

Acts

Peter Takes A Risk

Focal Verses: Acts 10:24-38

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISCOVER** Peter told the Gentiles about the message of God's love; **CELEBRATE** God loves all people; and **COMMUNICATE** God's love to those who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior.

In Focus

Katrina and Tiana had been friends since the beginning of the school year. They came from very different family backgrounds, but the two girls found that their differences made the friendship interesting. Tiana didn't have anyone to spend the holiday weekend with because her dad had been in jail since July. She was staying with her older brother, Deshawn, who thought it best to work double shifts, with time-and-a-half pay over the holiday, to make extra money. Katrina couldn't bear the thought of Tiana being alone for the three days, especially at night, so she got her parents' permission to invite Tiana to stay with them.

Katrina was nervous when Tiana showed up Friday night for dinner, with a hot pink wig on. She could see her family trying not to stare as she introduced Tiana to everyone. But in the end, everyone seemed to like Tiana a lot. Monday evening, after Deshawn picked her up, Katrina's mother noted, "Tiana is so fun! I'm surprised you haven't invited her over to visit before!"

God wants us to extend a welcome to everyone. Today we'll discuss how Peter was prompted to extend God's welcome to Gentile believers. What can the church do to extend its welcome to those who are different than the majority?

Keep In Mind

“Then Peter opened his mouth and said, “In truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons³⁵ but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted by Him.” (Acts 10:34-35 KJV)

Lesson Text

Acts 10:24-38

24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself also am a man.”

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

28 And he said unto them, “Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man who is a Jew to keep company with or to come unto one of another nation. But God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying as soon as I was sent for. I ask therefore, with what intent ye have sent for me?”

30 And Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

31 and said, ‘Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms have been remembered in the sight of God.

32 Send therefore to Joppa and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodged in the house of one Simon, a tanner, by the seaside. He, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.’

33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee, and thou hast done well, that thou hast come. Now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee from God.”

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said, “In truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons,

35 but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted by Him.

36 The Word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) —

37 that Word, I say, ye know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

The People, Places and Times

Caesarea: Caesarea, also known as Caesarea Maritima (“of the sea”) or Caesarea Augusta, (named after its founder Caesar Augustus) was a port city located 25 miles north of modern-day Tel Aviv. The city was built by Herod the Great sometime between 22 and 10 B.C. Caesarea, known for being a very beautiful city, contained many marbled structures. It was also known to contain a large hippodrome, a theater, a sewer system, and a sheltered harbor. There were five main roads leading into the city which, in addition to the harbor, made transporting people and goods easy.

Tanner: A tanner’s job was to clean and prepare animal hides to be used as leather. They employed a process which stripped the remaining hair, fat, and flesh from the animal skins. As one might imagine, it was considered an undesirable job due to the sights and smells it entailed. Furthermore, tanners were considered ceremonially unclean by Jews, because they were in constant contact with dead animals. Tanneries were often required to operate outside of city walls or along seashores to keep away the odors they created.

Background

Jewish law was very specific about what Jews were to eat and how they were to conduct themselves. The dietary laws Peter references are found in Leviticus 11:1–47. In their original form, these rules were meant to protect the people of Israel and set them apart as God’s people. These laws and covenant agreements made it possible for sinful humanity to commune with God. However, through Christ’s sacrifice, God removed the barrier of sin between Himself and His people. Humanity could now commune with God through the acceptance of His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21–26). This transition from law to grace through Christ created friction between Jewish Christians who still held to their Jewish culture and the new Gentile believers who hadn’t converted to Judaism. Some Jewish believers expected non-Jewish believers would fully convert to Judaism, taking on all Jewish customs and practices, including circumcision. This tension not only threatened the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles, but also the unity and potency of the Christian church.

Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch is recorded earlier in Acts 8:26–38. Similarly, salvation is given to the Ethiopian man based on his acceptance of Christ, not his cultural background. While this instance occurred in relative isolation, Peter's later interactions with Cornelius would be publicly known. This would represent a deep challenge to the beliefs of Jewish Christians, but it would also be an opportunity for them to finally understand God's will for the Gentiles."

In Depth

1. Peter Meets Cornelius (Acts 10:24–26): Peter, obedient to the prompting of the Lord, agreed to travel with Cornelius' men to Caesarea. Cornelius, apparently certain of Peter's arrival, has gathered friends and family to hear what Peter will share with them once he arrives. Cornelius' actions are indicative of his trust and belief in what God has instructed him to do. Not only does Cornelius do what he is instructed by sending men to find Peter, he expectantly looks forward to what God will do when Peter arrives.

Cornelius' response to Peter's arrival is to worship him. Peter quickly asks Cornelius to stop worshipping him and stand. Peter was already taking a risk by entering the home of a Gentile, something forbidden by Jewish culture. It was important for Jews to avoid any appearance of idolatry, which included entering the home of idolaters. Cornelius' worship of Peter would have been of immediate concern because it might have appeared to others that Peter was engaging in idolatry."

2. Peter Speaks to Cornelius' Guests (Acts 10:27–29): Upon entering Cornelius' home, Peter becomes aware that Cornelius has invited his friends and household to hear Peter. He explains his decision to accept Cornelius' invitation despite potential purity issues for entering a Gentile's home. He alludes to the vision he saw (Acts 10:11–16), sharing that he now understands that he is to no longer consider Gentiles unclean or impure. Consider how it must have felt for Cornelius and his friends to hear Peter, a devout Jew, tell them that he would no longer consider them impure because they are not Jewish like him. Furthermore, it was the God whom he serves that had shown him this truth."

3. Cornelius' Story (Acts 10:30–33): It is now Cornelius' turn to explain why he has called for Peter. He describes the visit he received from the angel. Earlier in the chapter, Cornelius is described as being a "devout man" who "feared God" (vv. 1–2). The fact that he was fasting and praying when the Lord sent him the message is proof of this. His generosity to the poor has been noticed by God as well. Rather than explaining God's acceptance of Gentiles to Cornelius directly, the angel directs him to find Peter. In his obedience, Cornelius is used by God to help orchestrate His will for his family and Peter. God intends to minister to both parties in this experience. Cornelius now explains that they have been waiting expectantly for what God wishes to speak to them through Peter."

4. Peter Delivers the Gospel (Acts 10:34–38): At this point, it all becomes clear to Peter what God was doing and what he was to preach to Cornelius' people. Gentile uncleanness would no longer be a barrier to fellowship between Gentile and Jewish believers. God does not view Gentiles as unclean nor withhold fellowship from Gentiles on account of their racial and religious heritage, and neither should the Jewish people. They only need fear God and do what is right. Again, consider the impact of hearing Peter speak these words to the Gentile audience in Cornelius' home.

Liberating Lesson

Jewish and Gentile believers were learning that salvation was based on their acceptance of Christ, not cultural heritage or outward actions. Today, despite having freely received the acceptance and love of God through Jesus Christ, it is easy for us to slip into thinking that we have somehow done (or can continue doing) things that warrant God's approval. This quickly results in judging others based on how well they live up to a human standard of righteousness. However, when we remember that we are only accepted by God's grace through Jesus Christ, we can extend grace, love, and acceptance to those around us (**Romans 5:15–17**).

Application for Activation

Peter took a risk by going to Cornelius' home and ministering to his household. Are there any ways in which God is asking you to take a risk to reach out to someone? Prayerfully consider stepping out and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in ministering to that person.

Closing Prayer

Week of 05 May 2024

Daily Bible Readings



Monday – Ezekiel 16-17

Tuesday – Ezekiel 18-20

Wednesday – Ezekiel 21-22

Thursday – Ezekiel 23-24

Friday – Ezekiel 25-27

Saturday – Ezekiel 28-30

Sunday – Ezekiel 31-33