

The Gospel to The World

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 10th of January 1999. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled The Gospel to the World and is from Acts chapter 10 verses 24 to 48.

While we're standing, let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your message to us, your word, the Bible. We pray that you're with us as we examine it this morning. Teach us new things and help us to apply them in our lives.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Please be seated. Well, my favourite subject at school was probably chemistry.

That's not to say I was very good at it, but it was my favourite subject. And it was helped by the fact that I had a really good teacher. And this guy was respected by all the students at my school.

[1 : 03] We all thought this teacher was a great guy and a very competent teacher. Now, I'm not saying I always found chemistry easy. In fact, I can remember one time when we were being introduced to a new part of the syllabus and I was having great difficulty grappling with the concepts and the formulas and all those sorts of things.

I just couldn't get it. I really couldn't understand it and get my head around these new concepts that were being introduced. And one day, I just had to ask my teacher about all this.

And I don't know if it was something he said or someone sort of presented this concept in a different way, but the penny dropped. And I thought, ah, I get it now.

I understand now. And maybe that sort of thing's happened for you. Maybe at school or university or in some other situation. Things are cloudy and then all of a sudden they become clear and are resolved.

Now, part of my problem with that chemistry situation was that I'd actually learnt something further back incorrectly and that was hindering my understanding of things as we were doing them then and there.

[2 : 09] I had to unlearn what I'd learnt and then I could move forward. Well, this is also what happened with the Apostle Peter in today's Bible reading. If you'd like to follow it with me, it's from the book of Acts chapter 10 and it can be found on page 894 in the Bibles in the seats in front of you.

Page 894. Before we do that, let me just recap what we looked at last week because that sort of impinges on what we're looking at today.

There was a Roman soldier and his name was Cornelius and he was a very devout man and worshipped God with all his family. Now, one afternoon, he had a vision of an angel who said that he should send some men to a town called Joppa because at Joppa, he would find Peter the Apostle and he should send for Peter to come up to Caesarea, which is where Cornelius lived, to hear what he had to say.

Now, the following day, Peter, who was down at this place called Joppa, also had an experience from God. He had a vision, sort of a trance, what the Bible tells us. And it was around lunchtime and he was hungry and in this vision, it was quite a bizarre vision, we were told last week that he saw a sheep descending from heaven and in this sheep were all kind of creatures, animals and birds.

And a voice said to him, Peter, get up, kill and eat. But Peter was aware that the Jews had certain food laws and there were certain animals you could eat and certain ones you couldn't eat.

[3 : 48] And he said, no, I'm not going to eat those things. Some of them are unclean. Well, this happened three times, we're told, and Peter was quite puzzled by this vision. Well, at that very moment, the men from Cornelius, I hope you're following this so far, it's quite complex.

At that moment, the men from Cornelius arrived to pick up Peter from the house in Joppa and Peter agreed to go with them back to Cornelius' house.

Now, that's a very quick summary of what happened last week. But basically, we've got this Roman soldier, Cornelius, who sent for Peter and Peter came to him and we'll see what happens today.

Well, Cornelius was an unusual kind of guy, I think. He was a Roman soldier and the Romans were the occupying force at the time. They had a reputation for ruling the people really harshly and were therefore resented bitterly by the Jewish people.

But we need to remember, from last week, that Cornelius was described as a devout man who feared God with all his household. The Bible also tells us that he gave generously to the people.

[5 : 01] We're told earlier in the chapter that he prayed constantly to God. Verse 22 of chapter 10 also tells us that Cornelius was well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.

Now, I don't think there'd be many Roman soldiers that the Jews would speak well of, but Cornelius was one. I think he was a very unique person, a kind man, a godly man, but he didn't know about Jesus.

Well, in anticipation of Peter's arrival, Cornelius had gathered his close family members and friends. And you can see what happened in verses 25 and 26 of chapter 10.

On Peter's arrival, Cornelius met him and falling at his feet, worshipped him. But Peter made him get up saying, stand up, I'm only a mortal.

Peter, even though he was one of the apostles who was closest to Jesus, was still just a human being. Certainly not someone to be worshipped. And he acknowledged this.

[6 : 10] I think it's of great concern to the church when people who are in Christian leadership and Christian ministry enjoy a lot of adulation and become celebrities, receiving the glory that is really only God's.

Perhaps a number of the so-called tele-evangelists have done the church great disservice in this regard. Not all of them, but some of them. Enjoying people's praise for themselves and not ensuring that it is God alone who receives the glory.

And this is the point that Peter made to Cornelius. Let's read on in verse 27. As he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled.

And he said to them, you yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anything profane, any one profane or unclean.

So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now, may I ask why you sent for me? Now, Peter was a Jew and Cornelius was a Gentile.

[7 : 20] A Gentile is just someone who isn't a Jew. We talk about the Jews and the Gentiles, the Jews and the non-Jews. The Jews didn't associate with people who weren't Jews. They didn't have anything to do with Gentile people.

They regarded them as profane and unclean. But remember that Peter had just had this bizarre vision of this sheet being lowered a couple of days earlier with the different animals in it.

And some of the animals in this sheet were unclean and he knew according to the Jewish laws he wasn't permitted to eat them. The ancient food laws that the Jews had can be found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

But Jesus declared we can read in Mark chapter 7 that all foods were clean. Jesus made this amazing statement changing the face of these Jewish food laws.

All things were now clean according to Jesus. Remember also what this voice had declared to Peter when he refused to eat those creatures in the sheet. It had said what God has made clean you must not call profane.

[8 : 31] It seems that Peter was starting to get the message that no food and certainly no one was unclean as far as God was concerned. Peter had just been staying at the house of Simon who was a tanner and tanners sort of dealt with the carcasses and skins of animals certainly not a place for a Jewish person to be seen and now he's present in the home of Cornelius not just a Gentile but a Roman soldier another Gentile incredible and yet Peter I think is being educated slowly that this is okay it's okay to be here this is fine.

Well in verse 30 onwards Cornelius explains to Peter what had happened a few days previously. Cornelius replied four days ago at this very hour at three o'clock I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me he said Cornelius your prayer has been heard and your arms have been remembered before God send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter he is staying in the home of Simon at tanner by the sea therefore I sent for you immediately and you have been kind enough to come so now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say Peter was just about to proclaim to Cornelius and his household and they were eager and willing recipients of what Peter had to say it seems that this Cornelius guy was really really sincerely searching and seeking after God desiring to know what is the truth what is the right thing to believe all he needed was someone to come and tell him about Jesus and Peter was about to do that

Cornelius was wanting to draw near to God and God honoured that he responded to his searching and through Peter showed him Jesus the one who is the way the truth and the life I was reminded of that verse from the letter of James where James writes draw near to God and he will draw near to you it's a great encouragement isn't it when we do search for God with all our hearts and we really try and what is the meaning of life what is life all about and we're sincere and not sort of sort of closed to what God might teach us God will honour that searching and meet us in our time of need God indeed did that for Cornelius and friends there are people in our world who are searching for the truth they're desiring to draw close to God is God wanting to use you or me to share his love with them do you know someone who's a kind of a Cornelius sort of a person who's really searching are you really searching now our church has many resources to help you reach out to people with God's love there are opportunities for you to learn how to share your faith sensitively and appropriately with others there's a course we run later in the year called the Alpha Course it's a course in the basics of the Christian faith conducted over a meal in a very non-threatening environment talk to Paul and myself if you'd like to learn more about these there are many resources to help the Cornelius of our world meet the one true God and to enjoy his love well

Peter now proclaims the good news about Jesus to Cornelius and his household and we pick this up in verse 34 on page 895 then Peter began to speak to them I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him God's not a racist or a racialist he doesn't accept people of one racial group and exclude others of another group simply on the grounds of their race our race is not a criterion as to whether or not we're acceptable to God I had the privilege about three years ago of attending a conference in Florida I sound like I'm bragging about overseas travels the last time I was in Florida it's the only time I was in Florida but the conference was a great celebration to do with the

EE ministry if you're not familiar with what EE is it stands for evangelism explosion and all that is is a course in personal faith sharing and the conference celebrated the fact that this ministry is now being used in every nation of the world and delegates have been invited from every corner of the world I don't think they'd all come but certainly delegates from most of the nations of the world had been invited and I had the privilege of being one of the Australian representatives and I distinctly remember a couple of meals that we had and sitting at the meal table with a delegate from Mexico and there was a chap who spoke Spanish who translated for us and another guy who was from Wales who I didn't understand a word of no I don't mean that rudely and African countries people very dark skin people from Europe I remember another chap from Spain and countries of the former Soviet Union but the delegate who made the lasting impression on me was the delegate from well I wonder if you could guess where he was from he was the delegate from Greenland

[14 : 26] I thought I didn't think there were people in Greenland let alone Christians I thought there were just sort of polar bears or perhaps an Eskimo or two but that blob of land just above Canada on the map Greenland there are Christians there and this guy showed me some photos of the Christian camps that he ran in Greenland for young people isn't it great to know that there are people in Greenland who today are going to be worshipping God as we are this morning yes indeed Peter got it right when he said I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him even people in Greenland he didn't say that I just said well Peter goes on in verse 36 to say you know the message he sent to the people of Israel preaching peace by Jesus Christ he is Lord of all it seems that

Peter's hearers had some background knowledge about Jesus they knew a bit about this guy they'd heard of him and what he'd done and Peter emphasizes that Jesus came to bring peace now this refers to peace between God and people we sort of talk about peace in a fairly schmaltzy sort of a way sometimes but the fact of the matter is that without Jesus the Bible describes someone as being an enemy of God we're at enmity with God without Jesus and Jesus came to bring us peace with God it's a terrifying thought being God's enemy but God wants everyone to be his friends reconciled to him through Jesus and his death on the cross for us as the well-known Christmas Carol puts it peace on earth and mercy mild God and sinners reconciled Peter goes on to outline the basics of the Christian message in verse 37 and following that message spread throughout

Judea beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him we are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem friends the Christian faith isn't the product of someone's fanciful imagination or some fictitious story some legend or myth that came together years ago it's based on what is true historical facts that have been recorded for us here in the Bible Peter acknowledges this at the start of verse 39 where he says we are witnesses to all that he did Peter was there other witnesses were there too and God in his grace to us has preserved these events written in the Bible for us to read for ourselves that we too may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Lord of all that we can have forgiveness through him

Peter goes on to outline the events of that very first Easter in verse 39 they put him to death by hanging him on a tree that's a reference to the cross but God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to appear not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead we have to acknowledge what Peter says Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by Peter and others it's an undeniable incredible fact of history verse 42 he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name yes

Jesus is our judge he's my judge he's your judge he's the judge of every human person and way back in the old testament prophets had testified that everyone who believes in him and puts their trust in him would be forgiven for their sins the knowledge that Jesus is my judge doesn't fill me with fear I don't cower in fear nor should it fill the heart of any Christian with fear why because I have the assurance that my sins are forgiven Jesus has taken my punishment in his death on the cross and declares me not guilty even though I am but Jesus took the punishment that should have been mine to make me acceptable to God and it's the same for any Christian person for any person that wants to accept it it could be the same for you if you choose to trust and follow him Cornelius his friends and family were clearly receptive to what they just heard they wanted to trust and follow

[19 : 52] Jesus to receive forgiveness of their sins from him but while Peter was still speaking verse 44 the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word the circumcised believers the Jewish believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles even the Gentiles it was a shock to them but God had given his gift of the Holy Spirit to the people who weren't Jews in verse 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God God had given the Gentiles his gift the Holy Spirit just as the Holy Spirit had been given to the Jewish people on the first day of Pentecost God's Spirit is there with Christian people and it's through his Spirit that Jesus is able to be with us all the time well the final couple of verses of our reading verses 47 and 48 then Peter said can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy

Spirit just as we have so we ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ then they invited him to stay for several days well these new Christian people having experienced the gift of God's Holy Spirit and that was manifested because they began to speak in tongues different languages they were clearly fully entitled to receive baptism with water which was the common practice for Christian people the outward sign of what God had been doing in their lives and Peter stayed with them more than likely giving them further instruction in their faith what we conclude from all this this morning how does this relate to us what can we learn from this reading well it's a wonderful thing that the good news of Jesus is for everybody no one is excluded God wants everyone to enjoy his love everyone is invited to his kingdom he doesn't turn anyone away that comes to him it's great that Peter was able to learn to throw off his old outdated ways of thinking which was quite a challenge for him and a lesson he needed to be taught a couple of times but what's the lesson for us does prejudice and discrimination exist in our own church even subconsciously in our minds what if a young person sorted through that door right now and they smelled of marijuana and had green hair honestly what would your reaction be

I'd probably but I think we'd all react like that wouldn't we would we automatically reject them in our minds before we got to know them and tried to find out a bit about them and tried to show them God's love would we have sort of written them off already we need to be careful not to exclude anyone we need to see people with the eyes that God sees them people matter to God and they need to matter to us as well what if people of a different racial group or language group or political persuasion became involved in our church would we want to put barriers between them and the good news of Jesus I don't think we would I think that's really great and it's great that there are many many different racial groups here in our own church I think it's a wonderful asset it's a wonderful thing that this year we're beginning a ministry to mandarin speaking people later this year that congregation will begin and we need to pray for David and

Esther Ruan as they begin leading that ministry later this year the gospel is for everyone one Christian author put it like this Christians cannot yield to prejudice for they serve a God who does not show favoritism he may have sent the good news to Israel first but he intends it for everybody there is no room then in the New Testament Christianity for segregated congregations chauvinistic rivalries may well continue to divide the nations but they must not be allowed to divide the Christian community we pray that God would help us to dissolve all sinful rivalries and divisions between people may they never damage God's church especially his church here at Holy Trinity may we always be making known the gospel of

Jesus and making it available to all people Amen