

Peter Takes A Risk

Printed Text · Acts 10:24–38

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCOVER that Peter told the Gentiles about the message of God's love; CELEBRATE that God loves all people; and COMMUNICATE God's love to those who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior.

In Focus

Katrina and Tiana had been friends since the beginning of the school year. They came from very different family backgrounds, but the two girls found that their differences made the friendship interesting. Tiana didn't have anyone to spend the holiday weekend with because her dad had been in jail since July. She was staying with her older brother, Deshawn, who thought it best to work double shifts, with time-and-a-half pay over the holiday, to make extra money. Katrina couldn't bear the thought of Tiana being alone for the three days, especially at night, so she got her parents' permission to invite Tiana to stay with them.

Katrina was nervous when Tiana showed up Friday night for dinner, with a hot pink wig on. She could see her family trying not to stare as she introduced Tiana to everyone. But in the end, everyone seemed to like Tiana a lot. Monday evening, after Deshawn picked her up, Katrina's mother noted, "Tiana is so fun! I'm surprised you haven't invited her over to visit before!"

God wants us to extend a welcome to everyone. Today we'll discuss how Peter was prompted to extend God's welcome to Gentile believers. What can the church do to extend its welcome to those who are different than the majority.

Keep In Mind

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34–35, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Without gainsaying (Acts 10:29) *anantirrhotos* (Gk.) — Without contradiction.

B. Respector of persons (v. 34) *prosopoleptes* (Gk.) — One who accepts only certain people; one who discriminates.

Say It Correctly

Caesarea. SEE-se-ree-uh

Joppa. JAH-puh

KJV

Acts:10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.
28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.
29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?
30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,
31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.
32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.
33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.
34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.
36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

NLT

Acts:10:24 They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.
25 As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him.
26 But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being just like you!"
27 So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled.
28 Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.
29 So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me."
30 Cornelius replied, "Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes was standing in front of me.
31 He told me, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God!
32 Now send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.'
33 So I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you."
34 Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.
35 In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.
36 This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.
37 You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism.
38 And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

The People, Places, and Times

Caesarea. Caesarea, also known as Caesarea Maritima (“of the sea”) or Caesarea Augusta, (named after its founder Caesar Augustus) was a port city located 25 miles north of modern-day Tel Aviv. The city was built by Herod the Great sometime between 22 and 10 B.C. Caesarea, known for being a very beautiful city, contained many marbled structures. It was also known to contain a large hippodrome, a theater, a sewer system, and a sheltered harbor. There were five main roads leading into the city which, in addition to the harbor, made transporting people and goods easy.

Tanner. A tanner’s job was to clean and prepare animal hides to be used as leather. They employed a process that stripped the remaining hair, fat, and flesh from the animal skins. As one might imagine, it was considered an undesirable job due to the sights and smells it entailed. Furthermore, tanners were considered ceremonially unclean by Jews, because they were in constant contact with dead animals. Tanneries were often required to operate outside of city walls or along sea shores in order to keep away the odors they created.

Background

Jewish law was very specific about what Jews were to eat and how they were to conduct themselves. The dietary laws that Peter references are found in Leviticus 11:1–47. In their original form, these rules were meant to protect the people of Israel and set them apart as God’s people. These laws and covenant agreements made it possible for sinful humanity to commune with God. However, through Christ’s sacrifice, God had removed the barrier of sin between Himself and His people. Humanity could now commune with God through the acceptance of His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21–26). This transition from law to grace through Christ created friction between Jewish Christians who still held to their Jewish culture and the new Gentile believers who hadn’t converted to Judaism. Some Jewish believers expected that non-Jewish believers would fully convert to Judaism, taking on all Jewish customs and practices, including circumcision. This tension not only threatened the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles, but also the unity and potency of the Christian church.

Philip’s encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch is recorded earlier in Acts 8:26–38. Similarly, salvation is given to the Ethiopian man based on his acceptance of Christ, not his cultural background. While this instance occurred in relative isolation, Peter’s later interactions with Cornelius would be publicly known. This would represent a deep challenge to the beliefs of Jewish Christians, but it would also be an opportunity for them to finally understand God’s will for the Gentiles.

At-A-Glance

1. Peter Meets Cornelius (Acts 10:24–26)
2. Peter Speaks to Cornelius’ Guests (vv. 27–29)
 3. Cornelius’ Story (vv. 30–33)
4. Peter Delivers the Gospel (vv. 34–38)

In Depth

1. Peter Meets Cornelius (Acts 10:24–26)

Peter, being obedient to the prompting of the Lord, has agreed to travel with Cornelius’ men to Caesarea. Cornelius, apparently certain of Peter’s arrival, has gathered friends and family to hear what Peter will share with them once he arrives. Cornelius’ actions are indicative of his trust and belief in what God has instructed him to do. Not only does Cornelius do what he is instructed by sending men to find Peter, he expectantly looks forward to what God will do when Peter arrives.

Cornelius' response to Peter's arrival is to worship him. Peter quickly asks Cornelius to stop worshipping him and stand. Peter was already taking a risk by entering into the home of a Gentile, something forbidden by Jewish culture. It was important for Jews to avoid any appearance of idolatry, which included entering into the home of idolaters. Cornelius' worship of Peter would have been of immediate concern because it might have appeared to others that Peter was engaging in idolatry.

2. Peter Speaks to Cornelius' Guests (vv. 27–29)

Upon entering Cornelius' home, Peter becomes aware that Cornelius has invited his friends and household to hear Peter. He explains his decision to accept Cornelius' invitation despite potential purity issues for entering a Gentile's home. He alludes to the vision he saw (Acts 10:11–16), sharing that he now understands that he is to no longer consider Gentiles unclean or impure. Consider how it must have felt for Cornelius and his friends to hear Peter, a devout Jew, tell them that he would no longer consider them impure because they are not Jewish like him. Furthermore, it was the God whom he serves that had shown him this truth.

3. Cornelius' Story (vv. 30–33)

It is now Cornelius' turn to explain why he has called for Peter. He describes the visit he received from the angel. Earlier in the chapter, Cornelius is described as being a "devout man" who "feared God" (vv. 1–2). The fact that he was fasting and praying when the Lord sent him the message is proof of this. His generosity to the poor has been noticed by God as well. Rather than explaining God's acceptance of Gentiles to Cornelius directly, the angel directs him to find Peter. In his obedience, Cornelius is used by God to help orchestrate His will for his family and Peter. God intends to minister to both parties in this experience. Cornelius now explains that they have been waiting expectantly for what God wishes to speak to them through Peter.

4. Peter Delivers the Gospel (vv. 34–38)

At this point, it all becomes clear to Peter what God was doing and what he was to preach to Cornelius' people. Gentile uncleanness would no longer be a barrier to fellowship between Gentile and Jewish believers. God does not view Gentiles as unclean nor withhold fellowship from Gentiles on account of their racial and religious heritage, and neither should the Jewish people. They only need fear God and do what is right. Again, consider the impact of hearing Peter speak these words to the Gentile audience in Cornelius' home.

Peter acknowledges that his audience has most likely heard of Jesus' ministry and the Good News preached to the Jewish people. However, he now preaches the Gospel message to Gentile believers who have been informed of their full acceptance by God. They now know that their Christian faith and identity is considered the same as Jewish believers.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Peter agree to go to Cornelius' home, despite how this would appear to Jewish leaders (Acts 10:28–29)?
2. Whom does Cornelius credit for orchestrating his meeting with Peter? Whose message is he waiting to hear (vv. 32–33)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. People care a lot about whether they are truly loved and accepted by others. It is innately human to seek out fellowship with a community. How do you think the Gentile believers thought of

themselves after hearing Peter speak to them?

2. How do you think Peter considered Gentile believers before this experience? How might his views have changed afterward?

Liberating Lesson

Jewish and Gentile believers were learning that salvation was based on their acceptance of Christ, not cultural heritage or outward actions. Today, despite having freely received the acceptance and love of God through Jesus Christ, it is easy for us to slip into thinking that we have somehow done (or can continue doing) things that warrant God’s approval. This quickly results in judging others based on how well they live up to a human standard of righteousness. However, when we remember that we are only accepted by God’s grace through Jesus Christ, we can extend grace, love, and acceptance to those around us (Romans 5:15–17).

Application For Activation

Peter took a risk by going to Cornelius’ home and ministering to his household. Are there any ways in which God is asking you to take a risk to reach out to someone? Prayerfully consider stepping out and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in ministering to that person.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 10:24–38

24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Peter enters into Caesarea after Cornelius dispatches a group to request Peter’s presence in their home. Peter was accompanied by some disciples from Joppa on this journey. This would prove valuable as they would be eyewitnesses to what happened during Peter’s preaching. Cornelius, seeing the gravity and importance of the occasion, invites his kinsmen and his close friends into his house.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Cornelius is struck with awe at Peter's visit. From this, we can infer that Cornelius believed Peter to be a servant of Jesus, thinking that Peter is able to impart salvation. As a Greek Gentile who was steeped in paganism, the centurion offers him the required obeisance as a semidivine son of God who had supernatural powers. Cornelius' reaction is ingrained and reflexive. Peter refuses this worship and tells him to stand up because he was not a god, but a man.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

Peter talks to Cornelius as they walk into the home. When he sees all the people gathered together, he sees an opportunity to express what God has revealed to him. He reminds them of how his presence there is unlawful (Gk. athemitos, ah-THEH-mee-tose), or contrary to accepted morality or social convention. In the Jewish context, it means forbidden and disgusting. Peter states that it is contrary to Jewish law for him to "keep company" with (Gk. kollao, ko-LAH-oh) or join together with a Gentile or enter a Gentile's home. Such practices were not prohibited by Jewish law. Instead, Peter is echoing a common Gentile perception at the time which developed out of table fellowship issues which caused some Jews to avoid eating with Gentiles because certain foods were prohibited in the Mosaic laws. Cornelius and his Gentile associates would have been surprised that Peter was willing to come into his home, and Peter explains that not only is it possible for them to fellowship together, but God has even told Peter that he should no longer think of anyone or anything as unclean (i.e., unacceptable to God without ritual purification). Peter says God has "shewed" (Gk. deiknumi, DAKE-noo-mee) him that he should not call any man common or unclean. The word for shewed means to establish the validity of something with an explanation or example. Here the explanation or example is the vision Peter receives on the rooftop of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:9–16). This vision is the basis for Peter's going to Cornelius' house without gainsaying (Gk. anantirretos, ah-nahn-TEEraytose), or without objection.

30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, or a captain in the army. Although the root word in centurion means "a hundred," a Roman centurion of this time would command eighty men. The Bible says he was a "devout man," which means he tried to be godly in his ways and gave God due reverence, evident by the fact that he positively influenced all those in his house, and he gave money to the poor while praying to God "alway" (Acts 10:1–2).

Cornelius recounted to Peter how God had given him a vision to send for Peter. It was around "the ninth hour," or 3 p.m., when Cornelius had a supernatural encounter. This mention of the ninth hour indicates Cornelius' adherence to the Jewish times of prayer, which corresponded with the morning and evening offerings in the temple. As a result of this Gentile man's efforts to know God, he was blessed with the vision, which would start a series of events leading to his salvation. The man who wore "bright clothing" was identified as an angel in the actual vision (v. 3). It is interesting that God spoke to both Peter and Cornelius in visions leading up to this fateful event.

31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

The angel in the vision let Cornelius know that God had heard his prayer and his alms (Gk. eleemosune, eh-leh-EIGH-moh-SOO neigh) were remembered (Gk. mnaomai, muh-NAH-oh-my), or God was mindful of them. The word for alms is literally compassion or pity. For some Jews in the Roman period, almsgiving was considered compatible with righteousness. Luke clearly intends to show that Cornelius was a righteous man and that God was answering the prayer of this righteous God-fearer. These God-fearers were Gentiles who were sympathetic to the Jewish religion. These were not full converts who were circumcised, but those who contributed to the synagogue and demonstrated piety.

32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

Cornelius recounted his vision to Peter to explain why he had sent for him. The angel had instructed him, and therefore God had instructed him to do so. The omniscient God knew exactly where Peter was, just as He knows where all of our blessings are. The blessing that God had for Cornelius was that Peter would speak the gift of the Gospel message to him.

Peter was lodging with Simon the tanner (Gk. burseus, bur-seh-OOS). A tanner was a laborer who created leather from hides and skins by treating them with mineral lime and juices and leaves from various other plants. This leather was often used for making tents. The tabernacle coverings were made from the skins of rams or goats and were more than likely created by tanners (Exodus 25:5, 26:14, 35:7, 23, 36:19). Tanners were despised in Jewish culture. They were not allowed to go to the temple during pilgrimage season, and had their own synagogues because of the bad odor created by the animal hides. Even in Levirate marriage, the Mishnah or oral law allowed for the wife of the deceased brother of a tanner to remain a widow by saying "I could endure your brother, but I cannot endure you." Due to the odors, tanners were required to do their work outside the gates of the city or by the coast.

33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Cornelius thanked Peter for coming, but what he did not know was that God gave Peter a vision just before Cornelius's messengers arrived. In Peter's vision, God dealt with his feelings of prejudice toward Gentiles, while telling him to go with Cornelius' messengers (Acts 10:9–20). The mighty providence of God works everything out. God can weave a tapestry of people and events in our lives which appear to be unrelated or are totally unknown to us. Then, when the time is right, God will pull all the pieces together so that we are blessed with something He has been preparing for us for some time. Cornelius showed his love for his household by having everyone gather to hear Peter's words. His example shows that we should not be selfish with God's Word of salvation. We should see that all of our relatives and friends get to hear it, whether from us or someone else. We owe it to those we love to give them a chance to hear the Gospel and receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.
35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.**

Peter knew why he was there, so he went right to work. He began by acknowledging the truth that God had shown him in his own vision: "God is no respecter of persons." The phrase "respecter of persons" (Gk. prosopolemptes, pro-so-po-LAYMP-tase) is actually a single compound word in Greek that can mean "accepter of people." In this context it can be translated as "one who discriminates." Peter lays out the foundation of his message: God is not one who discriminates. In the event at Cornelius' house, God was using a formerly prejudiced Peter to initiate opening up the invitation of the Gospel to Gentiles everywhere. No matter what nationality, God accepts the one who "feareth"

(Gk. phobeo, pho-BEH-oh) Him, which means showing Him deference and reverence. He also accepts the one who “worketh” (Gk. ergazomai, er-GOD-zo-my) righteousness, which is to “produce” righteousness. This is an appropriate description of Cornelius as a God-fearer who prayed and gave alms regularly.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

Peter began to lay out the chronological progression of the Gospel. He told his audience that God started by sending His Word to the Children of Israel. This Word was the preaching of peace (Gk. eirene, ay-RAY-nay) by Jesus Christ. Peter shows how the Gospel was first given to Israel and was expected, according to Old Testament prophecy, to bring peace (Isaiah 52:7). Later in Isaiah, peace would be proclaimed to everyone far and near which includes Gentiles as well as the Jews (Isaiah 57:19). Peter also says that Jesus is “Lord of all,” reinforcing the truth of God being “no respecter of persons” (v. 34).

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

Peter encouraged them by saying that they already knew about some aspects of the message, which had spread to areas beyond Jerusalem. The word for published (Gk. ginomai, GEE-no-my) here is not in the sense of a publishing a book, but can mean to arise in history or come on the stage (cf. John 1:4). Judea was usually the name of the southern region of Palestine. In this case, it is a term for the whole of the Roman province of Judea. He indicated that the ministry of Jesus began in Galilee after His baptism by John the Baptist. John preached a message of water baptism and repentance from sin (Mark 1:4).

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.

Peter then told his audience about the earthly ministry of Jesus. He said that Jesus was “anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Matthew 3:16). Then Jesus did good and miraculous works, such as healing people with all sorts of ailments (cf. Matthew 8:2–3, 9:20–22, 12:10–13; John 11:43–44). The word for “doing good” can mean more than just being a “do-gooder”; it can specifically refer to rulers and deities who benefit their subjects. By using the phrase “God was with him,” Peter connects Jesus to Old Testament figures such as Joseph, David, and Nehemiah (Genesis 39:3, 23, 1 Samuel 18:12; Nehemiah 1:8). These figures enjoyed the approval of God and His blessing on their endeavors. God Himself expressed that He was with Jesus, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5). Through this description, Peter establishes the uniqueness of Jesus’ life and ministry and how the God who accepts all endorsed His ministry.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Romans 8:31-39

Tuesday

Matthew 14:22-33

Wednesday

Matthew 12:1-8

Thursday

Acts 10:1-16

Friday

Acts 10:17-23

Saturday

Acts 10:39-48

Sunday

Acts 10:24-38