The Salvation of the Gentiles Part 3

We have been studying Acts chapter 10 in the flow of our study of the book of Acts, and we’ve been learning so many practical points. In this particular chapter, we have the account historically of the communicating of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now without being repetitious to the point of annoyance, let me just remind you of this thought, that Jews and Gentiles have been antagonistic for centuries by the time we come to Acts 10. And the moving of the Gospel to the Gentiles to include them in the church is a monumental, cataclysmic event. Very, very important, and that is the theme of the 10th chapter as Peter is chosen by God to be the instrument to carry the Gospel to Cornelius and other of his household who come to Christ; and that begins the inclusion of the Jews and Gentiles into the one body, which welds together the body of Christ, not only in Jerusalem, but in Judea, Samaria, and now finally the outermost part of the earth.

So it’s a great and classic historical chapter; but it’s also the story of the conversion of a man, a real live man by the name of Cornelius and some real people who were his friends; and so it’s important not only historically, but it’s important soteriologically, which means salvation. It’s important for its history. It’s important because it’s the story of a man’s conversion, and we’ve looked at both of those things as we’ve moved through this 10th chapter.

And now we come in the conflux of events to the very moment of the meeting between Cornelius and Peter. God has done some tremendous preparation. Peter has been made ready by a special vision. His prejudices were attacked and begun to be broken down. Cornelius has been made ready by another special vision and told to go send some men to find Peter, for Peter would be the one to communicate the truth to him. So everything is ready, and the men have met. In fact, they met in our study last week, and they came together reporting how it was they were led to this meeting. And as we approach our text today, we’ll find that Peter begins to preach, and the first words of the verse which really will become our message is, “Then Peter opened his mouth and said,” and here Peter pours out the content that is needed at that moment to bring an already prepared vessel to the salvation that he awaits.

Now the message which Peter gives, the dominant message, is stated in verse 36, and we’ll just basically introduce the message by going over that verse. “The Word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all.” The message that Peter is giving is the message of peace. That is the message of the Gospel. Man is in open rebellion against God in the first place and is not at peace with God. It is only Christ who can bring him to peace with God. Man is also in rebellion against his fellow man. Men are selfish, self-centered, self-motivated, independent, and they do things which will reflect best on them not on somebody else. Consequently, to bring men to peace with each is extremely difficult, but it is exactly that which the Gospel accomplishes: First peace with God; secondly, peace among men. In fact, the only true peace comes from God. Peace for the Christian is a reality. Peace for the unsaved man is an impossible dream. Can’t happen.

In 1 Corinthians 14:33, the Apostle Paul said this. “God is not the author of confusion but of” – what? – “peace.” God is not the author of confusion but of peace. You look around the world, you say, if God’s God, why is the world in such a mess? God didn’t make the mess. God is not the author of a mess, of confusion, of hatred, but of peace. Paul, in his benediction, the church at Rome, called God the God of Peace. At the end of the book of Hebrews chapter 13 verse 20, the same statement is made regarding God. He is called the God of Peace. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul calls Christ the Lord of Peace. Jesus leaving, said to His disciples, “My peace I leave with you, not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled.” He gave His peace. Peace comes only from God. Anything manufactured by man is temporary.

An amazing statistic that I read from a historian was this: Of all the peace treaties that have ever been made between men, all of them have been broken on a national level. You see, papers don’t usually make for peace. Paul put it this way. In Ephesians 2, he said this, “He is our peace.” Now what did he mean by that? Well suppose two people had a quarrel, a knockdown, drag-out quarrel over some particular issue. And they could not resolve it, and it was very, very volatile. And so lawyers got into the act, and there were countersuits and all of this kind of thing going on, which is so common today. And they went to court, and the court drew up a legal document stating the rights of each and told them to be at peace on the basis of that document. Well the chances are, friends, and you know it as well as I do, that the quarrel would continue, that the breach would remain, because no peace is ever made on the basis of a paper.

But then suppose that there is a third party, and this third party is somebody that both of those two fighting people love and who in return loves them. And let’s say that that individual takes the hand of one and the hand of the other and clasps their hands, that person becomes their peace. And the chances of their peace are much greater when there is a common love for an individual, and they can get together on the basis of that common love than through some kind of legal document. And that’s exactly what Paul meant when he said, “He is our peace.” You see, God couldn’t draw up a thing and say, “All right, now all you Jews, you have these 42 rules. All you Gentiles, you have these 42 rules. On the basis of those two rules, I want you to be at peace.” It wouldn’t work. So God just took Jesus Christ, and He found that if a whole lot of Jews fell in love with Jesus Christ and a whole lot of Gentiles fell in love with Jesus Christ, a whole lot of Jews would be in love with a whole lot of Gentiles.

Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 6, he said, “For he that is joined to the Lord is” – what? – “one spirit.” If I’m one with Christ as a Gentile, and a Jew is one with Christ as a Jew, we’re one with each other. There’s only one body. There’s only one body, and we’re one in Christ. He is our peace. He doesn’t teach us about peace. He doesn’t give us a little document about peace. He is our peace. It is as we are in Him we are at peace with other who are also in Him. Well that’s his message. See, here’s Peter and the Jews are there and the Gentiles are there, and Peter knows that peace is the issue. And first of all, establishing peace with God, a man could have peace with his brother.

Remember the prodigal son? What happened to the prodigal son? Well, the prodigal son thought it’d be better to go off and do what he wanted, do his own thing. So he gathered up all of his goodies and told his father he wanted his inheritance, took off for a far country and lived it up. Riotous living, women, wine, song, and the whole bit, and he had a great time. Shot his wad. Often happens. Decided he needed a job, and he got a job slopping hogs. That’s not a very good job. I used to do that in high school. That’s a terrible job, come to think of it. And you know, he came to himself one day, and he said, “This is not a good job.” Good thinking, fella. And so he decided, “I’m going home to my father.” Took off for his father, and remember his father was out there? Bible says his father fell on his neck and kissed him, you know, and they had a wonderful scene. He was reconciled to his father. But you know, there was still a renegade in the group. Who was that? His brother. And it took a little time before that reconciliation came about. But first of all, reconciled to the father, the possibility of reconciling to the brother was made.

And that’s exactly the picture of the church. You see, it is when men are reconciled to the Father that they can be reconciled to their brothers, to each other, only in Christ. And that’s the point. If Jew and Gentile are to be one in the church, they’re going to be one in Christ. On no other basis. Too many years of fighting, too many years of hatred. I mean the Jews have been going around for years saying Gentiles were created to provide fuel for the fires of hell, and Gentiles have been going around for years saying Jews are no good but for slave material. And that had been inbred and ingrained in those two people too long to ever be settled by a document. It had to be settled by an overwhelming love, by a miracle from God, and it could only happen in Christ. That’s the message that Peter wants them to get. That there is peace, not only with God and the peace of God, but peace with each other. So peace dominates. That becomes Peter’s theme.

Now there’s a twofold theme as we have repeated to you several times since studying chapter 10. That is that we see here the record of Cornelius getting saved, and we also see the beautiful record of the history of the Jews and the Gentiles becoming one in the church. Both of these are important, but as you know, we have decided to concentrate on the salvation of Cornelius, seeing the features of his salvation that are universal.

There are six things that we mentioned to you and put in your little outline that are the sequence events in salvation. Now let me footnote by saying this: Salvation is not a process; it is a moment miracle. For example, take birth. Birth is not a process. It’s something that happens in a moment. A child comes out and it’s alive, but there is a period that leads up to it, a pre-preparation, and then there is a post-preparation. The baby is prepared by God to be born, and then it is prepared to live life after it is born. Certain things need to be done. Take care of that baby.

The same thing is true in salvation. Though the actual new birth is a momentary miracle, there is a pre-preparation and a post-preparation, and this is what we’re seeing here. Not that salvation is a process. You don’t say to somebody, “Well, I’m in week six of being saved, and you know, it’s a nine-week process.” No, it’s not. It’s not that at all. It’s just that there is a pre-preparation and a post-preparation that’s obvious in the sequence of salvation. We see that all outlined here in the 10th chapter. Now, we’ve already considered several of these things in this universal picture. Let me just remind you what they are. You have an outline. The six things that really are the features of the sequence of salvation are sovereign call, submissive will, simple proclamation, spiritual power, symbolic confession, and sweet fellowship. Now we’ll cover those one at a time.

First of all, salvation begins with sovereign call. We saw this. Peter has been prepared by God to meet Cornelius. Cornelius is the guy who’s going to be saved, and God has prepared Cornelius. Salvation initially is God’s activity. From the divine side it begins. The natural man, no, he has no capacity to understand the things of God. They’re spiritual-discerned. He’s spiritually dead. He doesn’t know anything about it. He cannot comprehend it by empiricism. He can’t comprehend it by philosophy. There’s no way that a natural man can know God. Romans 3, Paul says, “No man seeks after God.” He’s just completely lost. Second Corinthians 4 says that, “He is blinded by the god of this world lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto him.” In other words, the man is locked into deadness, blindness, deafness, an inability to raise or to make a rational conclusion concerning God and salvation. He’s completely trapped in his sinfulness.

Therefore, the initiation of salvation must come from God’s sovereignty. That’s exactly what it says in John 1, “As many as received Him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God. Even to them that believed on His name.” Oh – not of the will of man, not of the will of the flesh, but of the will of God. Salvation initiates with God. Romans 8:28, Paul put it this way, “All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose.” In Romans, the same chapter, Paul later on says, “Whom He called,” and then he goes on, “Whom He called, He saved, He sanctified, and He’ll glorify.” You see, salvation begins with God. Paul – look at Paul for a classic example. Just traipsing down the Damascus Road. Wham! God smacked him right straight in the face with a vision of Jesus Christ and said, “I want you.” And he said, “Okay.” Sovereign call. We’ve covered that in the first 20 verses of the chapter, that’s what it’s talking about.

All right the second point, submissive will. Now when we talk about sovereign call, we’re not saying that God is in heaven stamping out little rubber ducks with no will of their own who just quack when he pokes them. God is not manufacturing little robots all wound up with spiritual springs determined by God and planted in the guy. But there is an activity on the part of a man. Salvation is not just God; it’s us responding to God, and that’s where submissive will comes in. And we find that clearly outlined in verses 21 to 33, which we studied last time. Because in those verses, we find how responsive Cornelius really was. Boy, Cornelius was so open. He had just – God just moved upon his heart, and he had responded immediately. In verse 33, he says, “Immediately I sent to you.” As soon as I heard what the angel said to me in the vision, I moved on it. Salvation is a matter of will. Jesus simply said this. He said looking at Jerusalem and the leaders, He said, “You will not come unto Me that you might have life.” Sovereign call, yes, but the beautiful paradox is it also demands a human response. As I said last week, you don’t go running around saying, “Gee, I hope God will save me one of these days. I’m waiting to get zapped.” No, it’s a matter of your will, too. You’re not just waiting for some divine act. You are involved in your will, and the Spirit of God moves upon your will till you come to that crisis point of decision which you receive Jesus Christ.

And so we find then, that Cornelius had a will to respond to God. God had done the preparation work in his heart. God had taken a blind, dumb pagan who couldn’t understand God, couldn’t talk to God, couldn’t see God, couldn’t know God, and God did a work in his heart, turned him around, gave him a sight that he could see God. He saw God. He saw the light that God had given him, and he lived up to that light. Right? And when a man lives up to the light God gives him, God does what? Gives him more light.

People always say, “Oh, what about the heathen? What about” – don’t worry about the heathen. Don’t worry for a minute about the heathen. God knows exactly what He’s doing with the heathen. There’s no such thing as a man who’s lived up to the light that he has who will be damned by God. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” Here was a pagan, Cornelius, and he had – somehow God had worked on his heart, and he had seen the light, and then he saw that the Jehovah of Israel was that God that he knew to be, and he attached himself to Judaism as a God-fearer. Remember, we gave you a definition of that? He attached himself to Judaism, and he was living up to the light he had, and he was a good man. And God saw the man, and He saw that his heart was right, and that he had lived up to every revelation God had given him, inside of him and outside of him, and God moved to give him a full revelation that he might be saved. And that’s how God deals with pagan people, whether they’re pagans in New Guinea or Madison Avenue, New York. Cornelius illustrates submissive will.

Let me take it a step further and just a footnote. Peter also shows the will of a Christian in this, doesn’t he? Do you know that God not only choose people for salvation, but hang onto this one, he chooses people for service? Did you know that? You just look down in verse 41 and you’ll see it. God had raised Jesus and shown Him openly, “Not to all people, but to unto witnesses chosen before by God.” Do you know that God had certain select people that He chose to be the witnesses of the resurrection? John 15, what did Jesus say, “You have not chosen Me. I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go forth – bring forth fruit.” You see, He chose the disciples. God not only chooses to salvation, but He chooses people to serve us. I am here at this church teaching you because God has chosen to put me here. I’m chosen of God for this task, and I’m grateful. God choose His servant. But you know something? The servant also has to be submissive. God may have chosen you for certain, specific duties. You need your will involved. God’s not going to pick you up by some kind of divine chariot like Elijah and, you know, haul you off. You got to go. And so Peter illustrates the submission of the will of a Christian in doing what God called him to do.

We went all over this. You know, I closed last time with Psalm 119:60. Let me just remind you of a principle. In Psalm 119, you have tremendous statement repeated – well, what is there? A hundred and seventy-six verses or something – and it’s just over and over and over and over, talks about how the psalmist loves the Word of God. Now that’s the spirit of obedience. Let me just show you. In Psalm 119 – don’t try to follow me, just listen – verse 16 says, “I will delight myself in Thy statutes. I will not forget Thy Word.” Can you imagine a guy who loved commands that he had to obey? That’s what’s known as the spirit of obedience. Here’s what I mean by that. You say to your daughter, “Honey, do the dishes.” Well then you’ll find out whether she has the spirit of obedience or not. She’ll say, "Oh, the dishes. Mmm." She goes and does the dishes. Why? Because she’s afraid that you’re going to, you know, give her a little shot if she doesn’t or take away her allowance, something like that. You ever had your daughter come in and say, “Mom, are you done so I can get the dishes done for ya?” You say, “No, never had that happen.” You say, well, that’s stretching depravity pretty far, you know. But the point is this. One is obedience. The other is the spirit of obedience.

The psalmist said in Psalm 119 verse 60, and this is the classic definition of the spirit of obedience, “I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.” Isn’t that beautiful? The spirit of obedience says, “I’m in such a hurry. I got to get going, because I got some commandments I got to keep.” Isn’t that terrific? That’s the spirit of obedience. It’s one thing to be obedient. It’s something else to have the spirit of obedience. Some people are obedient out of fear, they’re afraid of God’s punishment; out of legalism, they think that they can please God by doing it and He’ll like them better; and some people are obedient because they love Him so much they’d rather serve Him than do anything else. That’s the spirit of obedience, and, incidentally, that’s synonymous with maturity. That’s synonymous with maturity, spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature people are in a hurry to obey God. And look in the Psalm, he just repeats it. Verse 20, “My soul breaks for the longing that it hath unto Thine ordinances at all times.” You imagine any guy like that? He says, “God, my heart is just breaking, because I can’t get over this desire to keep Your commandments.” You say, wow, that guy’s a far – a long way from where I’m at. Well, that’s spiritual maturity.

He goes on in verse 24, “Thy testimonies are my delight.” Hmm, interesting. Verse 47, “I’ll delight myself in Thy commandments which I have loved.” Verse 70, “Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in the law.” You know, it’s like saying, “Mom, give me some commandments. I’m just so eager to obey.” Oh, that sounds so strange. That’s maturity. Verse 97, “Oh, how I love Thy law.” You say, no, no, no, you’re supposed to say, “I love Thy grace.” No, no, I love Thy law, because it is in my obedience that I can prove my love. That’s good. Verse 103 – I’m just picking out some that – “How sweet are Thy words unto my tastes. Sweeter than honey to my mouth.” And over in – was it 140? – “Thy word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it;” 167, “My soul hath kept Thy testimonies. I love them exceedingly.” Now, that’s the spirit of obedience.

Well, Peter had that. Submissive will. As a believer, he had the desire to submit himself to the will of God, not grudgingly, but because he loved to do it. That’s the spirit that God wants. Well, so that’s a footnote. Free for nothing. But anyway, in verse 21 to 33, we see this submissive will of Cornelius as he obeys the moving of God in his life, and salvation is set up: Sovereign call, submissive will – whammo – he is ripe. He has lived up to the light that he has had. He has obeyed the information God has given him, and God’s about to give him the final information.

We come thirdly and to verse 34 to simple presentation. And the reason I call it that is because that’s exactly what it is; it’s a simple Gospel message that Peter gives. There aren’t very many sweeping theological, grandiose, complex statements. Just simple, simple content. Why? This guy is ready. In fact, Peter doesn’t even get his sermon going. Peter later on gives testimony to the Jews in Jerusalem, he says, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them.” What does that mean? That means that God in effect was saying, “Shut up, Peter, you’ve said enough. They’re already saved.” Peter had probably a long way to go. He only began to talk. They were saved. The Spirit came, and the Lord ended the meeting. They were so ready.

Boy, it’s a tremendous thing. All they needed was the simple content, and that’s what Peter came to give.

It’s a good illustration of this, friends – it’s a good illustration of the fact that you can have a guy who believes a lot of things, who’s a good man, who’s a righteous man all the way down the line, but who doesn’t know Jesus Christ because he hasn’t heard the Gospel. This man was prepared by God. He was willing in himself. He had all the ingredients, but he still needed to hear the gospel. And I believe that no man – mark it – will ever enter into heaven apart from faith in Jesus Christ. You say, well, what if they can’t hear? They will. God will never hold back truth from a man who wants to know. John 7:17, “If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.” Christ said, “Whether I speak of Myself or not.” In other words, if a man lives up to what he has, God will always give him more light. Don’t worry. God knows what He’s doing.

All right, so Peter’s going to begin his sermon, and it’s a fantastic approach. Peter is a master of introductions. He can sense the situation. You remember back in Acts chapter 2, how the Holy Spirit created a citywide illustration for him? He had everybody speaking languages and the wind and the whole thing is going on and everybody’s in a turmoil; and they can’t figure out what’s going, and Peter stands up and says, “You men of Judea and Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken unto my words.” Now, I’m going to tell ya what you saw, and everybody goes riveting on Peter. See, he lets the Holy Spirit create the illustration, and he just slides in. It’s a great thing. It’s a great thing. Great way to introduce, and we always learn this in public speaking, a great way to introduce your message or your speech is to always accommodate a situation that’s going on that everybody’s aware of, and that immediately ties you into the scene.

Well Peter does it so beautifully. Mmm. You can just picture the scene. They’re in Cornelius’ house – nice house probably – and the Jews are there and the Gentiles are there. Now that in itself is a shaky thing, because Jews didn’t go into Gentile houses, remember? The Jews at the crucifixion of Christ wouldn’t enter the house of Pilate, because they would become defiled and couldn’t take the Passover. They thought it was a defilement to go in a Gentile house, as I told you, because they felt their abortions – that they put their abortions down the drain and that brought a seven-day defilement. They didn’t want to get near those Gentile houses. There were other things that they didn’t like either, but they wouldn’t go in. Well here they are sitting in a Gentile house, probably really, you know, concerned. And over somewhere else are the Gentiles. And you’ve probably got the Jews looking over and saying, “Gentiles, ooh, what a deal.” See? What’s going to happen? And it was probably so thick in there, you could of cut it with a hatchet. You know? And the Gentiles were over there looking at these Jews. See?

Well, Peter can just sense that just that stuff is in the air, you know. Just like two feuding parties sitting in the same room. It’s just thick. And Peter begins his introduction – beautiful – listen to this. “Then Peter opened his mouth,” which is the best way to start. If you’ve got something to say, “And said,” – you know, I used to think, well, why would they say that? “Peter opened his mouth and said.” It’s redundant. Of course he had to open his mouth to say. But if you understand what that means, the term “opened his mouth” is a colloquialism in the Greek, and it means he was going to say a very weighty saying, a very heavy saying, and I mean he had a saying that was going to shatter centuries of prejudice. Believe me, he had some heavy things to say. So, “Peter opened his mouth and said” – and what a zapper this was – “Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” See, there they are. We’re Jews, what are you doing with those crummy Gentiles? Says, “We’re Gentiles, what are you doing with those crummy Jews?” God is no respecter of persons. There goes the air out of their balloons, see. Beautiful introduction. Riveted their attention upon him. He cut right through the issue with one statement. Masterful introduction.

There’s another thing that I think I need to mention here that you ought to keep in mind. Notice that there’s no condescension on Peter’s part. Notice he doesn’t say this, “Now we Jews have come to you Gentiles because we care.” See? “Yes, we see you Gentiles as needy people.” None of that kind of condescension. You know, when I was in the South ministering in a black community, in black churches and all over the place, black schools and stuff, one guy said to me one time, and I always remember this, he said, “You know, John,” he says, “I think what makes your ministry effective here” – and I never even thought about it. I mean just, you know, I never premeditated it. He says, “I think what makes your ministry effective here is you don’t condescend.” He said, “We get people down here who – white people, who condescend to the black community. They come and they say, ‘We white people, we love you, you negroes.’”

See? Well all that does is just turn them off, because that’s condescension. See? That’s saying, “Yes, you’re worthy of our communicating to you.” See? You’re treating them like second-class people and that’s dynamite. That’s dynamite. So there was no condescension here. He doesn’t say, “Well you Gentiles, we’ve come to share with you.” You know? Not at all. He simply says, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of person.” Now, the term “I perceive” is very interesting. It’s a linear tense verb, and what he’s saying is, “I’m getting” – it’s continuous action – “I am getting a mental grip on the fact that God’s grace embraces everybody. All classes of men. I’m getting it,” he said. Well he’s slow, but he’s getting it. Right?

I mean the very fact that he’s in Cornelius’ house is good. And he’s a leader, and his six Jewish brethren over there who’ve come along – and now you see why it was so important for him to bring them – his six Jewish brethren who have come along, they’re followers and Peter’s a leader. And when they see Peter going this way, then he speaks hard to them, and their tendency would be to follow. So immediately he blasts his audience by saying, “God is no respecter of persons.” Let’s get that thing off the top and out of the way. We’re not dealing with nationalities, racial prejudice, or anything like that. That is not even an issue. Get rid of that altogether. “God is no respecter of persons.” He says, “I am beginning to understand that.” That’s quite an admission.

In Romans several places Paul indicated that he understood it clearly. Romans 3:29, “Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also. Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.” Right? Faith is the issue, not whether you’re Jew or Gentile. One God. Over in chapter 10 – isn’t it in verse 12 – he says this, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.” Paul understood it. He understood it perfectly. There is no distinction.

The meaning of the vision – you know, Peter looked back in his mind and he saw that sheet coming down with the clean and unclean animals in it that he’d had earlier in chapter 10. Oh, it was coming. The thought was beginning to get clear, you know, like the steam that comes off the mirror in the bathroom, you know. Just kind of rises and pretty soon the image is clear. That’s what Peter was doing. In his mind, it was all kind of defogging, you know? And he was beginning to see. Now he should’ve seen this a long time ago. You say, well, didn’t God teach in the Old Testament that God liked the Jews a lot better than anybody else? Absolutely not. Deuteronomy 10:17, first of all let me read you that. “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and an awesome one” – listen to this – “who regardeth not persons.” Who regardeth not persons. That’s clear back in Deuteronomy. God doesn’t have any favorites. Goes doesn’t play on nationalities. There’s another tremendous statement in 2 Chronicles 19:7 that is on the same theme. Listen to this. “Wherefore now, let the fear of the LORD be on you” – Why? – “Take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons” – listen to this – “nor taking of bribes.” Can’t bribe God. He’s impartial. Absolutely impartial.

Now that’s exactly what Peter is beginning to awaken to; and isn’t it an interesting thing that God had already told them that way, way back. Paul had it stated simply this way in Romans 2:11, “For there is no respect of persons with God.” There never has been. There never will be. Now this you say, well, that’s obvious to me, Pugh. Why wasn’t it obvious to them? Well there had been a lot oc traditions that had grown up, and a lot of rabbis had confused the issue, and the Jews, instead of becoming missionaries and evangelists, had become separatists. God is not only the God who cares about Israel, but He cares about all men. In fact, there’s a great statement, Amos 9, “If God brought Israel out of Egypt,” Amos says, “He also brought the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir.” You say, well what do you mean by that? Just the fact that God’s also active with other nations. God is not a respecter of persons. Listen to what Micah said. Micah said that here is God’s requirement, that a man “do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” Now that is a completely irrelevant statement in terms of national terminology. That has nothing to do with nations. Makes no sense at all if it’s only talking about Jews. He says simply this, any man is “to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” So a Gentile can fulfill it as well as a Jew. God never has been a respecter of persons.

I want you to notice that word that is there, “no respecter of persons,” because it is one word in the Greek – one Greek word – and it means to honor a person above somebody else. Partially, to rank people. It is used one other place – interesting place. James 2, let me show it to you. Listen to verse 1 James 2, “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” If you’re a Christian and you’re in the body, there is no ranking of people. This is tough for us to get over. Then he gives just a painfully practical illustration. “For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring” – See? Here comes some rich guy – “and fine apparel, and there come in a poor man in crummy clothes” – see, they arrive at the door at the same time. Well, the old usher thinks, “Hmm, I think I’ll take care of the guy with the ring.” See? Verse 3, “And you have respect to him that wear the fine clothing and say to him, ‘Sit thou here in a good place,’ and say to the poor, ‘Stand thou there or sit under my footstool,’” – oh – “‘are you not then partial in yourselves and are become judges with evil thoughts.’” Verse 8, “If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scriptures, you should love your neighbor as yourself. You do well.” – listen – “But if you have respect of persons, you commit” – what? – “sin.” Do you know that to respect a certain people over another people is sin? Let me ask this. Can God sin? No. Then can God respect Jews more than Gentiles? No. All are equal in His eyes. God selected Israel, not because He liked them better, but because He needed somebody to be His witness. And so there is no respect of persons with God. And within the body of Jesus Christ – it’s a practical point, people – make sure that we are equally sharing the love and the ministry that God has given us with the poor and the down and out as the up and in. When we’re doing it for the glory of the Lord and not to make social points, I think we’re getting on the right track.

All right, so Peter started with that devastating shot that just rattled their cages and tore down their prejudices, and it may be that he expanded the point as I have, since this is only excerpts from what he said. It may be that he took it further than that. But verse 35, anyway, he says this, “But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.” It doesn’t matter, says Peter. It’s amazing to hear Peter say this, but you know, there’s been a lot of times in his life when he said stuff he didn’t even know he knew. That happened to him, remember, in Matthew 16 when Jesus said, “Who do men say that I am?” And the disciples said, “Well, some say You’re Elijah. Some say You’re Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” And He says, “But whom say ye that I am?” And Peter says, “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.” And then I’m sure he went, “Oh, where did that come from?” You know, and the Lord kind of must of chuckled and looked at him and said, “Flesh and blood didn’t reveal that to you. My Father in heaven did.” See, “You didn’t know that, Peter.” He probably said, “I know, I didn’t know that.”

But he was always saying things inspiration – divine inspiration. He got up there on the Day of Pentecost, and I’m sure he asked somebody if they had a tape of that message so he could figure out what he’d said. God was just speaking through him as a vehicle. He gets up there and he says, "In every nation he that fearest Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.” You know, that was totally against what that man had learned all his life. Now that’s the revolution that God can bring about in the heart of a man through the Holy Spirit. You ever seen a man changed? If a man’s ever been truly changed, it’s been by Jesus Christ. And even after you become a Christian, you keep getting changed, don’t you? He keeps breaking down things. Ole Peter’s prejudice were falling apart, and so Peter says, “In every nation” – all classes, all ages, God accepts, watch – “he that fears Him and works righteousness.”

Now there you have two things: the right attitude, fearing God. What does the word fear mean? Reverence, “And worketh righteousness,” the right action. The right attitude and the right action, that’s what God looks at. If a man lives up to the revelation God’s given him, and he makes that obvious by his fear of God and his desire for right action, God looks at him and accepts him. Now I’ll show you what I mean by that in a moment, but let’s stick with attitude and action.

Two things, really, lead to the acceptance of God: The right attitude and the right action. James put it this way, “Faith without works is – what? – “dead.” There’s got to be verification in the action that the attitude is legitimate. God expects that. God wants that. If a man – watch now – if a man lives with the knowledge of God that God puts in him, and he lives in agreement with that knowledge, God will increase his knowledge. Through somehow, God, through some means, God will do it, give him more knowledge. If he lives up to the more knowledge, God will give him more light. And even a pagan Gentile who never saw the law of God can be led to God by living up to that revelation which God has given to him. Let me show you that from Romans chapter 2 verse 12 – verse 14, “For when the Gentiles, who have not the law” – they don’t have the Old Testament to give them the revelation of God. “When the Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature” – just by their inside propensity and desire – “the things contained in the law, then they, not having the law, are a law to themselves.” And what does this reveal? “They show the work of the law written in their hearts.” You see, God plants His law in the heart of a pagan. If a pagan wants to live up to that law, God will give him more law, more light all the way along. That’s what it’s saying.

All right, Cornelius did. He really reverenced God. He was not saved yet. I say that because in verse 14 of chapter 11, Peter reports, “Who shall tell thee words by which thou and all thy house shall be saved.” So he wasn’t saved, but he had lived up to full light that he’d had, and because of that, the desire was in his heart to serve the God that he knew to be, and he had attached that God to Israel. Jehovah of Israel he knew was the right God, and he was beginning to do good things. Remember, he gave to the poor, and he gave alms. He prayed. He did all these things, so he had the right attitude, and he had the right action. Therefore, God accepted him. Now, what does that phrase mean? Look at it. “Is accepted with Him,” does it mean you earn your way to heaven by good deeds? No, no. It doesn’t say God saved him. It said God accepted him for what he was. What was he? He was a man who had lived up to the light that he had. He still wasn’t saved. If he was saved, he wouldn’t have needed Peter to come in and go through all of this Gospel. This is what he needed to hear. God regarded him with favor is what it meant. God regarded him as a man who had responded and lived up to the light that he had, and God moved in with more light. God does this.

Let me give you a verse clear back in Genesis to answer the same question about whether the heathen are lost and how can they know if they don’t hear and all this. But listen to 18:25 of Genesis, “That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked.” Do you think God’s going to send good people who have lived up to all the light they had to hell with ones who have rejected Him? No. “And that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee!” Then he says this, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” And then LORD says, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous, I’ll spare the city.” You say, well, what do you mean, fifty righteous? Fifty people that God knew had lived up to the light that they had within them in a pagan city. God knows the heart of every man. God knows where that man is in terms of his relation to Him. And if that man has lived up to what light he has, God will invade that man’s life with the truth of Christ. Let me say this, too; I don’t believe any man will ever got to heaven apart from Jesus Christ. And I believe, therefore, that if a man lives up to the light that he has, somehow God will communicate to that man the facts concerning the atonement of Jesus Christ. Whether by name or not, I don’t know; but in fact and in truth I believe He does that.

Hosea, you know, the people there were offering God sacrifices, and then they were going through all the ritual, and God says, “But I don’t accept it,” Hosea 8:13. Why? Because it’s superficial. You’ve got to have the right attitude and action, not just the right action, and that takes us into the Jewish concept. The Jews weren’t accepted by Him. Why? Well, they had the right attitude. They believed He was God. I should say they had the right action. They followed through on all of the activities in believing that He was God. It looked very good, but down in their hearts they didn’t really have the right attitude. The Gentile may have had the right attitude, but didn’t just exactly know all the performance. There must be both. The Gentile with the right heart attitude, God accepts. The Jew with all the right activity and the wrong heart, God rejects. That’s the message of Romans 2.

All right, so God then communicates through Peter that salvation is an issue to any man who reverences God and endeavors to serve Him. He lives up to the light that he has. This is so classically illustrated. I want to take a minute to give you this illustration in Matthew 8:5. Listen to this tremendous story of another centurion. “And Jesus had entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him, saying, ‘Lord, my servant is at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.’” I got a sick servant. “Jesus said unto him, ‘I’ll come and heal him.’” Listen to the faith of this guy. “The centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. Just speak the word, and my servant will be healed.’” Can you believe that kind of faith? Just say a word. He’ll be healed. You can do it across the miles. It doesn’t matter that You’re there. I don’t feel worthy to have You in my house. That’s a humble man with the right attitude, but it’s also a man who knew where the truth was. He knew Christ was the one he needed.

I love this in verse 10. “When Jesus heard it, He marveled and said to them that followed, ‘Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.’” You people have all got all the right actions and you have the wrong attitude. This guy may not know all of the rigmarole, but he’s sure got the right heart, and his actions are righteous. Theirs were unrighteous, because the attitude was wrong. The two go together. So He says this great statement, “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west” – and that’s Gentiles – “and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven.” He says the kingdom is going to be populated with Gentiles. Then listen to this fearful statement. “But the sons of the kingdom” – who’s that? Jews – “shall be cast out into outer darkness, and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” You see, the right action without the right attitude isn’t anything at all. And God will accept a pagan out of the darkest place of ignorance if he fears God and the best he can shows that fear is real by working the best kind of righteous things he can do. God will look at him – He doesn’t say, “Okay, you’re saved for doing that.” He says, “You’ve lived up to the light you have. I’ll give you the light you need to be saved.”

The sad things is, people, and this is the thing that grieves God’s heart, is that neither the Jew nor the Gentile really live up to the light they have. In Romans 1:18, what does it say? “The wrath of God is revealed . . . against ungodliness of men and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” They hold it. They reject it. It simply goes on to say that the truth of God is manifest in them and from the visible world around, but when they saw God, “they glorified Him not as God.” They twisted it. Right? Worshipped the creature instead of the Creator. The Jews had done the same thing – Romans 2. He says, “You boast in the law. You boast in your teacher of babes.” You boast this. You boast this. You boast that. Then He turns around, “You that preach to others, why don’t you preach to yourself?” And He says, “You have become such as caused the name of Christ to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.” The sad thing is neither Jew nor Gentile really live up to the light that they have. And at the end of chapter 3, he concludes that both are damned under sin. They conclude that all are in sin.

So Peter sets the theme by saying, "Salvation is available and it’s available to any man, any place.” Any kind of man who will live up to the light that God has given him and have a seeking heart. God calls that man. That man responds with his will. That prepares that man’s heart, and God never rejects a prepared heart. Do you believe that? I believe that. If any man wills to do His will, he’ll know the truth; but you know what God needs? God needs Peters. He needs Peters to run around and pick off those prepared hearts. That’s where we come in.

Now next week, we’ll see the gospel that Peter gave Cornelius, and the beautiful thing is that before Peter ever finished his sermon Cornelius got saved. All he wanted Peter to do was crack the door, and the whole slew of Gentiles went rushing through it. Peter never even got finished. You know something, people? There are several things that speak to me in this. Many things about prejudice and so forth and so on that speak to me. The thing that really hits me is the fact that I must be available, because God has got prepared fruit ready to pick. Remember what Jesus said? What do you mean four months and then harvest? Look, the harvest is already ripe. See? I mean what we need are people to go and pick it off now, see. God needs Peters who know the gospel and who can go out to the work that God has already prepared.

You know, there are people in this world who have lived up to the light they have, who have submitted to the call of God. They’ve brought their will into harmony. They’re only waiting for somebody to explain Jesus Christ to them. That’s all. I’ve had occasion to lead many people to Christ just like that, who just dropped off at the first indications of the gospel. Let’s be that kind of Peter. Let’s reach that kind of work. And let me add this, at this time of the year, when people’s thoughts are on Christ, maybe the Spirit of God will allow us to have set up opportunities to do just that.