

4.19.2020 | COVID-19 Week 5

Series: Acts: You Are Sent Volume 2

Sermon: Acts 10 – 11.18 | **Hard Time is God's Time**

Introduction

The past few weeks have been something else haven't they? I think the anticipation of Easter carried us up to last weekend and even though it was different, it was really joyful to worship the resurrection with you all. If you are newer to Mercy Church, we want to welcome you. We had a lot of people join us for Easter and according to the data we had more people engaged in a Mercy Worship Service than ever before in the 4.5 year history of our church. We had several people indicate they received salvation in Christ last Sunday. Praise the Lord!

But now we are still in this thing. And though there does seem to be an end in sight, how this all ends and what a new normal looks like is all pretty unclear. And that's where I feel the need now more than ever for some concrete hope to stand on.

So I want you to get out your bible and turn to Acts 10. This passage of scripture contains the definitive moment in history where God made clear that HIS hope he offers in Christ...he wants every person on earth to have it.

And here's why we are where we are in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 8 opens with the church being scattered away from their hometown because of persecution. They aren't in church with each other anymore. They are on the run, alone, and trying to figure out what the new normal looks like for being a

follower of Jesus when you don't have your church routine to go through every week. Sound familiar?

And the reason its so good for us to be in this is because instead of the church shrinking because its normal operations are shut down...the church multiplies! And Luke, our author, is just sharing the story of the gospel going forward. And I want us locked in because I think fear will tell us that this is a hunker down moment and hopefully we won't lose too much ground during this hard time. That's how FEAR would want us to understand hard times – Try to minimize losses. But That's FEAR. We haven't been given a spirit of Fear. We've been given a spirit of power love and sound judgment.

But listen, **God is working in hard times**. Hard times are when God can do his greatest work in you AND when he can do his greatest work through you. The church multiplies during hard times. The fastest church growth movements on the planet right now are in countries where people aren't allowed to evangelize. Why? Because **God is working in hard times**. And listen I'm your pastor and so I want to do this lovingly but I don't want you to waste your quarantine just trying to "get by." This needs to be God's time in your life. I want you to look back on this 20 years from now and say THANK GOD for what he did in my life during the COVID-19 crisis. He did some work in me that would have never happened otherwise. My marriage needed quarantine, my family needed it, my prayer life need it, my dating life needed it...because while hardship hit us, the mercy of God met us and we were awakened to how much better he is for us than we ever realized. And I got to see him work through me in other's lives.

Acts 10 is going to show you 2 things: First, it's the story of God using somebody who is willing to lay aside his preferences to be used by God. Second, it's the story of God expanding his church in a very powerful way.

Here's how this is going to go for the next few minutes. This chapter has four scenes to it. I'm going to show you the four scenes. Now these 4 scenes cover 66 verses of scripture so I'm not going to read each verse. Then I'm going to show you why a Jewish Fisherman preaching to a Roman centurion 2000 years ago matters so much to your life.

Scene 1: God goes to a Gentile

There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God.

The most important thing here is Cornelius is not Jewish. He's what the Jews called a gentile. Which means non-Jew. That's how they viewed the world. Jews were God's chosen people, and everyone else was gentile. Not chosen. Not God's people. I imagine 98% or more of the people watching this message would qualify as gentile.

There were non-Jews who went to temple though & had been somewhat folded into the Jewish community. Like Cornelius. He saw their religion and revered it and tried to practice it as best he could.

Up until Acts 10 Christianity is Mono-ethnic. All of the

converts have been Jews who have converted from Judaism to Christianity. Because Christ has come as the foretold Messiah of the Jews.

Cornelius is a gentile. But he prays to the Jewish God. One day 3 About three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius." 4 Staring at him in awe, he said, "What is it, Lord?" The angel told him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have ascended as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter.

So Cornelius is like OK. And he does exactly that. Scene over

Scene 2: Peter's Animal Vision

It's the very next day from Scene 1. Cornelius' guys are in town looking for Peter. It's noon and he's on the roof praying and...

11 He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. 12 In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. 13 A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 14 "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean."

Peter is very confused. Because he knows OT law that says that God's people don't eat these animals. That's something GENTILES do. And God's chosen people are set apart from gentiles. These are unclean animals so they are to be eaten by unclean people. The same vision happens 2 more times. When the same vision happens 3 times...you take notice. RIGHT THEN...Peter doesn't even have time to come downstairs

before Cornelius' men knock at the door asking if Simon Peter is there.

19 While Peter was thinking about the vision, **the Spirit** told him, "Three men are here looking for you. 20 Get up, go downstairs, and go with them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them."

Peter invites them in. They say who sent them and he invites them to stay for the evening. The next day they go to Cornelius' house where a large group of **gentiles** have gathered

Scene 3: God's Favorite People

Peter has put a couple of the puzzle pieces together.

28 Peter said to them, "You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean. 29 That's why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So may I ask why you sent for me?"

I don't want you to miss how big of a spiritual leap Peter has taken in the past 24 hours. From living your whole life without associating with a certain group of people...and thinking you were honoring God by doing so...and now God being the one to tell you that very group is not unclean. And now you are in their house. And you don't know why. What a rollercoaster.

So Cornelius catches him up. On what's happened with the angel and everything and finishes saying

33 So immediately I sent for you, and it was good of you to come. So now we are all in the presence of God to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord."

Peter is overwhelmed. The puzzle is complete and it's a revolutionary moment.

34 Peter began to speak: "**Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism**, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ — he is Lord of **all**."

God sent the message to the Israelites. But it wasn't just for the Israelites. They were to carry that message to EVERY NATION. Because God's favorite people...is ALL PEOPLE. He is Lord of ALL. God doesn't have favorites. He doesn't play favorites. And THIS PASSAGE is where that comes from. And then Peter preaches the gospel to the gentiles!

39 We ourselves are witnesses of everything he did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, and yet they killed him by hanging him on a tree. 40 God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen, 41 not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses, 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 appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.

EVERYONE. Peter had no idea what that fully meant before now. He knew Jesus said “for God so loved the world” but Peter couldn’t, at that time, see beyond his own world. Peter understood at that time that the WORLD meant the Jews of the world. And now God is saying no, EVERYONE. Every One. From Every ethnicity across the planet. Who believes Jesus paid the debt for their sins can receive forgiveness from God and find new life in him. EVERY. ONE.

Well what happens next confirms this is a historic moment.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message.

WHILE HE WAS SPEAKING! U see that!? I love how this depicts the simplicity of faith. The Spirit doesn’t need to wait on the sermon to finish. He moves when he moves. When you believe Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins, God saves you RIGHT THEN. He may come to you right now, right in the middle of this sermon and convict your heart and call you to believe. And when he moves, that’s when you respond!

45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God

Lemme do a little bible hop scotch to show you why this matters ok. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that tongues were a fulfillment of a promise given to the Jews in Isaiah 28.11-12...that the gospel would be spoken to the Israelites in a strange tongue, as a sign to their unbelieving hearts that the

gospel was going forward to the gentiles. And THIS IS THAT MOMENT!

By having them speaking in tongues God is orchestrating a second Pentecost. God is giving a sign to the Jews the he is indeed including the gentiles in his salvation covenant! So Peter says:

47 “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? ”

Baptism becomes their external public celebration of what God has done internally to them. No longer will circumcision be the sign of faith. Now baptism is the sign of faith. Which is why when you receive Christ’s salvation we tell you to come and be baptized and we celebrate!

Click the Next Steps button up in the corner.

This was all REALLY hard for the Jews. That takes us to scene 4

Scene 4: The church submits to God’s plan

2 When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, 3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” -- Acts 11:1-3 (CSB)

What are you doing Peter? You know they are unclean. Well, Peter retells the whole thing.

17 If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God? ”

GOD IS MOVING! God is saving people. God is integrating his church. Not just Jews from every culture now. No the church is to be made up of people from every ethnic group! The church, the bride of Christ, the family of God, is now and forever more to be a multi-cultural multi-ethnic multi-generational family... And Peter asks HOW could I possibly hinder God!? It is God's decree that the gospel be for all people.

OK. Now, let's come up for air and I want to talk about Why a Jewish fisherman preaching to a roman centurion 2000 years ago matters to you. I told you 2 things: God working in an individual, and God expanding his global church.

1. God is working in hard times – The church was forced to scatter in Acts 8. And in what felt like hard time...God had been cultivating seeds of his global mission underneath the surface and now, just two chapters later new life is springing up in new places. The Christians are constantly under threat of persecution and death...constantly going through difficulties...and that is God's time! It's his time because in hard time ONLY God gets the glory for the work he does. So let me ask you something right now...

What is God trying to do IN you? But you have been ignoring him. You have been distracted by the false perception of busyness. But now you have a window. What are you doing this afternoon? NOTHING! You aren't going to the lake or to a friends house. You are sitting in your house trying to figure out

if today is the day you cut your own hair or if it can go another week. SIT DOWN WITH GOD! Pray and search your soul and say GOD I don't want to waste my quarantine. **GOD, what do you want to do in me?**

was given a strange calling but he obeyed it because the Spirit of God said GO and he went. And he humbled himself to realize God was showing him something. Before he preached the gospel God did a work in his heart showing him that if GOD loved All people, PETER needed to love all people. And God began tearing the walls of racism down in his heart not by condemning Peter but by showing Peter what he loved! And calling Peter to love as he loves! And even inviting Peter into the process of integrating his church. Started in Peter's heart. God what do you want to do in me? What do I need to trust you with? What sin do I need to surrender? What step of faith do I need to stop fighting?

And do you know the great hope in asking this question...THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS WITH YOU! He's interceding on your behalf before God. You have God's ear in this question. And you have the same power that resurrected Jesus from the grave at work in you. So as you go to him and say ok God I'm going to put myself out here and say what do you want? WHAT YOU NEED TO REALIZE IS HE'S BEEN EXPECTING YOU. HE'S THE ONE STIRRING UP YOUR HEART TOWARDS HIM FOR THIS MOMENT!

2. The Gospel, and God's church, is for all peoples – God does not have a favorite people group. Peter, who knew the grace of God, came to the clear realization that God had no

favorites. That God loved the gentile just like he did the Jew. And if God had no favorites...it meant Peter was going to have to lay aside everything he knew in order to be a part of building God's church the way GOD wanted to build it. And this wasn't easy work. That's why there are so many reminders throughout the new testament letters that God doesn't have a favorite people. Eph 2 – God has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. Galatians 2 Paul confronts Peter for showing partiality to jews over gentiles. 1 Peter 2 – God has made HIS people a chosen race and royal nation.

And I share just a couple of those reminders to say...it aint easy to put down our cultural preferences. But God has said his church is to be one people...a family...made up of all peoples. So the church must be for all people groups. And we are going to keep pressing forward to build Mercy Church in a way that isn't just one majority culture making a little room for minority cultures. But instead is a church built from the ground up for all peoples. God has blessed our efforts these past couple of years but we have a ways to go and the great news of Acts 10 is that we bring glory to God and are in step with what he loves as we pursue that vision.

3. God's Grace is for any person – I know there is somebody watching this who thinks they have disqualified themselves from God's grace. I know there are others who have just lived under the constant impression that they aren't worthy of God. And I'm telling you the bible is filled with stories like these of God going to great lengths to declare that his grace is for any person. And what he's saying here in Acts 10 is his grace is for EVERYONE!?

Not only does Peter say in verse 36 he is Lord of ALL and in verse 43 through his name EVERYONE who believes in him receives forgiveness from sins. His GRACE IS FOR YOU!

4. God SENDS his people to all people – Fascinating right? God is so cool. Orchestrating this whole elaborate plan to bring his salvation to Cornelius & everyone. But that's how God has set this whole thing up. God works THROUGH people. I told you to ask the question "God what do you want to do in Me?" And you need to deal with him. But there is a second question that gets at the heart of God. God sent Peter to announce his grace to Cornelius. And the question we cannot wait a few months to ask is:

"God who are you sending me to?"

GOD IS MOVING RIGHT NOW! It's going to start in your home. Probably people you need to be a blessing to instead of a burden. People you need to repent to for being selfish when Christ calls you to be self-less. Husbands & Wives, let's redeem this time for our marriages. For our families. And let's do so by going first. By recognizing God put me here, and put his spirit of power within me, to BRING HIS GRACE to the people in my home. Maybe you need to share the gospel in your home. I know we have living rooms right now divided in faith. Unbeliever don't just listen to me, listen to your believing family members or roommates.

Prayer Points:

- **God what do you want to do in me?**
- **God who are you sending me to?**