like this, about the attitude that sees some people as being inferior to other people.

And yet it has always been this way in our world between different groups of people. And even in our society today, there are walls between different people to keep people apart.

So whether it be political differences or racial differences or cultural differences, as a human race, we are good at putting barriers between ourselves and those who are different from us.

And it may not be a deliberate thing, but we can find this attitude lurking within our own hearts. And so what is the solution?

Well, this was a huge issue for the early church. And this is what we read about here in these chapters in Acts. There was a huge chasm between the Jews and the rest of the world, between Jews and Gentiles.

[2 : 1 2] But what we see in Acts chapter 10 is how God has no favorites. He shows no partiality. God reaches out to all people with the message of Jesus Christ.

Where Gentiles here in Acts chapter 10 have the same access to Jews, to the salvation that is available in Jesus. And so division between different groups of people has always been an issue.

The world over for as long as human history has existed. But it is only the good news of Jesus that can resolve this problem or this issue.

And so what I'd like us to see this afternoon in Acts chapter 10 is how God prepares two men with one message for one mission. So first of all, two men.

Secondly, one message. And thirdly, one mission. First, two men. And this is in verse 1 to verse 33. The two men are obviously Cornelius and Peter.

[3 : 1 5] Now, Cornelius was a Gentile, non-Jew, like we are. And Peter was a Jew. But they are brought together here in this passage by God.

It is almost like an evangelistic blind date. Because their encounter shows how Gentiles have the same access to Jews, to salvation in Jesus Christ.

And so whilst the focus here is on Cornelius and in the conversion of the Gentiles, that's what Acts chapter 10 is pushing forward, the mission of Jesus to reach beyond Jews to Gentiles.

It's about their conversion. But there's a sense in which it is also about the conversion of Peter. Because Peter, in his understanding and in his heart, has to undergo a conversion to understand how wide and how gracious the gospel of Jesus Christ really is.

Jesus is teaching Peter that the gospel is for all. So let's look at Cornelius first and then Peter. So Cornelius is there in verse 1 to verse 8.

[4 : 24] Just look at how he's described. Verse 1 to 2, first of all. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian regiment.

He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. And then Cornelius is described again in verse 22.

Where it says, The men replied, We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man who is respected by all the Jewish people. Okay, so Cornelius, first of all, he was a centurion with the Italian cohort.

So he was responsible for 100 soldiers within this cohort, which would have approximately 600 soldiers. But more significantly about Cornelius, he was a devotee man.

He feared God. He gave generously. He prayed continually. And he was well-respected by all the Jewish people. But God sends an angel with a message because Cornelius needed to be saved.

[5 : 33] And some might wonder why. I mean, after all, he's described here as such a great guy. Who wouldn't want to be a friend with somebody like Cornelius? Outwardly, he was a good person.

He was even very religious. And so surely, if anyone is going to be acceptable to God, it must be somebody like Cornelius. And that's what many people would think these days, that God accepts you.

And you can get a place in heaven by being a good person. And you can have even more confidence of your place in heaven if you're also a religious person.

Religious going together. Surely God loves that. But being nice, being good, even being religious isn't what makes you a Christian. Because no matter how good we think we are, we can never be good enough for God.

Our sin means that we are rebels against our Creator. And so Cornelius needed his sins to be forgiven. And we all do. Cornelius needed to believe in Jesus in order to be saved.

[6 : 40] And we all do. So that's Cornelius. Secondly, there's Peter. And his story here is in verse 9 to 23.

So God spoke to Cornelius through an angel. And God speaks to Peter through a vision. Well, why? Well, it's because Peter had a vital lesson to learn if Peter was going to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles.

Because so far, Peter had basically been hanging out with the Jews and taking the good news of Jesus to them. And here's the thing. Jews would regard Gentiles as being unclean.

And that's why Jews would have nothing to do with them. And yet the good news of Jesus, we're being told here, is for all. For Jews and Gentiles. There's no distinction.

And that is really the message that's being drilled home in these chapters in Acts. And it's a message that needs to be drilled into Peter's heart as well. And also our hearts too.

[7 : 45] And that's probably why Luke reports on Peter's vision three times in Acts. In chapters 10, chapter 11, and in chapter 15. Not only that, but do you notice that this vision itself takes place three identical times?

In verse 16. And it's because the message of this vision is crucial. It is so important. And so let's see it by reading verse 11 to 16.

This is Peter's vision. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It can date all kinds of four-footed animals as well as reptiles and birds.

Then a voice told him, Get up, Peter. Kill and eat. Surely not, Lord. Peter replied, I have never eaten anything impure or unclean. The voice spoke to him a second time.

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. The law. And that's why Peter says, verse 14, Surely not, Lord. And so the key to understanding why God asks Peter to do this is there in verse 15.

[8 : 54] The voice spoke to him a second time. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. So the background here is that there was a time when laws about clean foods and unclean foods were necessary for the people of Israel.

But now that Jesus has fulfilled the law, food restrictions are no longer appropriate. And so what excluded the Gentiles from God's people before no longer applies.

And yet this isn't just about the food. The food, if you like, is a bit of a visual aid. Because it's about the people. Because while Peter lived his life thinking that certain foods were unclean and you couldn't touch them, he also thought certain people were unclean.

Gentiles were unclean. And if you had anything to do with them, then you would be unclean too. And so there was a prejudice towards Gentiles, which came from the pride of being Jewish.

But here God is declaring through this vision that this great barrier that existed between Jew and Gentile could no longer exist because of Jesus.

[10 : 11] So the door into God's family is wide open so that all can be welcomed in. And now Peter didn't get this message immediately.

But what God does is then he pushes Peter towards Cornelius, who is a Gentile, to tell him about Jesus. And so this happens. Let's read verse 27 to 29.

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them, You're well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.

But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why he sent for me?

Now can you see what God is doing here? From the way he communicates to Cornelius, to the way that he communicates to Peter, to the way that he brings them together. It is all orchestrated by God so that Peter goes to Cornelius to tell him about Jesus.

[11 : 19] So God is doing all the groundwork here for his mission to the Gentiles. To bring Gentiles into his kingdom, his family.

But God is also doing this to do this deeper work in Peter's heart. Where Peter needed to grasp the gracious gospel of Jesus Christ.

As it extends to those who are unclean. And I wonder if we need to grasp the same. Because I'm sure, as well as you are, that we all have got blind spots.

And so perhaps God still needs to change our hearts towards some other people. People we would perhaps naturally avoid. People that we may even think are inferior to us.

Either because they look different, or they talk differently, or they dress differently, or they're from a different race or class, or have a different education or income.

[12 : 23] We can be tempted to think of ourselves as those who are clean. And sometimes think of other people as being unclean. Maybe even look our noses down at them.

And of course we never say this out loud in public. But don't we need to be careful that we don't separate ourselves from other people? Because we have this kind of spiritual snobbery.

As if we're superior and more worthy of God's love than they are. Or that we've got more right to a place in God's family than they have. It can be easy to slip into this, can't it?

Without even thinking. And it happens when we forget that we are nothing more than a sinner saved by God's grace. Because we're not saved by God because we are more worthy than other people.

Or more acceptable than other people. Or more deserving than other people. Or more clean than other people. We're saved by grace. The point about Cornelius was he needed his sins forgiven.

[13 : 33] We all need our sins forgiven. So it puts us all on a level footing before God. Nobody is better than anybody else. And Peter needed to realize this in his own heart.

The apostle Peter spent three years with Jesus. Jesus gave Peter this role within his church.

In this world. And yet Peter still needed to grasp this great truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's an old hymn that says, There's a wideness in God's mercy.

We hardly ever sing the hymn. But let's be careful that we don't narrow God's mercy in any way. With us being the ones who put restrictions on who can be welcomed into God's family.

Either with our attitude or with our behavior. Because the good news of Jesus Christ is for all people. Whoever we are. And despite what we are.

[14 : 37] And the good news is not just to leave us as we are. But to change us into what God wants us to be. And so that takes us to our second point. Two men, first of all.

That's the longest point. So don't worry. Second point is one message. There in verse 34 to 43. So after God had arranged this encounter between Cornelius and Peter.

What Peter does is he holds out the offer of no favoritism. But accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

So God doesn't show partiality. Peter is saying God has got no favorites. God welcomes people from every nation. And that's why Peter preaches this message of Jesus to this Gentile audience.

And so what's the content of the message that he proclaims? Well, verse 36. Peter starts by saying that Jesus is Lord of all. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel.

[15 : 40] Announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. So Jesus is not just Lord of the Jewish people. Nor even is Jesus Lord of those who choose to accept his lordship.

Jesus is Lord whether people acknowledge Jesus is Lord or not. So right now, here and now, Jesus is Lord and forever will be Lord of all.

So Jesus is Lord of all. Then Peter centers on the events of history. So he outlines the life of Jesus. Verse 37 and 38. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. And how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil. Because God was with him. That's a brief summary of the life and impact of Jesus.

Next, he tells how they were witnesses to the death of Jesus. Verse 39. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

[16 : 54] They killed him by hanging him on a cross. And then he mentions the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 14 and 41. But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen. By us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And notice how the emphasis here is on the historical facts of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

And how the apostles were witnesses to these things. Because the point is, Christianity is public truth. It happened in public.

It happened in history. It didn't happen behind a closed door. It didn't happen in a place away from people seeing what was going on. It's public truth.

About what has happened in history regarding the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. So it's not an exclusive message for a few. That only a few are supposed to know about.

[17 : 58] It is an inclusive message for all. Impacting all people in all places at all times. Well, why? Well, because Jesus is not only Lord of all.

Peter says in his message, Jesus is judge of all. Verse 42. He commanded us to preach to the people. And to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

What's Peter saying? He's saying Jesus is going to judge everybody. Including you and me. And that's why the message of Christianity is never simply come to Jesus.

Come to church. Hear the message. And come to Jesus. As if we are the ones who make the definitive choice on Jesus. We don't. No, the message is you will meet Jesus.

That is a fact. If Jesus has been appointed by God as judge of the living, those of us who are still around, and the dead, those who've gone, then we'll all be forced to meet Jesus as our judge.

[19 : 10] And so one day we will have to stand before him. And that's why Christianity is a message that we need to respond to. We need to reflect on and think about.

Because if this public truth, these historical events have happened, and they make this massive claim about Jesus who is Lord of all and then judge of all, and we go through the life he's given us and we ignore him, then we'll be judged for how we've lived.

And so Christianity is a faith, a religion that we must respond to. Verse 43 says, All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

In other words, those who believe in him are forgiven, So on the judgment day, they won't be condemned. So by implication, if those who hear about Jesus and don't go to him to have their sins forgiven, then on the judgment day when they meet Jesus, then Jesus will judge them and condemn them.

It'll be a guilty verdict. And so yes, Jesus is judge. But what Peter is also saying here is that the fantastic news is that Jesus is also our Savior.

[20 : 31] Because if everybody who believes in him receives forgiveness of their sins, it's great news. And so the message is for all people.

Because forgiveness is for all. Because we all need to be forgiven. And if that's the case, then how can we feel superior to other people?

If we all need our sins to be forgiven. Christianity is the only hope for our world because it truly is good news. We fail to obey the God who made us as we should.

His laws show up our sins because we can't keep them. We deserve his punishment. So we must be judged. And yet in Jesus, we have the offer of forgiveness.

Where all who believe in Jesus can face judgment, knowing that in facing Jesus on judgment day, their sins won't be counted against them.

[21 : 35] Because Jesus has taken those sins to the cross and paid the penalty for them. So we don't have to pay it ourselves in hell. And so this is not that everyone will automatically be saved.

But anyone may be saved if they turn to Jesus and receive forgiveness. So Jesus is for all. All may be saved.

Jesus is Lord of all. All must submit to him. And Jesus is judge of all. So all of us will meet Jesus. And Jesus is also Savior.

So all who believe in Jesus will be welcomed into God's family. And that's the message that Peter gives here. And the amazing reality is our judge is also our Savior.

So when Jesus first came into this world, it wasn't to bring God's judgment. It was to bear God's judgment on the cross as he died for our sins.

[22 : 43] But when Jesus comes again, we're being told that it will be to bring judgment. And so now is the time of opportunity, the time that we have to respond to Jesus to avoid that guilty verdict.

And so we should be in no doubt whatsoever that Jesus will judge in the future. Just picture this. Imagine a person who is guilty standing in court.

They're condemned. And they're facing a prison sentence for a crime that they've committed. And so for justice to be done, their crime needs to be punished, doesn't it?

They can't just be let off with it. And the judge says, okay, you've committed this horrendous crime, but it doesn't matter. Off you go. But can you imagine the judge who's got all the authority and all the power taking the punishment for the guilty person himself for their crime?

Imagine the judge being willing to accept the punishment because somebody has to pay for what's happened. Imagine the judge accepting that so that the guilty person can go free.

[23 : 56] It's hard to imagine because it doesn't happen, does it? It never would. But that's exactly what Jesus has done. Our sins need to be paid for. And we either pay for our sins ourselves by being condemned, or Jesus pays for our sins on the cross.

We believe in him and we receive forgiveness for them. And so we're set free. And that's why we call the message of Jesus Christ the message of grace.

Jesus willingly takes what we deserve, the punishment for our sins, and we get what we don't deserve, which is forgiveness for our sins.

And that's the good news of Christianity. So two men, one message, and then thirdly, one mission. In verse 44 to 48. What we see here is God's global mission advancing as it reaches out beyond the Jewish people to Gentile people like us.

Verse 44. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. So they're converted through hearing the message of Jesus.

[25 : 12] Verse 45. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

So there's this astonishment because the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. Nobody could believe it. Poured out on them just as the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Jews at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

And now the Gentiles are also speaking in tongues, speaking in other languages and praising God. So this was a Gentile Pentecost.

God was showing how the Gentiles had also received his salvation. It's a clear demonstration that God fully accepted them as members in his family, just as he accepted the Jews.

So they were part of the church. That's why they're baptized. Verse 47 and 48. So can you see how this is a significant step forward in God's salvation purposes for the world?

[26 : 19] It's like that stone or a pebble being dropped in some water and you get these concentric circles as the ripples spread out. That's what's happening here. It all began in Jerusalem with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And I was spreading out to the ends of the earth to encompass people like you and like me. And so the message of Acts 10 is that all people have the same access to salvation in Jesus Christ.

That's why there can never be any room for pride, never any room for prejudice in Jesus' church. Because it's only in Jesus that every human barrier that separates people, every wall that divides is broken down.

And you'll never find this anywhere else in the world. That's what politicians continue to debate and argue about and try and find solutions for. How can our divided nation be one?

How can people get behind a common goal? It never happens, does it? What do you find instead? Not just in our own land, but across the world.

[27 : 29] You find division. And you find distinction between people. And you find disparity. And it will always be this way, except in one place.

In the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And doesn't that say something amazing about Jesus? About his beauty and his grace and his love? He accepts all kinds of people in his church.

No other religion does that. And so this barrier between Jews and Gentiles was gone back then. But today in the church, barriers of race, language, class, background, age, or whatever, should never separate people.

They should never keep people apart. Why? Because God shows no favoritism. He shows no partiality. And that is astonishing when you think about it.

Because God has every right to exclude every single one of us. That is what we all deserve because of our sin. All human beings are equally lost.

[28 : 41] And that's why we can only be saved by sheer grace. Even Cornelius. Even Cornelius. Even Cornelius. This good, clean living, religious man needed to be saved.

He may have been devout. He may have been God-fearing. But he was still lost. He needed to repent of his sins, believe in Jesus, and be saved. Like we all do.

Because it's only through Jesus' willing death for our sins that we can be forgiven and accepted by God. That's why Christians have got no right to be feeling superior to anyone else.

If we are no more than sinners saved by grace, then we are no better than anyone else. So how dare we close the door that God has flung open to welcome people in.

And that's the message of Acts chapter 10. And it needs to be drilled down into my heart, into your heart, just as it was drilled down into Peter's heart.

[29 : 41] And when it's drilled down into our hearts, then we'll be driven out to be part of God's great global mission to this world. Because God's mission is to gather in a multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language to himself.

So we can dwell with him forever. And we see this happening in Acts 10. And we see it happening across the world today. We see it happening even here in Christchurch, Glasgow.

Whatever the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, God is welcoming all kinds of people to himself. And so as we close, my final question is, have you been welcomed in to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The message is you can be through Jesus. Even if you're a good, religious, generous person like Cornelius, you still need Jesus. Or even if you feel very unclean, you still need Jesus because we all do.

And so God is reminding us that salvation is by grace alone. We can't do a single thing to make ourselves clean and acceptable to God. But we have one in Jesus Christ who became un- In order to make us clean.