

Acts 10:1-11:18 – God’s Expansive Purposes

From a young age we are taught to take sides. I was taught to play Cowboys and Indians. Goodies and baddies. This is played out as we grow up. You start watching cartoons and then movies where the whole plot depends upon a good guy verses a bad guy. The State of Origin perpetuates this thinking. This projects into looking at people and see they are different and whether they are good or bad; better or worse. We are taught to forge prejudices and barriers between us and others.

We’re all prone toward prejudice in some form or another. By nature, we put up all sorts of barriers to people who are different to what we are. God must break our prejudices.

The story of the gospel spreading beyond Jewish boundaries toward the Gentiles teaches us from the life of Peter that …

*God purposes are expansive. He **breaks down prejudices** so the message of Jesus moves beyond the Jews to the Gentiles.*

The result of the story is that today you and I who are Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the church with the Jews, and we share in the promise of Jesus through the gospel.

In Acts 10 you have **three main characters**. You have a **Gentile Roman soldier**, representing the despised occupation of Israel, in the main city of the Roman occupation. Down South you have a **Jewish apostle, Peter** staying.

Behind the scenes, **God** is orchestrating the events to bring these two men together in a way that shocked both of them by breaking down the wall of prejudice between them.

1. 2 Visions from God

The word from God to break down barrier

Read: 1-2

There are 2 men who each have a vision from God.

1. A Roman soldier.

v. 2 tells us He is a devout and God fearing. Good man BUT not a Christian. Not converted

We are told in v.22 and v.33 that there is something else he needs to hear. He needs to know. 11:14 makes this clear.

He has a vision that moves him towards hearing this message of Jesus.

Read v.3

2. Peter – an apostle but a Jew. Read vv.9-16

Israel distorted the special relationship with God to be make it exclusive. Their hearts turned to racial pride and hatred. They even considered Gentiles as 'dogs.' They would never invite a Gentile to their house. They would not sit with them at a table to eat.

The vision of clean and unclean food was related to clean and unclean people. Jews as clean and Gentiles as unclean.

Although he is a Jew and an Apostle sent by Jesus he needs the Vision 3 times. It's though that is not enough. He's still trying to workout what it's about. God has to bring the men who come as a result of the Gentiles vision to him.

Read vv.17-23

Peter's first response is:—"Surely not Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean"

At this point Peter is blind to his prejudices. He is still sticking to his ways even though has a direct command from God.

I could point out many ways that we are prone to be prejudiced. We all tend to group people by race or occupation, and then we pigeonhole individuals and judge them because they belong to the group.

The word from God to break down the barrier.

2.2 Journeys

The expression of the breakdown of the barrier

Read: 7-8

The Roman soldier sends his men. The vision commands a journey. Gentile to Jew.

Peter has to be brought but his vision also commands a journey. Jew to Gentiles. vv.23b-28 Peter enters the Romans soldiers' house.

John Stott says: *"Peter refused to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog."*

Brian Welch was a member of the band Korn. He was living a stereotypical life of a member of a metal rock band. Sex, drugs and rock and roll. He life starting falling apart and someone invited him to church. He eventually became a Christian but to look at him you never think he would ever become a Christian. He confirms our prejudices.

Have you ever noticed that the guy driving slower than you is always a jerk, whereas the guy driving faster than you is always a maniac?

By fallen nature, we're all prone to justify ourselves and to condemn those who are different than we are. We're prone to judge others according to outward characteristics, rather than to accept them as individual human beings.

3. 2 Speeches

The message that breaks down the barrier

Read: 30-34

Cornelius' speech recounts the events to Peter. Most importantly he says they are ready to hear from God. The key verse is v.33

Hear what he is saying. He expects God to speak as Peter speaks.

Is that your response as you come to hear the message?

Peter also make a speech or gives a sermon.

Read vv.34-43

We get a summary of the good news of Jesus. He has 3 points. Jesus life. Jesus death. Jesus resurrection. This is the message that Jesus came and broke down the barrier of sin between God and man. What we couldn't do God did.

If you've ever been to one of the **Worlds**. Dreamworld, Seaworld. You'll know they have rides you can go on. Some rides have a **height requirement**.

They have a place where you can see if you are tall enough.

You see some kids trying to make themselves tall enough. They try all sorts of things. It doesn't matter how far they fall short they still fall short.

So God has a standard we are to live up to. Perfection. We all fall short of living up to his standard.

Sure some of us may not fall short as much as others. Well in our own judgment. But we all fall short.

Jesus came to bring us to God. He does this in his death. He lived up to God's standard. He lived a sinless life and so was the perfect sacrifice.

Jesus saw us as people who needed help. He came to earth to be with sinners. So much so that he earned the reputation of being the '**friend of sinners**'.

Is our life so reflecting of Jesus that we could have the same said about us.

I am not saying that we should be tolerant or accepting of practices the Bible calls sin. But I am saying that if we do not face our prejudices and allow God to root them out, we will not be effective in reaching across cultural and personal barriers with the gospel. If we steer clear of certain types of people? If we don't go to people different to us, how will you lead them to Jesus Christ? If you steer clear of young people with body piercings and tattoos, how can God use you to bring the gospel to them?

4. Conversion and Confirmation

The barrier is broken

Read it: 44-48

Conversion happens. Peter doesn't even get the chance to make the appeal and outline the right response to his message. The Holy Spirit jumps in. v.44

They receive the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and praising God. Then they are Baptised.

They show all the evidences of becoming Christians.

Peter returns to Jerusalem and is criticized for what he did. But he confirms inclusion of the Gentiles.

See 11:12.

He has already has a few days of fellowship with these Gentile Christians.

The greatest example of someone breaking prejudices is Jesus. He went to people showing he didn't have prejudices. He wasn't worried about what people would think like we do.

Zacheus, Woman at the well. Can you ever imagine yourself with them?

Attitudes and Action

Our attitude about ourselves will affect our attitude towards others.

How do you view the lifestyles of people you know or meet?

Do I look at their sinful lives and say 'That's wrong' and walk away? Or avoid them?

Or do I look through the surface and love them like God loved me while I was still a sinner?

We should view ourselves as beggars whose job is to show other beggars where to find God's free bread. This is what we are in view of the Gospel of Jesus.

We may well have that attitude. That we are all equal.

But would we see that in your actions if we were to see you during the week.

I am commanded to love my neighbour. I cannot expect my neighbours to come to me. I must go to them. The best place to practise this with each other here at church.

Here's a radical prayer request: Ask God to show you your prejudices. When He does, obey Him by putting your prejudices to death and by showing His love and offering His gospel to those whom you might not naturally be inclined to like. He will use it to exalt His name among the nations!