

# What God has Made Clean

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of January 1999. The preacher is Phil Millman.

His sermon is entitled, What God Has Made Clean, and is from Acts chapter 10, verses 1 to 23.

Our gracious God, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds, that we would be attentive to what your word has to say to us, and may we live it out in our lives, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well, it's nearly 12 months ago that I was given the opportunity to come and work here at Holy Trinity, so I snapped up the opportunity and came here with my family alongside.

And from my very first day here, I have realised what a great encouragement it is to work in this environment. I have seen over this time how Holy Trinity really is a part of the body of Christ.

[ 1 : 12 ] People come together to worship, to grow, and to fellowship with our Lord and to fellowship with each other. We are also a church that is increasingly looking at ways in which to include people from a multitude of different social and economic classes, races, cultures, and racial backgrounds.

And we need to be doing this in order to be relevant to the society and culture that is going on around us, don't we? This all fits in with what Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples that in the age of the Spirit, he was going to build his church and it would include not only Jews, but also Gentiles from every corner of the world.

But as his church grew around the world, all Christians in each new generation from those multiracial and multicultural societies would have to work hard to preserve the unity of the Spirit that Ephesians talks about.

And as I've sat back and reflected on the great encouragement and joy that Holy Trinity has been for me personally, and I hope for you as well, I have also begun to wonder what could destroy the unity of the Spirit of God among us.

One real possibility is the sin of prejudice. And that is a real possibility that perhaps some of us could struggle with.

[ 2 : 55 ] Now to help us understand the word, I've looked up the definition in the dictionary. And here it is. Prejudice. It's noun, firstly, an adverse judgment or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge or examination of the facts.

It is a preconceived preference or idea. It's a bias. Secondly, it is the act or state of holding unreasonable preconceived judgments or convictions. Thirdly, it is a rational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race or religion or class or culture.

And fourthly, prejudice is a detriment or injury caused to a person by the preconceived and unfavorable conviction of another or others. And it's also a verb.

To cause someone to judge prematurely and irrationally, to affect injuriously or detrimentally by some judgment or act.

Now you may like to just skim over that definition. Or you may like to go home and look it up in your own dictionaries.

[ 4 : 08 ] And as you do, then ask God to search your heart to see if this sin of prejudice is within.

If it is, then we need to be willing to have him who is our life dissolve the prejudice because he is the only one who can.

And we need to do it so that we can continue to enjoy the unity of the Holy Spirit that is here in Holy Trinity and with other Christians around this community and throughout the world.

Now Acts chapter 10 is a wonderful mirror for us to look into in this matter because in it we will find what we would call today a born-again Christian, Peter, who is filled with the Holy Spirit but who is struggling with a deeply rooted religious and racial prejudice.

Now God helps Peter get rid of this sin of prejudice in two ways. Firstly, through a vision, which we saw in the video.

[ 5 : 19 ] And secondly, by an action. Now this week, it's my intention to deal with the vision and that can be seen mainly in verses 1 through to 23.

And next week, Warwick's going to continue on and he's going to deal with Peter's action of how he deals with the sin of prejudice that is within. Now just as a bit of background, it may be helpful to be reminded that Jesus said to Peter and the other apostles that he was with, he said to them before he died, after he rose from the dead and before ascending into heaven, that the kingdom of God was not accounted to the Jewish people but it was available for all nations and races.

And that includes, that means, the kingdom of God was for Gentiles as well. And the gospel of Jesus Christ was just as much for them, for the Gentiles, you and me, if repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ came about as a result.

So let's begin by looking at Acts chapter 10 verses 1 to 8 and we read here in verses 1 to 2 that in Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort as it was called.

He was a devout man who feared God with all his household. He gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. Now Olive's going to turn on a map here and we'll see Caesarea, this is a map of Israel, and we see Caesarea, can you just point to that?

[ 7 : 04 ] Just there is the place which we're talking about. And at the time of this incident, the Roman Empire was being ruled by Tiberius and one of Rome's most important military bases was located on the western shores of Israel in a seaport named Caesarea, which we see there.

And this city was built by Herod the Great and was the capital from which a Roman governor administered the provinces of Judea and Samaria.

And I'm told reliably this morning that you can still visit its well-preserved ruins and harbour today. Now this is an ad if you're going to Israel next year. Paul is going there and he's going to bring me back some snapshots of Caesarea.

Aren't you? Maybe. Well, he doesn't take many photos, I believe. Well, in that Roman base was stationed this centurion named Cornelius who was a member of the Italian regiment or cohort as I call it here, thanks.

Now Cornelius was a man who knew how to take orders and also he knew how to give orders because he was a centurion. His Roman religious culture also required that he worship Caesar.

[ 8 : 20 ] But apparently Cornelius was spiritually restless and became attracted to the Jewish God and his holy people. So some of the things that we learn about Cornelius.

Firstly, he was a devout man. Secondly, he was one who feared the God of the Jews along with his household, his family. Thirdly, he was one who gave alms to the Jewish people and whom they held in high esteem.

And fourthly, as it says here, he was a man who prayed. He prayed constantly. But Cornelius had not converted to Judaism.

Now on this particular day, Cornelius was praying at the ninth hour about three o'clock in the afternoon when he saw in a spiritual vision an angel of God who came to him and called out his name.

Cornelius stared at this man in terror. But notice his response here, Cornelius' response. He says in verse 4, What is it, Lord? What is it, Lord? The angel told him that God the Father had accepted his prayers and alms as a memorial before him.

[ 9 : 40 ] God knows your name and he knows your heart that you are seeking him. He hears your prayers and sees your good works. God knew that this man hungered to know him.

God knew that this Cornelius was a spiritual fetus, so to speak, having a form of life but still needing to be born again.

Now it's worth noting that this passage shows us about how aware God is of all who fear him and of their need to be saved.

And this story of Cornelius and many more like it in the Bible should put to rest the question that most people have thought of at least once in their lives. The question being, what happens to all people in the world living in different cultures who are under different governments, who perhaps have come from pagan religious systems and so on, who have never heard of Jesus?

What happens to them when they die? An answer to that can be found in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 6 says this, As this soldier was drawing near to God, God was drawing near to him.

[ 11 : 13 ] And the reward would be an introduction to his son Jesus Christ and also the offer of eternal life through Jesus.

Now this community here is filled with people who are drawing near to God. But for many of us, they are hard to see because the sin of prejudice has blinded us.

We can't see them because of where they live, where they work, how they dress, where they worship, the colour of their skin, their different cultures, their different social gatherings or the groups that they belong to.

But in spite of all those outward barriers, God sees each and every heart that is seeking to draw near to him. So God would like to cure our blindness and use us to place his gospel into their open hearts.

Now the angel of God wasn't sent to share the gospel with Cornelius. That wasn't the purpose. But he told him that the man who could share the gospel of Jesus Christ was at that moment lodging in the seaport of Joppa, which is a little bit south, about 30 miles, I think it's on that map.

[ 12 : 38 ] If you go down the coast, the west coast, from Caesarea down to Joppa and that's where Peter was. And he was staying in the home of Simon the Tanner. So Cornelius was given instruction to send some of his men to find Peter in Joppa.

And without hesitation, Cornelius did as he was told and he sent two Gentile servants and one of his Gentile soldiers, who was also devout, to Joppa to find the house of Simon the Tanner, the Jewish Tanner.

God could see that Cornelius, who could have had a deep hatred and prejudice against the Jews, didn't. And that as a Gentile, not only was he involved in their spiritual and social life, but he was also quite willing to send his Gentile servants to find this Jew, Peter, that he had never met and invite him to come to his home in Caesarea.

So God was involved in getting Cornelius to meet Peter. Now we will see that our Lord Jesus needed to get involved in Peter's life before he met Cornelius so that Cornelius could hear about the gift of salvation that could be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we discover that in verses 9 through to 16. Now in contrast to Cornelius, Peter was a born-again Christian is the terminology we would use today.

[ 14 : 08 ] He was a born-again Christian from the Jewish race and he was filled with the Holy Spirit as I've already mentioned. Peter, as we are probably aware, had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the first message of salvation to the Jewish people first in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

But he still struggled with prejudice. It was still a problem for him. Yet he will continue to take a leadership role here in Acts chapter 10.

We find Peter staying in this little seaport town of Joppa. And he was staying in the home of Simon the tanner. And notice that Peter was staying with a man who was totally involved with dead animals which if touched by a Jew would make him ceremonially unclean as Pat read to us from Leviticus chapter 11 this morning.

But the Lord was getting Peter ready to get involved with those whom the Jews called unclean. That is, he was getting them ready to be involved with the Gentiles. And like Cornelius the day before, Peter too looked for a time of prayer as verse 9 tells us.

And at the sixth hour he went up on the rooftop while he waited for lunch for which he was hungry and he began to pray. And at this point our Lord begins the painful but necessary spiritual surgery on Peter's heart to remove the hundreds of years of religious racism and prejudice that had been passed down as truth within Judaism.

[ 15 : 53 ] But there were in reality man-made customs. Instead of seeing a vision like Cornelius we read that Peter fell into a trance an altered state of mind.

And there was a vision within this trance. In it the sky opened up and something that looked like a giant sheet seemed to be lowered by its four corners. And when it touched the ground Peter could see all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

Some of the animals were kosher and they could be eaten according to the dietary laws of Leviticus. But some of the animals were non-kosher and they were forbidden for eating.

Now, however, since Jesus those laws had been cancelled. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus declared all foods clean.

But that, knowing that all foods are clean, knowing that Jesus has said it, but that, while easy to say, was harder and much more difficult to carry out.

[ 17 : 11 ] Well, a familiar personal voice says in verse 13, Get up, Peter, kill and eat. Now, at this point, the Jews already had the Levitical laws in their lives and they had it for some 1500 years.

And when the Jews became followers of Jesus their Lord, it took them some 40 years to break away from the temple worship services, the prayer services, the dietary laws and the sacrificial system, as well as their deep-seated racial prejudice against Gentiles.

But the two historical events that helped them the most were the Jerusalem Council in about 45 AD and the destruction of the temple by the Romans in around about 70 AD.

They were later on, they were events that came later on. But at this point, for Peter, a ham sandwich, which we've all probably eaten heaps of over the Christmas break, was still unclean to Peter.

Even though Peter was now a Christian living in the age of the Spirit, living post Pentecost. So at this moment, we find the reluctant apostle Peter telling the risen Jesus in his best legalistic voice, he's calling out, filled with pride, seeking to defile what God had made clean.

[ 18 : 39 ] He says, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything profane or unclean, as verse 15 says. And then the voice reminded Peter in 16, What God has made clean, you must not call profane.

And then, a most amazing thing happened. Apparently, three times this sheet came down to Peter. Three times he was told to take the formerly unclean animals and kill them.

And three times this Peter, who was with Jesus when he was alive on earth, resisted. Peter had denied Jesus three times.

This same Peter had denied Jesus three times at his trial. And now, he is refusing to obey the risen Jesus here another three times.

he never did kill and eat any of the unclean or clean animals before the sheet was taken back up into the sky. Now, Peter was a follower of Jesus.

[ 19 : 51 ] There's no doubt about that at all. But it was his traditional Jewish background that blinded him and filled his heart with the pride that kept him from being free in the spirit.

But the lesson Jesus wanted to teach Peter here at this time, just before the gates of salvation would be opened to the Gentiles, was that the Gentiles, whom the Jews called unclean, were not unclean in the sight of God.

According to God's calendar, it was time now to move out into the Gentile world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, the root of prejudice is pride.

God, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, one of those is that you shall love your neighbour as yourself. And if you do that, you are doing well.

But, as James says, if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

[ 20 : 59 ] look at all the ethnic cleansing that has occurred in Bosnia and the prejudice that has occurred in South Africa and Central Africa in recent times.

Not to mention that the hatred that has built up over generations between Jews and Arabs and also between Arabs and our Western world. all this conflict is there because of the pride and prejudice in the hearts of people.

But isn't the same thing going on in our own backyard? Australia, here in Australia, right here in Victoria, Melbourne, even here in Doncaster.

in our own backyards people are showing partiality toward each other based on class, social status, race, culture, intellect, religious expression and political differences and so on.

Each of these prejudices divide us. But on the other hand, once godly men and women see the sin of prejudice in their hearts, they want that sin removed, they want to cut out and they want it removed by the one who can do it, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 22 : 25 ] God the Father was involved in getting Cornelius to meet Peter and our risen Lord Jesus needed to get involved in Peter's life so that he would meet Cornelius and Cornelius could hear about the gift of salvation found in Jesus Christ.

And now as we move on in the next few verses, we see how the Holy Spirit gets involved. In verses 17 through to 23, we see that once Peter came out of this trance, he remained puzzled, he remained greatly perplexed as to the meaning of the vision that he had just had.

Then Cornelius' servants arrived at Simon's gate and they called out the name that the angel had given them which was Peter. And at that moment, the Holy Spirit in verse 19 gets involved in this mission and told Peter that the three men, the two servants and a devout soldier, were looking for him and that he should go with them without misgivings.

The Spirit says in verse 20, For I have sent them. Peter would not only need to be filled with the Spirit, but also to be taught and to be led by the Spirit.

So Peter met them and they shared what had happened to Cornelius and the fact that they were under orders to invite him to Caesarea and meet this centurion, Cornelius.

[ 23 : 53 ] So Peter invited the Gentiles in for the night, although it was unacceptable according to Jewish custom. Then early the next morning, Peter joined the three Gentiles, they left Joppa and they headed north up to Caesarea.

The Jews hated the Romans because they had to live under an accompanying army, an occupying army sorry.

They had to pay taxes to Caesar. They had to carry their bags if commanded and they also suffered cruel treatment daily and so on. The Jews looked on the Romans as less than animals and so unclean that if they touched one in the street they would be considered unclean themselves and they would have to rush home and wash.

And no Jew would ever be found in the home of a Gentile, let alone the home of a Roman soldier. Nor would a Jew be found praying with a Gentile in the temple.

See, the Jews thought that they were God's favoured people because they had descended from Abraham. But they were called out to be God's people only to demonstrate the relationship that he wanted to have with all nations.

[ 25 : 13 ] John Stott puts it like this, the tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favouritism. They became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as dogs and developed traditions which kept them apart.

But on the other side of the coin, the Romans couldn't stand the arrogant Jews and their religious sensitivity. They couldn't stand their religious laws and the crowds at the times of the feast in Jerusalem which could turn into a riot at a moment's notice.

So in the midst of this tense social and religious climate that we're sort of building up here, two natural enemies were to meet. But Cornelius was waiting for Peter with his relatives and close friends.

And when Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet and worshipped him. It was unheard of. It was almost unreal.

And it shows us here the spiritual hunger that was in the heart of Cornelius and it shows us his faith in the words from the angel of God. And Peter goes on and he says, stand up, I am only mortal.

[ 26 : 36 ] Then Peter, in total honesty and a spirit of humility, but perhaps with a little lingering prejudice, says in verses 28 and 29, you yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.

Peter has known for a God. He should not call anyone profane or unclean. Peter perhaps has understood part of the vision that he has had.

And he goes on and he says, so when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me? then Cornelius goes on and he explains his vision and the orders the angel had given him to go and ask Peter to come but I leave that now for Warwick to continue on with next week that's his job and can I encourage you to read the remainder of chapter 10 next week in preparation for what Warwick has to say well God has been involved in the bringing together here of Jews and Gentiles and it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the barriers are broken down and the barriers are able to be broken down because of what Jesus has done on the cross you see it is the cross that breaks down all social barriers and is able to draw people to God and knowing that then as many of us here do knowing then that God has shown his favour to us through the Lord Jesus Christ are we prepared as his people to step out and break down the barriers that cause division among people for the sake of the gospel my challenge and prayer for us all in 1999 is this is that we listen to God's words here and know that in the age we live in we too are able by the power of the Holy Spirit to help and point people to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ regardless of their cultural background we are able to do it and that we also in turn show them a Christian faith that is not complicated by all sorts of our own cultural baggage and prejudice but is a faith that points people to the risen Jesus and welcomes all who respond in faith to him

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen