

How Jesus Changes our Prejudices

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Today's scripture reading is from Acts chapter 10, the whole chapter. Hena and I will share the reading. Hena is Filipino and I'm Indonesian. Please follow along in your Bible or the church Bible, which you can get from near the stage or near the entrance.

Our passage can be found on page 864 in the church Bible. Let's listen to God's word to us today, starting in verse 1.

At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God.

About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius. And he stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord?

And he said to him, Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon, who is called Peter.

[1 : 13] He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him.

And having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has made clean, do not call common. This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

[2 : 22] Now, while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at a gate and called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was lodging there.

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the spirit said to him, Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.

And Peter went down to the men and said, I'm the one you're looking for. What is the reason for your coming? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man who is well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

[3 : 44] But Peter lifted him up, saying, Stand up, I too am a man. And he talked with him. He went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.

But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I asked then why you sent for me.

And Cornelius said, Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour. And behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms have been remembered before God.

Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner by the sea. And so I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now, therefore, we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality. [5 : 05] But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable for him. As for the word that he said to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all.

You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism that John proclaimed, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. For God was with him, and we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

[6 : 22] While Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word.

Great. Thank you so much. And you can put that down there with Kristen. Thank you for reading. Well, good morning, everybody. Once again, if you don't know me, my name is Kevin. Great to have you with us.

Why don't we pray together? And then we're going to look at the scripture. Lord Jesus, your word is living and active, powerful and real. As Hannah just said, these are the words of the true and living God.

[7 : 27] Help us to respond. Would you write these words in our hearts? Help us to understand what you have to say and how you want us to live. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Let me tell you about a man called Laxello Quintana.

Many of you will know that our family is from Cape Town in South Africa. And I used to pastor a small church in Cape Town. And in Cape Town, crime is something that we have to live with. And one of the things that happens is every year at Christmas time and at Easter time, there is a whole lot of pickpocketing. So what will happen is you come to church and you put your bag down somewhere. And then you go and you talk to a friend or get coffee or go to the washroom. And you come back and either your phone or your wallet or the entire bag has been taken. And this always happens at Christmas and Easter every year. And so in the church that we were pastoring, it's about Easter time one year, April, about 10, 12 years ago.

And we'd had a whole bunch of pickpockets and things going missing during the church service. And so I think I'm going to get on to these guys. I'm going to find out who they are. And so it's one Sunday night. It's dark outside.

[8 : 37] It's kind of dark inside. And there's a young black guy sitting towards the back with a low peak cap over his eyes, like low over his eyes. And I think this guy looks suspicious.

He looks very sus, as my daughters would say. And so I decide I'm going to go up and talk to him. And I think I can't go to him and say, what are you doing here? You're going to steal phones. That's a little bit too bold. But what I can do is I can ask a lot of questions. I can get to know him. I can make sure that he knows that he's been seen. He's not anonymous. He's not flying under the

radar.

And so I go up to him. And I'm like, and he's got this ridiculous rapper accent. He's like, what's up, bro? And I'm thinking, don't WhatsApp bro me. I know who you are. And I know what you're on to. But anyway, I don't say that. I think that. And I spend the next 10 minutes kind of asking him a ton of questions. Where are you from? What are you up to? And I'm being friendly, but not too friendly because I want him to know that I'm on to him.

[9 : 35] Anyway, the service is about to start. And so I eventually say, hey, bro, good to meet you. See you around. And I think to myself, I'm never seeing this guy again. I've done my job, right?

But to my surprise, the next week he rocks up again. And he comes back to church. And the next week. And the next week. And the following week.

He's still there. And so by now, I'm starting to question the narrative in my own mind. And I eventually say, hey, let's go get some coffee. And so we meet up one day. And Lux tells me what it's like to be a black man in Cape Town, South Africa.

You know, South Africa had apartheid, this racial segregation. That ended in the 1990s. But Cape Town City is built for segregation. The highways, the sewerage systems, everything is built to separate black people from white people.

And the white people live in the nice areas. And the black people in the not so nice areas. And the culture and the structure, the infrastructure of the city is built along racial lines. And Lux tells me his story of growing up in a home where his dad was constantly, his dad was a pastor but constantly oppressed by the white police.

[10 : 43] And he tells me what it's like to walk into a church that's 95% white, listening to a white preacher singing white people's songs, and what it feels like to be in a church where he feels unwelcome, unwanted, not good enough, not understood.

We're going to come back to Lux a little bit later. Now, as a church, we are going through the book of Acts. And the book of Acts is this wonderful account of how the gospel spreads from this small group of people in Jerusalem to the ends of the known world and within one generation and then beyond that.

And the book of Acts is this amazing book. It continues in our day as the gospel spreads. It's the story of how God is at work. This is not the work of humanity or human beings.

This is God by the work of his spirit and the power of Jesus changing the world upside down. But Acts chapter 10, which Chris and Hannah read to us, shows us the deep sinful tendency of the human heart to treat people who are different from us as not just being different, but as being undesirable.

As those who are unlike us are not just unlike us, but they are unacceptable to us, unwanted by us, sometimes seen as unworthy by us. But in Acts chapter 10, we see how God goes about dismantling the prejudice and the discrimination that lies in our hearts.

[12 : 08] And so in this passage we're going to look at today, we're going to see that God is going to use this man called Peter, the great apostle Peter. But while God is using Peter, he's also going to change Peter.

While God is going to use Peter to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, to this other person, this Gentile unbeliever called Cornelius, at the same time, God wants the gospel to get into Peter and change Peter himself.

And so the gospel's got these two frontiers, the people out there that don't know Jesus, but also the hearts of those that do know Jesus himself. And friends, if this is true of Peter, how much more of it is true of me and maybe of us.

Okay, so in this chapter, there are four kind of scenes to the story. And so let's run through them together. Okay, the first one will be quite quick and then we'll get into it. Scene one, Cornelius and the divine encounter.

So the passage starts off, we meet this man called Cornelius. Cornelius is a Roman centurion. That means he's a ranking Roman soldier. He oversees about a hundred soldiers.

[13 : 08] It means he is wealthy and somewhat powerful. He is paid five times more, the average Roman soldier. But it also means he's an enemy to the Israelites. He is part of the occupying force.

Those, the Romans, remember, they're the ones that crucified Jesus. They're the ones that are oppressing the Jews in Israel. He's part of the occupying force. He lives in Caesarea, which is the seat of the Roman government in this area, in the province of Judea.

He's an enforcer of Roman law. But the story also tells us that he is a devout man. He's a God-fearing man. He's a man who prays. He's not a Jew.

He's not welcome in the synagogue, but he's a spiritual seeker. He's got questions and he's seeking spiritual answers to his questions. He may be trying on faith, thinking, what does this look like and feel like to be a person of faith, a person who prays, a person who gives money to the poor.

But he's a spiritual seeker. But one day, while he's praying, he sees a vision and an angel tells him, send a delegation to this place called Joppa. You'll find a man called Peter. Call him.

[14:12] He's got a message for you. And so he does. Scene two, Peter and the puzzling vision. While this is going on in Caesarea up north, down, God is also speaking to another man, Peter.

Peter, the apostle Peter, is the representative of Jesus. He's also the disciple. Remember the guy who denied Jesus and always puts his foot in it and says stupid things.

But Peter now is filled with the spirit. He's used by God. He preaches the great sermon and Pentecost. He's a powerful man. But notice, where is Peter? What town is he in?

He's in Joppa. Anybody remember where we've come across Joppa recently? The book of Jonah. Do you remember? Remember in January, we looked at the story of Jonah. In the book of Jonah, God sends this prodigal prophet, this man called Jonah, to Nineveh, which is a city full of Gentiles, non-Jewish people, to tell them about the gospel, how God wants to save them from their sins and call them from repentance.

But Jonah doesn't think that these Ninevites, these Assyrian Gentiles, deserve God's grace. He doesn't want them to be forgiven. They are unworthy, unliked, undesirable.

[15:24] And so what does Jonah do? He runs away. But where does Jonah go to? He goes down to Joppa, the port city on the coast, to board a ship to Tarshish.

Jonah is running away because he doesn't want the Gentiles to hear about God and be forgiven. And so in the background, the story of Jonah, the prodigal prophet, who's on the run from God because he despised the Gentiles, because he considered them unworthy, is going on in the background.

And Luke, who writes the book of Acts, is just dropping this question in for us. Is Peter in Joppa going to be like Jonah? Is he going to run away from the Gentiles because he thinks that they don't deserve God's grace?

So while he's in the city of Joppa, Peter has this vision. And in this vision, a sheath comes down and there's full of animals, animals and reptiles and birds of prey, all sorts of animals.

And he hears a voice saying, Peter, feast yourself. Eat what's in front of you. But for Peter, this is a problem. Because the animals that he sees in this vision in front of him are all what are ceremonially and religiously unclean.

[16:30] They are defiled. They're the kind of things that no Jew would ever eat in his life. Peter says, never, Lord. You've got to be joking. Now, why is this? In the Old Testament, God had given his people all sorts of rules and regulations around food and clothing to wear and household articles and activities.

Things that he said, these are outlawed. These are off limits for you. These things, if you engage with them, will make you unclean. Now, why does God do that? Well, partly it's for hygiene reasons and health.

Remember, they're traveling through the wilderness. God doesn't want them to eat unhealthy food. Right? I'm sure we've all eaten off sushi or food that is not properly cooked.

What's going to happen? You're going to get very sick. Okay? In those days, they don't have refrigerators and preservatives. So, part of this is hygiene and health. As they're traveling through the wilderness, God wants his people to be safe. But also, these are the kinds of things that the nations that are around them, the non-Jewish people, engage in and eat and practice.

And God's plan was that his people were always to be set apart. Different. Distinctive. They are not to be like the nations around them. Not to eat what they eat. Do what they do. Practice what they practice.

[17:42] They are God's people and they're set apart. And so, God gives them rules saying, My people who belong to me, eat these foods. Do these things. Don't do the things that the nations around you.

So, listen to Leviticus 11. This is what God says. This is my law about beasts and birds and living creatures that move on the earth. You are to make a distinction between unclean and the clean.

Between living creatures that may be eaten and living creatures that may not be eaten. I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourself therefore. Be holy for I am holy. I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God.

You shall therefore be holy as I am holy. So, all these laws are a way of demonstrating we are God's set apart people. We belong to him. We're not like the nations around us. And we don't engage in things that make us unclean or defiled.

And Peter sees this vision and God tells him to go and eat these foods which for him are ceremonially unclean. They're religiously unclean. They'll make him unclean. And Peter says, never Lord. I've never done that.

[18 : 42] But God responds and says, do not call common or vulgar what I have made clean. While Peter's processing all this strange vision, trying to make sense of it, the contingent from Cornelius comes downstairs.

And the Holy Spirit tells Peter, go downstairs. There are people that are waiting for you. Scene three. When opponents meet. So, Peter is contemplating this vision.

He goes downstairs and there's this contingent. And he welcomes them. And the next day, they go to Cornelius' house up in Caesarea. And it takes two days journey to get there.

But they eventually get there. And while they're there, Cornelius has called all his friends and family to come to the house. It's a big Roman house. Maybe 40 or 50 people could stay there. And it's packed to the brim.

Everybody's anticipating. Who is the special person that Cornelius has called? He had a vision from an angel. Must be someone special. And they're all anticipating. And Peter walks in.

[19 : 41] And look what happens. Cornelius falls down and worships him. But Peter says, hang on. I'm nobody special. Get up. And then verse 28, Peter says this. You yourself know how unlawful it is for me, a Jew, to associate or visit anyone of another nation.

But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean. The penny is starting to drop for Peter. The vision wasn't about food.

It was about people. God wasn't telling Peter to eat whatever food Cornelius puts in front of him. But to welcome whatever people God puts in front of him. And Peter is starting to see.

If God declares something clean, who am I to say it's unclean? If God, the maker of heaven and earth, says someone is good, who am I to rubbish it or belittle it or reject it?

If God, the one who knows all things and owns all things, the king of all creation, says something that's pleasing and acceptable to him, who am I to decide that it's unacceptable or beneath me?

[20 : 46] And what Peter has known in theory his whole life is starting, the penny is starting to drop. That what is most important about any human being is not what people say about them or culture says about them or the church says about them, but what God says about them.

And God says to Peter, don't you dare call common that what is precious to me. And so Peter started to see things. And so he says to Cornelius, okay, why have you sent me?

Right? I'm here. What do you want me to say? And Cornelius tells his side of the story, how an angel stood before him and called him. And then he says, so here we are. Well, to hear what you have to say.

So Peter says, okay, I'm ready. Why have you called me? And they say, okay, we're ready. What do you have to say? And they're kind of looking at each other, both waiting for the other to speak. Scene four, the healing of discrimination and prejudice. So they're both looking at each other wondering, it's like a blind date, right? They're kind of not, no one's too sure what to say, except Peter does have something to say.

[21 : 53] Because the Holy Spirit has no doubt been working in Peter's heart this whole time. So look what he says. For the third time in this passage, Peter says, truly I understand. This is verse 34.

God shows no partiality. But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. God shows no partiality. In some ways that's the crux of the message, isn't it? But now, just by the way, what Peter is not saying here is that anybody is saved or justified or acceptable to God by just doing good works, right?

Cornelius gives money to the poor. Anyone that does that, justified. Actually, John Stott explains it like this. He says, the emphasis is that Cornelius' Roman nationality was acceptable, so he had no need to become a Jew.

Not that his righteousness was adequate, so that he had no need to become a follower of Jesus. Peter's not saying, listen, Cornelius, you seem like a good guy. You don't need Jesus.

[22 : 50] God loves you as you are. That's not his point. His point is, Cornelius, you don't need to become a Jew. You don't need to become circumcised and go to the synagogue for God to love you. All you need is Jesus.

Peter's point is not that God is indifferent to what we believe, but indifferent to where we come from, our culture, our nationality, our background. And so, what does Peter say to Cornelius here?

Well, if this was me, or if this was the United Nations, it would be tempted to draw up this kind of, the Caesarea declaration on, you know, race relations. Or a 20-point peace plan on how to make things work between Jews and Gentiles.

Or this five-year vision on cooperation between Jews and non-Jews. But Peter doesn't do any of that. What does Peter do? Look at verse 34, all the way down to 42 with me.

In that passage, in 10 verses, Peter tells Cornelius and his household about Jesus. And in these 10 verses, Peter talks about Jesus Christ, or references, 18 times.

[23 : 53] Almost 20 times, in a few short sentences. In his short speech, Peter, almost 20 times, tells him about Jesus. Who he is. What he did. What he was about.

Why God sent him. What he accomplished. And how that changes the world. Friends, why is it that these two people, a wealthy Roman centurion. Remember, centurions are the people that crucified Jesus and put him on the cross.

A wealthy Roman centurion. And a poor fisherman turned preacher. How is it that these two people, a Gentile and a Jew, can welcome each other.

Accept each other. And honor each other. Friends, how is it that the prejudice in our heart. And the discrimination in our heart. Can be broken down.

Because Jesus Christ makes polluted things clean again. Because Jesus makes undesirable things acceptable. Because Jesus makes unsanctified things sanctified.

[24 : 52] Because Jesus makes ugly things beautiful. Because Jesus welcomes unwelcome things and unwelcome people. Because Jesus washes sinners.

Both religious sinners like Peter. And unreligious sinners like Cornelius. Both pious sinners and people like me. And unpious sinners like, I don't know.

Also me, maybe. Jesus gives new value to people's lives. That is not defined by culture or ethnicity. Language, wealth or education. Because Jesus changes us.

And that's what Cornelius is starting to see. And Cornelius says, okay, we're here. Well, what do you have to say? Cornelius falls down on his knees before Peter. Which is amazing. And Peter says, get up.

I'm nobody special. Don't come and honor me. Don't try and become like me. There's someone else you need to become like. You need to fall down on your knees before Jesus. Peter tells him about Jesus.

[25 : 49] Who he is. And what he's done. Now, just a side comment here. This passage is talking about the immense welcome of Jesus. To all sorts of people, right?

But you may say, but actually, Jesus is often drawing a line in the sand and discriminating. Jesus is often separating people. You might think of the famous Matthew 25.

Jesus tells this parable. And he says, all people come. All sorts of people come. And I say, you go over there. You go over there. You to the right. And you to the left. And he says, these people on the right. My sheep are welcome in the kingdom.

And these people on the left will go to eternal destruction. Or think about how Jesus welcomes children. But the rich young ruler, he sends them away. Or he welcomes sinners and tax collectors and prostitutes.

But the Pharisees, he says, no, no. You have no part of my kingdom. So Jesus does make a distinction. So how does that work? Friends, in the scripture, the answer is that in God's kingdom, what separates and divides is not culture or wealth or status or ethnicity or language, but faith.

[26 : 57] Faith and repentance is the dividing line that divides. And Jesus has no problem saying there is a dividing line between those who trust me and believe me and come to me in faith and repentance and those who reject me and reject the offer of grace.

There is a dividing line. But it's not the line that we draw. We like to draw the dividing line of culture and race and ethnicity and work and career and socioeconomic status. Jesus says it's those who

come to him in faith and repentance, which is why it all comes down to Jesus.

And so Peter tells us here about Jesus. And what does he say? Well, he says three things in particular. Look at what he says here. Firstly, he says, Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus is Lord of all. Look at verse 36 it is. Peter says this. As for the word that God sent to Israel, preaching the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, then our Bibles, he has brackets.

He is Lord of all. That's in some ways the main point. Jesus is Lord of all. He is Lord of all people. Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus is Lord of the people that we find hard to accept and welcome.

[28 : 06] Jesus is Lord of the beggar that lives under the bridge. Jesus is Lord of the frustrating neighbor who lives upstairs, keeps you awake at night. Jesus is Lord of every political leader, every business leader.

Jesus is Lord of the family member who makes life difficult for us. Friends, Jesus is Lord of the colleague who scolded you this week and told you that you're rubbish. Jesus is Lord of the person who didn't reciprocate your romantic intentions.

Friends, Jesus is Lord of the world's wealthiest people and the world's poorest people. Jesus is Lord of that young lady who was trafficked into sex work in Wan Chai, who was used and abused and treated as nothing but a tool for some men's distorted pleasure.

Friends, Jesus is Lord of your life. He's Lord of you. He's Lord of me. Jesus is Lord of all. And because he is Lord of all, he gets to determine a person's value and wealth, not culture, not media, not our bank accounts, not the things that we look to.

Peter also tells Cornelius that Jesus is the justifier of all, the vindicator of all. Look at verse 43 with me at the end. He says, In verse 28, Peter says to Cornelius, Now why is that?

[29 : 43] Why is it that Peter should not judge anyone? Is it because this new religion called Christianity is so very woke, so very welcoming and tolerant of everyone? We don't judge anyone.

Well, that's not the reason. The reason is, no friends, because Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, also died on the cross for all and was raised for all who will trust in him and believe in him.

Jesus Christ was made the ultimate outsider so that anyone can become the insider. Jesus Christ was the one who was rejected so that anyone who trusts in him can be welcomed and accepted.

As the apostle Paul would later write, For God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us so that in him we who trust in him, anyone might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. And Jesus is the vindicator, the justifier, the welcomer of all. But then look at what he also says, verse 42. Jesus is judge of all.

[30 : 47] Verse 42 says, And God commanded us to preach to the people, to testify that he, Jesus, is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.

Neil showed me this week that usually we get that the other way around. We think the Old Testament prophets talk about judgment, and Jesus is here just to talk about grace and mercy. This passage actually tells us that the Old Testament prophets spoke about his forgiveness of sins, and Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead.

Friends, our assessment of people is always warped. Even with the very best intentions, we've always got mixed motives, self-justifying pride, sinful attitudes.

But there is one whose judgment is perfect. One who can look into the very intentions of the heart, who knows everybody perfectly. His judgment is just. His judgment is true.

About a year after I had coffee with my friend Lux, I got to know him, and we started a bit of a friendship. And we had coffee about a year later, downtown Cape Town at a coffee bar called Deluxe Coffee Works.

[31 : 54] And there at the coffee bar, I told Lux what I was thinking the first time I met him. And I told him the story of how I had judged him, and how I told him that in my mind, being a person of black skin, dark skin, made him more suspicious in my mind.

I remember looking him in the eye and saying, Lux, I judged you because of the color of your skin. And with tears streaming, I think, down both of our faces, I apologized and I asked for his forgiveness.

Yes, I was a pastor, but yes, I still had a lot of discrimination and prejudice in my heart. Yes, I needed the grace of the Lord Jesus to work in me, and forgive me, and change me.

That day, Lux became more than just a friend. He became a brother. I think we still are today.

Friends, the deep work of God needs to reach, not just the outer corners of the world, not just to Cornelius and Caesarea and China and Mongolia and North Korea and Iran and the outermost

ends of the earth.

The gospel also needs to work in the innermost parts of our hearts. It needs to get to the place where we struggle to let it in. The same Lord Jesus that's going to save Cornelius and his household from the judgment to come is the same Lord Jesus that's going to change Peter, the apostle, the representative of Christ, and drive out the discrimination in his heart to change him from a man of judgment to a man of welcome.

[33 : 21] Friends, that same Lord Jesus, that same grace is what needs to change us, change me, change you, change our city. So what are we going to do with this message?

How can we live differently this week? How might the Lord Jesus, the judge of all, the justifier of all, the Lord of all, how might he want us to live differently this week? And so here are just three questions for us to think about.

Friends, who do you find it hard to accept? Who do you find it hard to welcome? Are there any people groups, any ethnicities, any job types that you think are below you, beneath you, below your status, your station in life?

Friends, what do your circle of friends look like? Who are the people that you hang out with? The people you socialize with? Are they all just like you? The same economic bracket?

Are there people with the same education, same backgrounds, same career trajectories, going to make them the same path? Or are there any people that will never match your social status, never match your socioeconomic status, that are part of your circle of friends, people that you can welcome?

[34 : 27] Because the gospel has equalized relationships. Thirdly, friends, when we come to church, when we join a CG, do we just sit with people that are just like us? Do we join a CG of people that are just like us?

Or can we maybe be those that find people that are unlike us, and yet one with us, because of Jesus? The book of Acts is the story of God's remarkable power.

How his gospel message spread from a small band of followers in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And it's the story of how the gospel is still going out, all over the world. This was God's doing. No strategic planning, no vision statements, or 10-year plans. Friends, this was nothing less than the power of the living God, through the power of the living Holy Spirit, through the church, changing people's lives.

But the gospel that was so powerfully at work in the cities and the nations of the world was also at work in the people of God. It needed to be at work in them as well. If Peter, the great apostle, and Jesus Christ only represented, needed the gospel to change him, friends, how much more does it need to change us as well?

[35 : 31] Let's come to him now in prayer, and ask him to do that. Lord Jesus, we confess, God, that there is more of Peter inside of us than we like to admit.

Living God, we need you. Have mercy upon us. Forgive us. God, sin is so deceptive, it's so deep, that it often blinds us to its role in our life.

We often think we are fine, we're not as bad as we used to be, and we think we are fine. But God, your gospel wants to keep on going deeper. And so I pray, Lord Jesus, the gospel that changed Cornelius, the gospel that changed Saul, the gospel that changed Peter, let that gospel come and change us.

Make us a community that is like what heaven's going to be like one day, full of diverse people, welcome, accepted, loved, not judged, because you, God, are at work in our hearts.

We pray this in your almighty name. Amen.