

United in Faith: Welcoming All in Christ

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Date: 31 December 2023

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[0 : 0 0] In Acts chapter 10, verses 44 through 48, we encounter a groundbreaking moment in the history of the early church, a moment that challenged the perspective of the Jewish believers and was calling them into a broader, more unified understanding of the family of God. And as we look into Luke's account as what happens in the home of Cornelius, as Cornelius has gathered his family and gathered his friends together, we see Luke focusing on something in particular as Peter is sharing his message about Jesus Christ with the Gentiles. And when we do so, and when we see what Luke is including and how Luke focuses, what we do is, I believe we uncover the very heart of God. And that is by Peter's very own words that God shows no favoritism, but that everyone who trusts Christ is welcomed into the body of Christ, his church. As we remember, excuse me, back in chapter 9 and chapter 10, where Peter has the vision. Peter, who has been raised as an Orthodox Jew, never allowed any food that God had not allowed them to eat to enter his mouth. And God is using the vision of the sheet lower down with the animals, the unclean animals, telling Peter to get up to kill and eat. Peter objecting and saying, God, I've never done anything like that. And God saying, no, I've called him clean. Now get up, kill and eat. And then he being sent to Gentiles, allowing Gentiles to come and actually be in the same home and eat at the same table with Gentiles. And then as we get into chapter number 10, we hear Peter telling the Gentiles in Cornelius's home that God shows no favoritism. So he's over and over again revealing to them that God's plan is being carried out, and it's not what the Jews thought it was, and it's not even what the Gentiles had feared, that they were still going to be left out. And so as we look in Acts chapter 10, verses 44 to 48, excuse me, we ask ourselves the question, why would Luke want to focus on this dramatic shift in God's plan, and first in the life of Peter, then in the life of the six Jews that Peter had brought with him? Well, I believe it's because of human nature. See, we tend to believe that we are more special to God than others who are different from us. That has been the same in every single culture.

It was that way in the Jewish culture, even in the Gentile culture. There were some Gentiles who thought they were better than other Gentiles. So Luke's main theme here throughout this section of the book of Acts is focusing on God accepting those that the Jews thought that God would never accept. We're going to see it again in this morning's verses by the dramatic reaction that the Jews had to the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit. They were literally out of their mind when they realized that God was going to be accepting the Gentiles just like He accepted them. So God wants us to see that anyone who trusts Jesus Christ is welcomed into His family, welcomed into His body, welcomed into the church, that God shows no favoritism in the invitation of the gospel. So let's take a look at what happens, starting with verse number 44. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word, and those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, the six

Jews who came with him. Why? They were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they had heard them speak with tongues and magnified God. Then Peter answered, verse 47, Can anyone forbid or can anyone object to water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have, or just like us? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Then they asked him to stay a few days. So we see the surprise here. Look back at verse number 44, and I like that.

This is pretty cool. God doesn't even let Peter stop preaching. In the middle of Peter's message, the Holy Spirit falls on, indwells these Gentile believers, and they start speaking in tongues. And it's amazing that God is showing this to these Jews, and he didn't even, Peter didn't even give an invitation. Peter didn't even challenge them of what they should do. He didn't say, well, let me lead you in the sinner's prayer, and if you pray this, then you're going to be saved. No, God saw their heart. He saw that they believed in Jesus Christ, and at that moment, even while Peter was still talking, the Holy Spirit indwells them because God saw the belief in their hearts. And so God decided that they'd heard enough, and he recognized their faith, and saw that in their hearts they had trusted in him who Peter was talking about. Now we look in verse 44, while Peter was still speaking these words, what words was Peter speaking? There's a couple of ways we could look at this. It could be because of the predicate usage of what Luke is saying, that it was the entire message that Peter had been preaching. But if we look a little closer in the construction of the sentence in the original, verse 43, whosoever or everyone who believes in him occurs at the end of that sentence.

[7 : 36] And so it's very possible that Peter includes this at the end of that sentence for emphasis. And some commentators say it was like the thunderbolt of realization within the hearts of these Gentiles, and it was their reaction to Peter saying, those can, people can receive forgiveness of sin, everyone who trusts in Jesus. And it's that moment of realization that in their hearts, they said, even beyond their wildest imagination, God would accept us.

I want to believe in that Jesus. And so Peter doesn't even, doesn't even have the chance to stop preaching when God shakes up the entire household. And everyone who heard the word were convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus offers salvation to everyone who believes. And I find it interesting here, excuse me, that the Holy Spirit indwells these believers, these new believers, without the laying on of hands.

Because there are some who point to back in Samaria, where Paul came, or when the apostles came and laid hands on the Samaritans, that they received the Holy Spirit. And you remember the one who said, I'll pay you, give me that same power.

Well, there was no laying on of hands here. So we don't need to lay hands on anybody to receive the Holy Spirit, as some might even still believe today. But there's another thing that we need to understand and recognize.

They had not gone through water baptism yet either. They trusted Christ. God sent the Holy Spirit within them, and they had not even been baptized yet.

[9 : 49] So is it not possible that salvation is by grace through faith alone? Just like the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, For by grace you are saved through faith, and it is not of yourselves, not of works.

What is baptism? Baptism is a work of hands. Now, it doesn't mean we shouldn't do it, because baptism comes after someone has shown that they have trusted Christ as their Savior.

So God didn't change the plan of salvation. It's always been through faith. Remember Abraham? It wasn't circumcision that saved Abraham. It was Abraham's faith that made Abraham right with God.

So the Holy Spirit, God was giving witness through the Holy Spirit. The purpose was so these six Jewish believers, these circumcised believers, would get the message that God was accepting the Gentiles as well as accepting them.

So God was showing these six Jewish believers that God was accepting and welcoming these Gentiles into the body of Christ. Now, these Jewish Christians were deeply rooted in tradition and who they thought God favored.

[11 : 17] But God was going to show them that it doesn't matter what we think about God. God will do what God wants to do no matter what we think.

Then something astonishing happens. You know, they thought, we're the Jews. We're special to God because of who we are. We're special to God because of the way we live. We're not like those Gentiles.

But that God would accept them as well. And here's the Holy Spirit indwelling non-Jews. This was a game changer for these Jewish believers.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was as shocking to these Jewish believers as if the rain would have started falling upwards instead of down.

It was that dramatic to them. It defied everything they thought was right. It defied every tradition that they had grown up learning about.

[12 : 17] Now, this moment, I think, teaches us something about God. He isn't limited by our expectations. God isn't limited by our understanding. And God isn't limited by our traditions.

God is going to do what God chooses to do. The Holy Spirit's descent on these Gentiles showed that God's love and God's salvation was not to an exclusive single group.

It's available to everyone who hears the gospel, to everyone who trusts Christ as their Savior. The gospel is for everyone, everywhere. And it's a clear sign to the Jews that God was doing something new.

Quite often, God talked about, in the Old Testament, about God was doing something new. In the book of the Revelation, we see God doing something new.

So, new is not foreign to God. God is in the business of new. God gave us a new life. God gave us a brand new life when we trust Christ as our Savior.

[13 : 20] So, the surprise of the Spirit, I think, is a powerful reminder to us. Sometimes we think we've got God all figured out. We've got Him neat in a box. He's working based upon the way we think He should be working.

And we might assume that the way we're doing it is the best way, or the right way, or the only way. And then God comes along, and He blesses in a way that we didn't expect.

We thought, well, God, we didn't think that was the way it should be done. And God says, you know what? I'll bless who I decide to bless. And I'll choose what I do. And so, it encourages us to look around our own church.

It encourages us to look around our own community. Who are the people that we least expect to see touched by the gospel?

Who do we don't even think would hear us or listen to us? Think about that person. You might have somebody in your own family. You know what? They're just too hard-hearted. You know, they've already come out and told me that they don't want to hear anything about that Jesus stuff.

[14 : 23] Or, I've got my own religion. You've heard people say that? I've got my own religion. Don't talk to me about religion. You know, two things we don't talk about. We don't talk about politics.

We don't talk about religion. Well, I find a whole lot of people talk about politics. So, let's not talk about religion. Let's talk about Jesus. So, the surprise of the Spirit, I think, invites us to embrace a bigger picture of God's family.

One that includes people from every background, from every walk of life. But I also want us to look at their immediate response to their faith. Or God's immediate response.

Verse 44, while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard. See, they didn't hesitate to believe.

God had already been preparing their hearts. God's Holy Spirit had already been preparing them to believe. And they trusted Jesus before Peter had even finished His message.

[15 : 25] They simply believed. What does this teach us? It teaches us the power of the gospel. You know, all you and I have to do is share the words of God. The Holy Spirit will do what we cannot.

The Holy Spirit will open up the mind. He will illuminate the mind of those who hear the gospel. The moment the light of Christ shone upon these Gentiles, they saw the truth and they embraced it for what it was.

Their faith wasn't gradual. Their faith was instantaneous. This is the power of the gospel. The power of the gospel transcends cultural, ethnic, and even religious backgrounds.

It speaks directly to the heart. God can speak to those of the Muslim faith. God can speak to those of Hindu. God can speak to the irreligious. God can speak to the non-religious.

God can speak to the anti-religious. He can speak to the heart because that's the power of the gospel and power of the Holy Spirit. So we think about our own context.

[16 : 34] You know, often we sometimes underestimate our own impact and our own reach. You know, you probably maybe even have people you work with or people that are neighbors that you think, well, you know, I don't think they would, I don't know that they would listen to me.

You know, I, you know, I, yeah, I know God can save them, but, you know, I don't know if I just need to open up the subject. Why not? Because who knows, but God might have been working on them.

So just be open. The message for Jesus is everyone, everywhere, no exception. Has the power to touch hearts and minds, those we least expect.

So what's the big takeaway? Just be open to God, working where God chooses to work. Expect God to work in surprising ways. Expect God to work in some unexpected ways.

As we share our faith, let's do so with confidence, knowing that God's Holy Spirit will do what He's going to do. All God expects us to do is do the work. All God expects us to do is prepare to do the work, just like Paul did, just like Peter did.

[17 : 45] Go ahead and plan. Go ahead and prepare. And then let God move. God moved Paul. Paul had a plan, and God says, no, I don't want you to go there, I want you to go here instead.

So be prepared for God to move us around. It'll resonate with all walks of life. So first point is, God is inviting everyone.

Now, as I said before, Luke is focusing on the response of the Jewish believers here. You say, why do you say that?

Well, let's continue. And those, verse 45, of the circumcision, who believed were astonished. Why were they astonished?

Because the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles, just like it was given to them on the day of Pentecost.

[18 : 43] You know, picture this. You are a Jewish believer in the early church. You've grown up with a clear understanding of who God's people are. It's always been about Israel, always about the Jewish customs, always about the Jewish laws.

Then suddenly, you see Gentiles receiving the same Holy Spirit that you've received. They're from a different culture.

They're from a different background. They have different cultural practices. They even might even look a little bit different. And all of a sudden, God is welcoming them into the family as well.

So this moment in Acts chapter 10, verse 45, for these six Jews, it's like the walls came crumbling down. Everything they believed, God shatters.

See, they were more than just surprised. They were astonished. It was a radical, eye-opening moment that challenged their deepest held beliefs, their deepest prejudices, and their deepest biases.

[19 : 53] He said, well, pastor, you're making that pretty intense here. Well, the word that Luke used for astonished literally means beside themselves.

This word for astonished has the prefix for it that means out of. And it was also a word used when someone was insane.

So the way we might say it is they were out of their minds with the possibility that God could accept Gentiles into the family.

They were literally out of their minds with amazement. They were beside themselves. They were so surprised that God would give these Gentile dogs the same Holy Spirit that they had.

So why does Luke include this? Why did Luke want to bring attention to the response of these Jews? I think he wanted to bring the attention to their prideful attitude.

[21 : 04] Why is it throughout human history, we tend to believe that God will only welcome those who look like us, talk like us, think like us, and even believe certain things like us.

They were incredulous. Incredulous. These Jewish believers thought they were more acceptable to God than these Gentiles were. So I think this astonishment from the Jews is something that we could learn from because God sometimes often goes beyond our expectations.

He goes beyond the way we think that He will work. So these Jewish believers had to confront the fact that God's grace and God's love was not just for the select few.

It was not just for them. It was a humbling and I think transformative realization. And we find that the early church going through that first century was multi-ethnic.

It was multicultural. There were slaves. There were masters. There were those from the different castes, those from the different social status.

[22 : 17] They all looked different. Some had different languages, but yet they were still together. I think this turns into a lesson about the boundless love of God and the reach of the gospel.

Jesus said, start in Jerusalem, go to Samaria, but ultimately we end up at the ends of the earth. Then we look, we go a little further, verse 46.

For some, maybe a little troubling, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. There are some commentators who have called this the Pentecost of the Gentile world.

Now, this verse does not suggest that every believer will give evidence of the Holy Spirit's indwelling by speaking in tongue.

You need to remember, why were signs given? Why was the sign of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues given at Pentecost? It was a sign that the Holy Spirit has finally come.

[23 : 27] Why was the sign of the Holy Spirit given at, in Samaria? It's so the Jews could realize the Holy Spirit was also given to the Samaritans.

Why was the signs of the Holy Spirit given for the Gentiles when the Gentiles believed? So the Jews could realize God was accepting a whole, He was accepting everybody else into the family of God.

Thing is, we don't see this replicated again through the New Testament. We need to remember that the signs were given to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, the laying on of hands in Samaria, and here the speaking in tongues to prove to the Jews that the Holy Spirit accepts Gentiles into His body as well.

Aren't you glad that God accepts Gentiles too? Because that's, I'm a Gentile, I'm not a Jew. And so I am so glad. And the message, one of the messages that we can get from this is, we have the privilege of being part of God's family, and we don't have to become a Jew.

We didn't have to be born a Jew. We were born outsiders. God still has a plan for His people, the Jews. That's going, we see that in the book of the Revelation. But God has accepted us.

[24 : 48] He has grafted us in to His people. And so we are able to share in that same blessing that God's people does.

Now the word tongues here is the same word that was used for speaking in tongues in Acts chapter 2. And that word means languages.

We're not told here whether these were specific languages, like what happened at the day of Pentecost, because there were people from all over the known world at that time, Jews from all over the world, spoke different languages.

This may have been ecstatic utterances. This we're not told, but all we see is that it's not necessarily replicated anywhere else. So with this event, what it did was, it is the end of the period of transition of the early church.

What we're going to begin seeing in the rest of the book of Acts is the gospel continuing to go to the rest of the known world at the time. So believers among Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles have at this point all received the Holy Spirit and are united in the body of Christ.

[26 : 00] So this was God's way of showing that salvation is not just to a single group. Well, we continue.

Peter answered. And then verse 47, verse 47, 48, we see baptism as that public declaration. Again, Peter says, can anyone forbid water?

Or does anyone object to these Gentiles being baptized? Again, Luke is focusing on the reaction and teaching the lesson to these six Jews.

So why do you think Peter phrased it the way he did? I'm sure looking to the six Jews, any of you guys have objections to these Gentiles being baptized?

And the reason I say that was the reason, because look at his qualifier. Just, who have received the Holy Spirit, just like we did.

[27 : 13] So, do we have any objections to these Gentiles being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit, just like we did?

And I think Peter was bringing the point home. They are just like us. So there's no reason why anyone should forbid them from being baptized.

Peter's point was, we're not special. We're not alone. God doesn't discriminate. God's got no favorites. He accepts everyone who comes to Him.

So what does this mean for us today? Like Peter, we need to recognize that our church, the body of Christ, is not just for people who look like us. Not just for people who talk just like us.

And it should shape our realization, the way God puts His body together, and how we share the gospel. We're called to be reflecting a community, or called to a community that reflects the heart of God.

[28 : 17] Where He's calling everyone who trusts Christ as their Savior to become a part of His family. So we're not just a church that opens its doors, but opens its arms wide to accept all those who trust Christ as their Savior.

Now understand, these Gentile believers weren't saved because they were baptized. They were baptized because they gave evidence of being saved.

Remember, the Holy Spirit came to them the moment they trusted. Even before Peter had finished speaking, they were baptized. And it's amazing how some will make doctrines out of a single verse without paying attention to the rest of Scripture.

Such as, we need to lay on hands in order for someone to receive the Holy Spirit. That didn't happen here. You need to be baptized in order to be saved.

That did not happen here. The Holy Spirit came upon them because they believed even before they were baptized. They were baptized because they believed.

[29 : 31] They weren't saved because they were baptized. So, what do we see from all of this? He commands them in verse 48 to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Then they asked Him to stay a few days. God was accepting of them. They were becoming a part of the family of God.

So, what's our role in this journey? As believers, I believe we're called to do more than just simply welcome people into the body. It's like on a sports team.

When someone joins a team, they don't just give them uniforms and say, good luck. What do they do? They teach them the plays. They teach them how to work together. They teach them how to play the game.

In the same way, when a new believer joins our family, it's our responsibility to disciple them. Help them to grow in their faith.

[30 : 34] Help them to understand God's Word. Teach them how to pray. Teach them how to live a life that honors and pleases God and to feel like they truly belong, that we are connected by family together.

And the discipling and the mentoring process isn't just for the benefit of new believers. Think about it this way. We get just as much out of the process as that person who just comes to know Jesus Christ because it's a way for us to be used by God.

And we sometimes learn just as much. And you know how exciting it is when someone first trusts Christ as their Savior? They're excited. They want to learn. They want to know everything they can.

That's exciting. It's almost like it breathes new life into us as well. So the discipling process is not just for the new believer. The discipling process is for us as well.

It's a blessing for us too when we take time to invest in someone else's spiritual journey. We get to see their faith through fresh eyes. And I believe that it's not just for us to disciple new believers.

[31 : 53] I think we should all be involved in the process of being disciplined for the rest of our lives. That's why I believe it's important for us to have a multi-generational body of Christ.

because a person who just comes to know Jesus Christ as their Savior is disciplined by someone who's been a follower of Jesus Christ for longer.

And you and me, we should always be learning. So we should all have a mentor. We should all have someone who has been a part of God's family longer than we have because we can always learn from someone else.

I can point to two or three other pastors. I have some who are even still former Bible college professors who I can call on at any time.

They'll pray with me, help me to make a decision that I just want someone who's been around longer than I have. So I believe multi-generational. I believe young, old alike.

[33 : 03] We can be mentoring and discipling someone younger than us, not necessarily age-wise, but spiritually. And also someone can be mentoring and discipling us.

So we should be finding someone to disciple. And by that way, we'll all be in that process of mentoring.

So think about it. Make it personal. Who can you find to mentor? Who can you find to mentor you? Another thing is, ask yourself, when was the last time I reached out to someone new?

Could even be someone new in the body of Christ. We've had people who've been here attending for six months and someone asks, what's their name? That's sad.

Someone's been sitting across from you for, and I'm not laying blame. I'm just saying, sometimes we just need to go in, take them out for coffee, invite them for lunch, ask questions, get to know them, get to learn how they're doing, because every one of us has a role in the body of Christ.

[34 : 16] So I challenge all of us this week, make an effort to talk to someone you don't know. Make an effort to invite someone to coffee, invite someone to a meal maybe, and just ask.

I just want to get to know you a little bit better. Where are you from? Have you always been in the area? Just find out something about someone else.

So what are our next steps? Connect with someone new this week. Invite someone new maybe for a meal or for coffee.

And then join a ministry team. Join a ministry team as a way of reaching out. Could be our prayer team. Spend time in prayer with others. You can even spend time with them physically or spend time praying separately.

Outreach team. We have a number of ways to be involved. Everyone can be involved. Everyone can play a role in the family of God.

[35 : 24] Let's pray. Father, we come to you this morning. We thank you that you love us. We thank you, Heavenly Father, that you have chosen to make your gospel available to all.

Lord, we thank you that you can change the heart of the most hardened sinner.

And you can change the heart of a child as well. We thank you, Father, that your grace, your love, and salvation is available to everyone.

Help us, dear Lord, that we may be partnering with you, sharing your gospel with as many as possible. We thank you for what you're going to do.

We thank you, Lord God, that you have accepted us who are not part of the end group. We were outsiders.

[36 : 27] Yet you chose to include us in your plan of salvation. We thank you for that. Father, as we end our time together this morning, we pray that you may bless this offering that we will receive in a moment, use it to honor, for you to be honored.

And Lord, we pray that as we finish out this, humanly speaking, this year, and are ready to step into a brand new year, Father, there may be a year where we surrender to you and look to you to lead us, to guide us, to direct us, help us to become even more effective at reaching the hurting, the broken, and the lost in our community.

Help us, Lord, as you help us to become healthier, and we thank you for what you're going to accomplish. Father, for it's in Jesus' precious and holy name that we pray.

Amen.