

Small Groups @ TBC
Sermon Discussion Notes

Date of sermon: May 21st 2017

Speaker: Paul Ferguson

Title: God has no favourites

Introduction: Acts chapter 10 tells the pivotal story of the conversion of Cornelius the Roman centurion. A devout man, God fearer, a seeker after God but he still needed to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Peter was praying on the roof of a house owned Simon the Tanner, when he saw an amazing vision of a sheet being lowered down from heaven filled with all manner of animals. These animals were the kind of creatures that it was forbidden for a good Jew to eat. However, the command came from heaven, kill and eat. This was against everything that Peter had been taught, understood or practised. He protested that he had never eaten anything unclean or profane. This meant that he had never been anything that would make him impure before God. But this sheet and the following command was intended to confront a deep prejudice within Peter's heart and possibly the hearts of the overwhelmingly Jewish church at that time, that found it very difficult for the Gentiles could become part of the church. The story unfolds wonderfully the spirit is poured out upon these first Gentile believers and this serves as a sign of God's acceptance.

Review: Invite those who listened to the talk to give a summary.

Read: Acts 10: 1-48

Reflect:

1. Cornelius.

- a. Cornelius was a seeker after God, not a proselyte, part of the whole group of people in the book of Acts called God fearers. We see people from this group of God fearers coming to faith. Think about how you were before you came to Christ. Would you consider yourself a seeker after God? If so, how would you describe the experience of being a God seeker? Have you had experience of talking to somebody about Christ only to discover that they have already begun the journey of coming to faith?
- b. Seeking after God is something that the Bible encourages us to do, read 1 Chronicles 22 verse 19, Colossians 3 versus 1-2. As you read about Cornelius what clues might we gain from his approach to seeking God? Think about the

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Christian practices such as Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, breaking bread etc. What place do you think these have in your life as means of seeking God?

- c. As great as Cornelius's desire to seek for God was, ultimately it was God who sought him. God sent an angelic visitor and then he sent Peter the apostle. Luke tells us in his gospel that Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19: 10). Luke also records three parables that Jesus told that cast God as a seeker after people. Reflect on these three parables recorded in Luke chapter 15, what sort of picture of your God do they paint? How does that make you feel about God? When you are talking to somebody about Jesus, how does knowing that God is seeking them potentially change that conversation?

2. Peter

- a. For Peter to obey the vision that God had given him was immensely costly and he would continue to struggle with the inclusion of Gentiles in the church, read Galatians 2: 11-21. Why do you think this was such a deep struggle for Peter? Explore the challenge of assimilating new ways of thinking with new ways of behaving.
- b. We must be careful not to think that the account of Peter having a radical change of mind, regarding a biblical principle, because of a spiritual experience, as giving us carte blanche to take a new approach to doctrine based on a 'new revelation'. Discuss? It is worth bearing in mind that what Peter was being asked to do, was in line with God's will as revealed in Scripture, for example Genesis chapter 12: 1-3. For further study looking at Leviticus chapter 11, where the food laws are predominantly spoken about and reflect on why these were given to Israel.
- c. For Peter, change was an incredibly painful thing. Change is part of being a human and particularly part of being a disciple. Talk about the challenges of change and the need to avoid becoming too fixed in a rut.

3. Preaching

Peter preached a 7 point sermon - more or less?

1. ³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: **'I truly understand that God shows no partiality,** ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.
2. Message of peace through Jesus. God's kingdom was announced by Jesus in the midst of great nationalistic expectation. The Pax Romana which the Romans sought to instil with brute force, never succeeded. But the king of

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peace could bring healing and reconciliation to a world at war.

3. Jesus is God's anointed one, the Messiah, Israel's real king.
4. God was with Jesus. This phrase is rooted in the tradition of leadership and kingship in the Bible. E.g. Joshua 19, Judges 6:12, 1 Sam 10: 7.
5. God raised Jesus from the dead, this is the central affirmation of the story
6. God chose us as witnesses, this is why we are here!
7. Jesus is the judge of all.

Reflect on Peter's sermon and consider why he said the things he said, why are these things important? Consider how these truths about Jesus might relate to you and your situation?

4. Pentecost

this part of the account has been called the Gentile Pentecost. It was the gift of the spirit that Peter saw as the decisive factor which showed God had accepted Gentiles in the same way that he had accepted Jews. Water baptism followed.

- a. Compare the two accounts of the outpouring of the Spirit. Firstly, from chapter 2 and then from this account. Reflect on why the gift of the spirit was primarily given? Who is this gift for? Do we pray regularly for God to pour out his spirit?

And finally:

- As you conclude, ask each person:
- What is the main thing you are taking away as an action point?
Explore the challenge of
- How can we pray for you?
- Is there anything we can check on next time we meet?

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