

# Acts 10

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 March 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Do you be seated and turn to Acts chapter 10.! Acts chapter 10. I've struggled somewhat in putting this sermon together.

! In fact finders there are no questions under the third point.

And there's a reason for that which will probably become apparent when we get to the third point.

Acts 10. The humble brag.

Bittersweet. Clearly confused. A deafening silence. What are they? What are they?

Oxymorons. Oxymorons. A humble brag. Bittersweet. Clearly confused. Deafening silence. Never lord.

[ 1 : 11 ] Look at verse 14. I think that's the verse that cracks open the chapter. Peter said, By no means lord.

Never lord. Never lord. It's one of the things that is repeated three times in the New Testament. By the same guy.

Peter says, Never lord. Do you remember? Jesus speaks in Caesarea Philippi. He tells his disciples that he is going to be handed over, mocked, crucified.

He will die in Jerusalem. And Peter says to him, Never lord. That's not going to happen. Jesus says to him, Get behind me, Satan.

Just a little bit further. I'm on. They're in the upper room the night before Jesus' death. And Jesus astonishingly takes a towel, wraps it around him.

[ 2 : 12 ] And he starts to wash the stinking feet of his disciples. And Jesus stoops to wash Peter's feet. And that is too much for Peter. And he says, Never lord.

He says, You'll never wash my feet. And Jesus says, If I don't wash your feet, I won't wash any part of you. I've got to wash all of you. And here it is again.

Acts 10, verse 14. Peter says, No lord. Never lord. I've never eaten anything clean or common. First of all, Peter says no to the cross.

And then he says, I think no to conversion. In the upper room. And here he's saying no to the Great Commission. Acts 10, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is about to jump into another culture, into another world, this cultural divide from Jews to Gentiles.

And Peter is saying, Surely not, Lord. If God had let Peter get away with that in Acts 10, then you and I wouldn't be here today.

[ 3 : 22 ] Because this is where the gospel leaps out of the, a cocoon of Judaism, into the big wide world. It's rightly referred to as the Gentile Pentecost. Gentile means non-Jew.

And it's such an important event that it's repeated three times. This morning I've kind of seen the number three everywhere in this passage and in Acts. I don't know why. So if you know why three comes up so often, I'd love to know why.

But this account is repeated three times. It's in chapter 10 and chapter 11. And then again in chapter 15. And the story unfolds actually in three movements.

So there are three V's. These are the points I've stolen from someone else. There is a vision. And there are visitors. And then there's a VIP. It took a vision to change Peter's mind.

Two visions. One vision at three o'clock in the afternoon for Cornelius. He had a vision. And an angel tells Peter Cornelius to send for Peter.

[ 4 : 25 ] Peter's 30 miles down the road in a place called Joppa. And so there's two visions. If you look at chapter 10 and verse 9. And we're told that Simon Peter is staying in the house of Simon the Tanner.

In a place called Joppa. It's midday, boiling hot. It tells us that lunch is being prepared. And there is Peter on the flat roof.

He's surrounded by animal skins on the roof. Because Simon's house is a tanner. Simon is a tanner. They're being stretched out to dry. The smell of lunch is wafting up the stairs.

Joppa's on the harbour. And so there are sails flapping in the breeze. And as Peter prays, he dozes. And as he dozes, he prays.

And God seems to use all these external stimuli in Peter's subconscious. And he sees, doesn't he, a vast sail. He sees a vast sheet being lowered down from heaven by its four corners.

[ 5 : 35 ] It's full of creepy crawlies. And all the unclean animals from the book of Leviticus are there. And the vision comes with sound, doesn't it? Verse 13.

And there came a voice to him saying, rise Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, by no means. Rise Peter, kill and eat.

It's the death knell to veganism and vegetarianism. Peter says, I've never eaten anything unclean. And what you're asking me to do is not right.

Look at verse 14. Surely not, Lord. I've never eaten anything that's common or unclean. And then, what happens? A voice came from heaven a second time.

What God's made clean, do not call common. It's happened three times. Three times, Peter protests. Three times, God lowers the sheet.

[ 6 : 36 ] Three times, God says, don't call unclean what God calls clean. Now, let me apply this for a minute. What's going on? It's pretty obvious, I think, when you think about this.

Peter is being dealt with, isn't he, by God. And his prejudices are being dealt with. I don't know what your prejudices are.

We don't see them in ourselves, do we? I'm not the one with an accent. You are the ones, all of you, with accents. None of us like to think of ourselves as prejudiced.

It's like the man who said, I'm not xenophobic. That's a horrible Greek word. That's another joke I've stolen. We always, we don't realise to be how prejudiced we are.

If God were to deal with you this morning, and lower a sheet down from the ceiling, what would be on that sheet? What are the no-nos? What are the taboos?

[ 7 : 42 ] So for this bigoted, racially prejudiced Jews, it's a smorgasbord, isn't it, of unclean animals. But what would it be for you?

What would it be for me? A mullet? Lamb biryani? An iPad?

Nose ring? Facial tattoos? A business suit? A burka? Who are you prejudiced against?

Which people do you, I'm instinctively, shy away from? When you're walking through Ealing? Goths? Immigrants?

Boomers? The working class? The well-dressed chattering classes? Yuppies? Nerds?

[ 8 : 45 ] Roadmen? Punks? Geeks? It's a good thing, isn't it? I'm not out of touch. And those words probably, they don't mean anything to you, but there are lots of different tribes out there in our city.

Let me put it to you another way. Who are we not going to with the gospel? Who's not here this morning?

Who's not in our church on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening? I read this week that Presbyterian churches in the US, which are a little bit different, but Presbyterian churches in the US are often perceived as middle class, white, affluent, intellectual, and culturally elitist.

And isn't that something to be proud of? And it's not just us Presbyterians, is it? Last summertime I was on sabbatical and went to lots of different churches around the city.

And there are ethnic churches which make very clear that their church is confined to a certain language and a certain skin colour. There are class-bound churches that make it clear that only a certain class of people are welcome through their doors.

[ 10 : 01 ] There are churches for geriatrics, which do not expect anyone to turn up under the age of 65, by the way they run their meetings. And there are churches where if you're over 25, you're made to feel old and that you don't fit in there and you're whispered to that maybe the morning service is a little bit better for you.

There are racist churches. There are tribal churches. There are sexist churches. And Peter's vision challenges all of that. Yes, salvation is of the Jews.

Yes, God may have sent the gospel to Israel first, but he intends it for everyone. And God sees this world in glorious technicolour. A tapestry of races, tribes, and groups that are all made after his own image.

And he rejoices in every one of them without exception. And they all need to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus. They all need the saviour of the world. They all need the gospel, every tribe and tongue.

And the challenge for us as God's people is, well, what are we going to do about it? All these people around us. And so here is, if I can put it like this, the first hammer blow to Peter's prejudice. [11:16] It's the vision of the sheet. Three times it comes down. And then a remarkable coincidence. Look at verse 17. There's a knock on the door. And just while Peter is thinking about this, about what it all means, there's a knock on the door.

And the second point is, Peter, you've got visitors. And three visitors turn up on the doorstep. Look at verse 17. Now, while Peter was inwardly perplexed, I think that's an understatement as to what the vision that he'd seen might mean.

Behold, the men were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate. Peter's still thinking about the vision. And they say to him, well, there's three men at the gate looking for you.

How is that for timing? What are the chances of that happening? These men have set out the day before yesterday. And they arrive at the very moment that Peter is still reeling in shock, trying to think, what does this vision mean?

Can you see the sovereignty of God? The sovereignty of God, that God has choreographed the whole kind of thing. And what appears to be a coincidence is in fact synchronized.

[12:37] There's a chorus that I used to sing when I was a little boy. And I do not know what lies ahead, the way I cannot see. Yet one stands near to be my God. He'll show the way to me. I know who holds the future.

And he'll guide me with his hand. With God, things don't just happen. Everything by him is planned. And I think that should be a massive comfort to us, isn't it?

That you and I do not know what lies ahead in the future, but we know the one who holds the future. And we know that God is absolutely sovereign. And God can work all things together for the good of those who love him, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And that is a huge, huge comfort, isn't it? That there is a God who's in charge of this world. It is our sovereign God.

And so here's another hammer blow to Peter's prejudices. Because now he's got to do, what's he going to do with these visitors? Is he going to invite them in? Remember, he's a Jew, and they are Gentiles.

[13:43] And Jews do not eat with Gentiles. What is he going to do? Is he going to invite them in? Or is he going to send them away? Will he go with them? He could leave them standing on the doorstep.

But no, he's told to get his bags and to go with them. In verses 19 to 20. And while Peter's 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. Get up, go, don't hesitate. It can easily be translated, the hesitate word there, it can easily be translated, don't discriminate.

This is me, Peter, God is saying. This is a God moment. I sent these men, and so he goes.

The next day they set out, and a day later they arrive at Cornelius' house. Look at verse 24.

Cornelius is expecting them, and he's called together his relatives, and his close friends. And Peter said to them, You're well aware, you're well aware, that it's against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile, but God has shown me that I shouldn't call anything unclean.

[15:08] I shouldn't call any person common or unclean. So typical of Peter. Every time he opens his mouth, he puts his foot in it, and here he goes, Peter is no diplomat, despite what God has shown him.

His prejudices are still showing here. He says, like to be honest, Cornelius, of course I shouldn't really be here.

Jews don't mix with Gentiles. So what do you want? God has told me that I should come, and Cornelius is so gracious, isn't he? Look at verse 30. Four days ago, about this hour, Cornelius said, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. He said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard. Your arms have been remembered before God's send. Therefore, the jopper asked for Simon, who's called Peter. He's lodging in the house of

Simon the Tanner. So I sent for you at once, and you've been kind enough to come. What a polite man. Peter, who's obviously very uncomfortable about being in a Gentile house, says, well, you know we Jews, we're not supposed to be here.

[16:16] We're not supposed to eat with Gentiles. But God told me, so I better come. Here I am. What do you want? Cornelius says, it's good. It's good of you to come.

So good. And then he says these remarkable words. He says, now we are all here, in the presence of God, to hear all that you've been commanded by the Lord.

Look at verse 33. And that is a summary of, I hope, Sunday morning and Sunday evening.

We're all here, in the presence of God, to hear all that you've been commanded by the Lord. And this church is better than most.

But the trend in the UK at the moment is that, that people are in church, in churches like this, on average, about one in every three Sundays. People are away an incredible amount.

[17:22] I'm really thankful that that isn't the case here. I know it's easy to think in London, we've got to get away for weekends all the time. But I think that, that actually is a real misunderstanding of what is going on, when the people of God gather.

Why, why we need to be here. That when we can't be bothered to come to church, it's a great insult to God. And when the king, issued invitations to his coronation, he did not invite people to turn up. He told them they had to. And so when I stand in this pulpit, or Roman stands in this pulpit, and we open the Bible, God is speaking to you. That's what we believe. And when the Bible is preached, God speaks.

Now, of course, that's not as important as your birthday. Is it? It's not as important as a really big Premier League game. It's not as important as the golf.

Now, therefore, we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. And that means, isn't it, when we believe that, that we come with real expectancy, that we come expecting God to address us, waiting to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

[18:55] And so let's pause for a moment and try and remind ourselves, what is God teaching us through Acts chapter 10? He's teaching us that the gospel is for everybody, not just for people who look like you and me.

If you're not a Christian here this morning, you're not yet a Christian, and we want to say thank you for coming and we're really pleased to have you with us and you might be thinking, I'm not that sort of person.

People say to me, I'm not the religious type. Let me tell you, the gospel is for you. No one is too good for the gospel. Cornelius is actually a very decent bloke, isn't he?

He's the sort of guy you want your daughter to marry. He's the sort of neighbor you'd love to have. Look at verse 2, he's a God-fearing man with a social conscience. He gives generously to the poor, verse 2. He prays regularly and look what it says, God sent him, God answered his prayers by sending him a missionary to convert him.

Do you get the irony of that? In the next chapter, Peter has to explain to the other apostles verse 18 of chapter 11, he sums it up like this, that God has granted repentance.

[20:12] A turning. And so Cornelius is a really nice bloke who does good things, but God has granted him repentance through eternal life.

At the Council of Jerusalem, in chapter 15, Peter said, God made no distinction between us, the Jews, and them, the non-Jews. Both of them need cleansing.

Their hearts need cleansing by faith. He said Cornelius is a really nice guy, but his heart still needed to be cleansed. He's a nice man, but he needed to be made a new man.

People say the most ridiculous things. They say, my grandson, he's such a lovely boy, really, really lovely lad, but he's not a Christian. He's such a lovely lad, but he's not a Christian. No, he's not. Nor am I, nor are you. You might describe him as a lovely boy, but he's without God and without hope and he's going to hell without the Lord Jesus. Do you realise that?

[21:22] Do you realise that good people, good people go to hell. Bad people go to heaven. You've been reading your Bible wrongly if you don't see that.

Jesus said, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And so, don't be surprised when you look around this room and you come to church and you find a bunch of hypocrites.

There's always room for one more because church isn't for nice people, it's for nasty people. Nasty people who know that they need to be rescued and Cornelius is really nice but he knows he needs to be saved.

And your neighbour might be much nicer than you are, probably is. But he's not a Christian unless he's come to faith and come to put his trust in the Lord Jesus and his need of salvation.

The gospel is for all, no one is too bad and no one is too good. Everyone needs to hear this gospel. Everyone and everywhere. Peter learns something else in verse 34.

[ 22 : 33 ] The penny drops and Peter says, now I realise that God doesn't show any favouritism. It's interesting, Peter forgot this. You go to the book of Galatians and the apostle Paul has to call Peter to account because he accuses Peter of being out of step with the gospel.

Peter is showing favouritism to the Jewish believers and he's withdrawing from the Gentile believers in a place called Antioch and the apostle Paul has to call him out. On your modern devices, on your modem or on your iPad or on your iPhone, your phone, there is a reset button, isn't there?

And there's times when things go wrong or the thing isn't working properly and you've got to press the reset button. And it's like that in the Christian life, isn't it?

There are times when we've got to press the reset button and realign ourselves with God's gospel. that we're not living in line with the Christian gospel and so we've got to press the reset button and we've got to keep challenging ourselves and bringing our feelings and our thinking and our church and the programmes that we run in church into line with the gospel.

The gospel is grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. It is not Jesus plus speaking in tongues or it's not Jesus plus baptism by immersion or it's not Jesus plus being a Presbyterian.

[ 24 : 08 ] It is Christ alone and we've got to keep bringing our thinking and we're going to again and again back into line with that. God gave him a vision. God sent him on a visit and then briefly and lastly look what happens next.

Verse 44. A VIP turns up. A VIP, a very important person. Verse 44.

While Peter, while Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. I'd love to be interrupted like that.

To be able to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. I think that is London's greatest need. We have, don't we, a really impossible task as a church family.

The huge, huge commission to see the city won for the Lord Jesus Christ. To speak to our friends and our family about the Lord Jesus. We find that terrifying.

[ 25 : 19 ] But this glorious truth is we're not on our own. And there is one who will go alongside us. There is a comforter, a paraclete who the Saviour sends to be with us.

In the next chapter, Peter explains the significance of this in verses 15 to 17. We'll look at it. It says, What's happening in chapter 11 is a rerun of Pentecost.

That kind of one-off event. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. If then God gave the same gift to them as he'd given to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?

When they heard these things, they fell silent and they glorified God and said, Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life. So what's happening in Acts chapter 10 is what happened in Pentecost with Jews from all over the world is now happening to the Gentiles.

And so it's a one-off. And yet I want to say there is an epidemic, isn't there, in my life and in churches all across London of very dry Bible talks, which are a little bit like comprehension exercises.

[ 26 : 50 ] And we do want, don't we, the Holy Spirit to come through his word. While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and believers from among the circumcised who'd come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

This is a watershed moment in Christianity. It is the final nail in the coffin of Peter's prejudice. And since God makes no distinction, neither should we.

And maybe today, you and I need to be realigned with the gospel of grace. And God is saying to Peter and he's saying to us, there are teeming millions out there who've never heard the gospel.

Peter loathes them, but God loves them. Peter needs a change of heart. I now realise, Peter said, it's a defining moment.

The penny drops. The Holy Spirit has come on the Gentiles as he did with the Jews. And so I wonder for you today, will it be a defining moment?

[ 28 : 07 ] Maybe you're somebody here, you're thinking about the gospel, but you've never really grasped it, you've never really understood it, you've never actually been gripped by it. Well, today is the day, isn't it, to call upon the Lord.

And for maybe some of us, it's time to press the reset button. To recognise that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God.  
Let's pray.