

ACTS 10:34-48

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues^[a] and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

IN 1912, THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY HAD A PRODUCTION MANAGER NAMED WILLIAM KNUDSEN, WHO WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST IN HIS FIELD.

HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE “MODEL T” HAD TO BE UPDATED.

THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS - HENRY FORD LOVED HIS CREATION SO MUCH IT WAS WELL KNOWN THAT HE OPPOSED CHANGING ANYTHING ABOUT THE CAR.

WHILE FORD WAS OVERSEAS, KNUDSEN THOUGHT TO CONVINC FORD BY BUILDING AN UPDATED AND IMPRESSIVE MODEL TO SHOW WHAT COULD BE DONE WITH A FEW CHANGES IN COLOR AND DESIGN.

WHEN FORD RETURNED FROM A EUROPEAN VACATION, HE SAW THE NEW DESIGN CREATED BY KNUDSEN.

WITNESSES TOLD HOW FORD, WITH HIS OWN HANDS BEGAN TO DESTROY WHAT HE COULD OF THE CAR.

AFTER THAT, KNUDSEN LEFT FOR GENERAL MOTORS AND HENRY FORD NURSED ALONG THE MODEL T.

BUT FINALLY, THE NEW DESIGNS OF COMPETITOR’S MODELS COMPELLED FORD TO UPDATE HIS CAR, MAKING THE MODEL A, BUT HIS HEART WAS NEVER IN IT.

THE STORY REVEALS THAT WHILE HENRY FORD WAS ONE OF THE MOST CREATIVE MEN OF HIS AGE, HE RESISTED THE OBVIOUS NEED FOR CHANGE.

CHANGE, FOR MOST PEOPLE IS BOTH CHALLENGING AND UNCOMFORTABLE, EVEN WHEN IT IS GOD WHO BRINGS ON THE CHANGE.

THIS IS ONE OF THE LESSONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT READING.

WE ARE NOW IN THE SEASON OF EPIPHANY- THE TIME IN THE CHURCH YEAR WE CELEBRATE GOD REVEALING HIS SON TO HIS PEOPLE AND THE WORLD.

IT WAS A TIME OF NEW BEGINNINGS FOR THE ADULT JESUS.
AND IT STARTED WITH HIS BAPTISM.

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS SUBMITTING TO BAPTISM WAS TO BE
COMMISSIONED, EMPOWERED, AND BLESSED TO BEGIN THE
MISSION FOR WHICH HE CAME INTO THE WORLD.

HIS MISSION, AS WE KNOW, WAS TO BRING ABOUT THE
SALVATION OF THE WORLD ON THE CROSS, AS GOD
DETERMINED.

THAT WAY WAS FOR MANY A MYSTERY-THE APOSTLE PAUL
DESCRIBED THE CROSS AS A SCANDAL TO THE JEWS AND
FOOLISHNESS TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.

AND WHEN JESUS CAME TO JOHN TO BE BAPTIZED, THE
SCANDAL IN A SENSE HAD ALREADY BEGUN.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, WHO WAS BORN TO PREPARE THE WAY
FOR JESUS, WAS PUSHED OUT OF HIS COMFORT ZONE TO
BAPTIZE THE ONE WHO HE WAS BORN TO SERVE.

GOD, HOWEVER, DESIRED THIS TO HAPPEN AS PART OF THE
FULFILLMENT OF HIS PLAN.

NO ONE BUT JESUS UNDERSTOOD IT, BUT WHEN HE CAME UP
OUT OF THE WATER FOLLOWING HIS BAPTISM IT WAS A
TRANSFORMING MOMENT.

IT WAS THEN THE POWER OF GOD- FATHER, SON, AND HOLY
SPIRIT, TOOK THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE CROSS.

CHRIST'S BIRTH AND GROWING UP WERE OVER, AND HIS
MINISTRY OF TEACHING, PREACHING, HEALING, AND
SALVATION HAD ARRIVED.

JESUS HIMSELF WAS DRIVEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO THE
UNCOMFORTABLE WILDERNESS AS PART OF THIS JOURNEY.

AND WHEN HE RETURNED, HE BEGAN TO DRAW OTHERS INTO
THE NEW THING GOD WAS DOING AMONGST HIS PEOPLE, AND
IN THE WORLD.

TODAY'S READING FROM ACTS OCCURS IN THE TIME
FOLLOWING CHRIST'S DEATH, RESURRECTION, ASCENSION,
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT'S DESCENT ON PENTECOST.

EARLIER IN ACTS TEN, THE APOSTLE PETER IS IN JOPPA,
WHERE HE RECEIVED A VISION DURING PRAYER.

GOD TELLS HIM TO EAT ANIMALS FORBIDDEN TO HIM BY THE
LAW GOD GAVE TO THE JEWS.

HERE, WHAT PETER IS COMMANDED TO DO IS SHOCKING, AND
IS ALSO UNCOMFORTABLE TO HIM.

BUT THE MESSAGE OF THE DREAM IS THAT PETER WAS TOLD
BY GOD THE RULES HAVE CHANGED.

JESUS HAS OPENED THE WAY FOR A NEW BEGINNING NOT
ONLY FOR THE JEWS BUT OTHER PEOPLE AS WELL.

THEN MESSENGERS ARRIVE ASKING TO PETER GO TO THE
HOME OF A ROMAN OFFICIAL.

THE PASSAGE READ TODAY IS PETER'S RESPONSE TO THE
ROMAN CENTURION SHARING A VISION GOD SENT TO HIM,
WHILE HE WAS PRAYING TO THE LORD.

THE MESSAGE WAS FOR CORNELIUS TO INVITE PETER TO HIS
HOME, AND SO HE SENT FOR HIM.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF GOD BREAKING
DOWN NATIONAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL BARRIERS.

A GENTILE ROMAN OFFICIAL, TECHNICALLY AN OPPRESSOR
OF THE JEWS, AS WELL AS A MAN OF SOME WEALTH AND
POWER, WAS TOLD TO SUBMIT TO THE AUTHORITY OF PETER.

PETER, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, WAS OF A LOWER CLASS THAN
CORNELIUS, AS WELL AS BEING AN UNWILLING SUBJECT OF
ROME.

GOD, HOWEVER DESIRED FOR BOTH PETER AND CORNELIUS
TO CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDES IN ORDER TO FULFILL HIS
WILL.

THE LORD DESIRED THEM TO BECOME BROTHERS IN CHRIST, ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE CENTURION'S HOUSEHOLD.

WE SEE THAT THE LORD OF ALL INTENTIONALLY UPSET THE STATUS QUO IN ORDER TO ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM AND WILL.

THE CHOICE THEN MUST BE MADE BY BOTH PETER AND CORNELIUS TO OBEY OR NOT, TO RESIST THE CHANGE GOD WILLS, OR TO BECOME A PART OF THAT CHANGE.

THE MESSAGE FROM ACTS IS THAT THEY OBEY THE LORD, AND THIS COMPELS PETER TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT SALVATION THROUGH JESUS TO HIS ROMAN OPPRESSORS.

THE ROMAN LEGIONS, WERE THE ONES WHO CARRIED OUT THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS. AND NOW, GOD SENT PETER TO REACH OUT TO A COMMANDER IN THE ROMAN ARMY.

PETER WAS SENT TO OFFER HIM AND HIS HOUSEHOLD FORGIVENESS AND NEW LIFE THROUGH CHRIST.

THEREFORE, PETER PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS TO THOSE OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL, WHICH WAS BIG CHANGE IN CHURCH PRACTICE UP TO THIS POINT IN TIME.

HE OFFERED TO THEM THE SAME HOPE AND GRACE HE AND OTHERS- HAD BEEN OFFERING TO THEIR FELLOW JEWS

PETER'S WORDS HERE CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF THE FAITH INTO WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE BAPTIZED.

HIS WORDS ALSO POINT TO HOW GOD BREAKS DOWN BARRIERS OF RACE, TRIBE, NATION, AND ALL OTHER KINDS THROUGH JESUS.

CHRIST ALSO HAS BROKEN DOWN THE BARRIER BETWEEN US AND GOD'S HOLY PRESENCE THAT SIN HAD BUILT UP, AND NOTHING BUT THE POWER OF GOD COULD TEAR DOWN.

THIS ALONE WOULD MAKE THE INCIDENT A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, BECAUSE IT WOULD CHANGE THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

HOWEVER, GOD DID NOT STOP WITH PETER'S SERMON, BUT SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON ALL WHO HEARD HIM AND BELIEVED IN JESUS.

THIS ALSO WAS A GREAT DISRUPTION FOR THE NEW CHURCH, SINCE WITH THE EXCEPTION OF AN ETHIOPIAN BAPTIZED BY PHILIP, ONLY JEWS AND SAMARITANS WERE BEING BAPTIZED.

BUT AFTER THE HOLY SPIRIT FELL UPON CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD PETER HAD A BIG DECISION TO MAKE.

THE DILEMMA WAS- SHOULD HE BAPTIZE THESE GENTILES THEN AND THERE, OR NOT?

IT WAS DECIDED THAT THOSE WHO RECEIVED THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OUGHT NOT TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE CHURCH, AND SO THEY WERE BAPTIZED.

THIS EVENT AND WHAT FOLLOWED, OPENED THE FLOOD GATES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, AND DOORS OF THE CHURCH MUCH WIDER THAN THE FIRST CHRISTIANS ANTICIPATED.

IN FACT, ACTS CHAPTER ELEVEN RECORDS THAT PETER GOT INTO TROUBLE WITH THE OTHER APOSTLES FOR THIS, AND HAD TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF TO THEM.

TRULY, THE UNDERSTANDING THAT GOD DOES NOT LOOK ON THE OUTSIDE APPEARANCE OR WORLDLY STATUS IS CHALLENGING.

SADLY, THERE ARE SOME INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES OF FAITH THAT KEEP TRYING TO BLOCKAGE THE DOORS GOD WANTS OPEN

INDEED, IT CAN BE HARD FOR SOME TO ACCEPT THAT GOD SEES AND JUDGES ON THE OPENNESS OF ONE'S HEART AND SOUL TO HIS SON, RATHER THAN ON WORLDLY SIGNIFICANCE OR LACK OF IT.

BUT THIS INCIDENT FOUND IN ACTS CHAPTER TEN, ALONG WITH THE REPERCUSSIONS OF IT, CHALLENGES US IN ANOTHER WAY.

IT REMINDS US THAT CHANGE CAN BE DIFFICULT, EVEN WHEN BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE WILL AND POWER OF GOD.

THE PASSAGE ALSO TEACHES US ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRAYER THAT NOT ONLY SPEAKS TO GOD, BUT LISTENS FOR GOD'S RESPONSE.

A BIBLE STUDY ON PRAYER OFFERS THIS REFLECTION THE ACT OF LISTENING TO GOD:

“LISTENING IS LETTING GO OF OUR CONTROL TO THE ONE WHO GRASPS THE FUTURE WITH CALM ASSURANCE.

WE ARE NOT ALWAYS SURE WHERE THE CONVERSATION WILL LEAD. GOD'S VISION EMBRACES SO MUCH MORE THAN WE CAN SEE.”

REMEMBER, BOTH PETER AND CORNELIUS WERE GIVEN VISIONS BY GOD WHILE THEY WERE PRAYING. EACH MAN LISTENED AND THEN ACTED ON WHAT THEY HEARD GOD TELL THEM.

THIS FACT REMINDS US ABOUT THE POWER OF PRAYER, WHICH HAS NEITHER WEAKENED NOR DIMINISHED IN THE 2000 PLUS YEARS OF THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

WHILE SOME MAY THINK GOD DOES NOT DIRECT US AS GREATLY THROUGH PRAYER LIKE IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES AND BEFORE, THE PROBLEM IS WITH US AND NOT THE LORD.

AFTER ALL PRAYER DOES NO GOOD IF NOT USED BY GOD'S PEOPLE, OR IF WE DO NOT REALLY LISTEN TO THE LORD.

BUT PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER, COUPLED WITH CONTINUING TRUST IN THE LOVE AND WISDOM OF THE LORD OUR GOD, CAN ACCOMPLISH MORE THAN WE MAY IMAGINE.

WHAT WAS TRUE FOR THE APOSTLES AND ALL CHRISTIANS IN THE EARLY CHURCH REMAINS TRUE FOR US TODAY.

FAITH AND PRAYER, ALONG WITH OBEDIENCE TO GOD, IS HOW WE ARE ABLE TO FACE THE ORDINARY CHALLENGES OF LIFE, AS WELL AS THE CHANGES GOD BRINGS UPON US.

INDEED, WE WHO ARE FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PETER AND OTHER MEN AND WOMEN OF FAITH ARE OFTEN CALLED TO BOLDLY GO WHERE WE DO NOT EXPECT.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THIS IS WE DO NOT GO ALONE, BUT WE ARE GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE LEAD- PHYSICALLY OR SPIRITUALLY.

IN THIS WE CAN GIVE THANKS TO GOD, WHO FAITHFULLY LOVES THOSE WHOM HE CALLS TO LIVE BY FAITH.

IN FACT, SOMEONE ELSE PUT THIS BEAUTIFULLY SAYING: “FAITH IS CONFIDENCE IN GOD EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HIS PLAN.”

THIS WAS WHAT LED PETER TO THE HOME OF CORNELIUS, EVEN WHEN EVERY THING HE WAS TAUGHT FROM A BOY TOLD HIM NO JEW SHOULD ENTER THE HOME OF A GENTILE.

IT IS A SIMILAR FAITH THAT CONTINUES TO LEAD CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS, HIS CHURCH TODAY AS WE WALK THE NARROW WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP.

MAY WE BE INSPIRED AND STRENGTHENED TODAY, AND ALWAYS, BY THE POWER OF GOD AS WE FOLLOW JESUS, OUR SAVIOR. AMEN

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