**Good News for All**

Acts 10-11

I know it’s hard to believe now, but ***I was not always this cool***. No. Believe it or not, for most of my teen years I was not one of the “cool kids.” 

I was “B crowd” at best. Middle school, I was probably C-, D crowd. Public school is gladiator warfare. It is eat or be eaten; kill or be killed. I wasn’t at the bottom of the food chain, thankfully. But I certainly was not at the top. At least, not until I got this haircut.



Yes, that was the game changer, for sure. (And if you’re not familiar with pommel horse - no, your knee is not supposed to be bent in scissors.)

The thing with “cool kids” - the “popular” - is that for them to be cool, other kids have to be “not cool.” The A crowd can only exist if there is a B crowd and C crowd to be compared to. As Syndrome so wisely noted in the original Incredibles film, “When everyone is super… no one will be.” The whole point of being a super hero is that you were exceptional - above the common, ordinary citizen. You were super!

Here is our lesson today in one verse.

“God shows no partiality, but in **every** nation **anyone** who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:35

Notice the universal language - EVERY nation, ANYONE. This is the good news of Jesus Christ - that forgiveness, salvation and eternal life are not just for one people and nation, not just one race. The gospel is for EVERYONE, everywhere.

This was not easy for first century Jews to accept. For over 1,000 years they had been the “special,” “holy,” “elect,” “chosen,” people of God. In their minds, they retained that privileged status. Other people, other nations were unclean while they were clean and holy. Other people were common, where they were special. Other people were far from God, they were near to God!

Did you hear that repetition? **OTHER people**… other people… other people. The Jews were “the cool crowd.” They were “in” and everyone else was out. Everyone else was a “Gentile” which had come to mean “pagan, godless, idolatrous, disgusting barbarian.” The Jews were the IN people. Everyone else was OTHER - outside, unclean, common.

***Who are the OTHERS for you?*** Who are the OUTSIDERS in your heart? Who is common and unclean for you?

* I wonder if ***all non-believers*** fall into this category for some of us. If, like me, you were raised with lots of strict rules that “Christians” follow, you probably developed a fear of the world and “worldliness” and “worldly people.”
* I hope that no one here feels this way about ***another ethnic group or skin tone***. But let’s be honest enough with our history to remember that it took until 1965 to finally address the racism that divided our country from its earliest days.
* 9/11 and the war on terror might have given you a fear of and distaste for all middle-eastern people, especially those who dress a certain way.
* Maybe it’s a social class, like the super rich or the very poor. Maybe it’s homeless people. Maybe it’s those flaming liberals or those crazy conservatives…

***Who do you struggle to love?*** That’s the real question before us today. Maybe it’s one specific person. Someone who hurt you - who offended you. They are OUT of your life. You will not associate with them.

As we go through the story of Cornelius, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you and open your heart to whoever is the OUTSIDER, the unclean, the common one for you. This passage gives us three lessons about GOD. How does God feel about everyone on earth? How does He treat all people?

Join me in Acts 10:1, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the town of Caesarea.

“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a **centurion** of what was known as the **Italian** Cohort.” Acts 10:1

This man was not just a Roman soldier, he was **a centurion** - in charge of 100 Roman soldiers. To a Jew of the first century all Romans, and especially Roman soldiers, were about as lost as a person could be. The Roman Empire was built on total allegiance to the Roman Emperor and the emperors demanded absolute loyalty and even worship. This system was abhorrent to the Jews who viewed the Romans as usurpers, disregarding the holy claim of the Jews to govern their own affairs under God.

There were two categories worse than a Roman soldier - ***the tax collectors and prostitutes***. So to the Jews, Cornelius was third from the bottom of the clean / popular food chain. He was down there. Well below them. So verse two is surprising.

“A devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.” Acts 10:2

Wow. A Roman soldier. A high ranking Roman soldier - ***who PRAYS***? What?

* Are you saying there are democrats who pray? Hold on.
* Are there tea party republicans who pray, continually? (See how I’m being even handed here?)
* Are there Muslims or Jehovah’s Witnesses who PRAY?

This story is meant ***to jolt us*** - to get our attention. It was this Cornelius - this Roman soldier - who saw a vision of an angel. God gave this man a detailed vision that connected him with Peter.

At the same exact time, God prepared Peter for something he ordinarily would have quickly refused. Imagine that your **doorbell rings** and it’s someone in a uniform, obviously selling something. Or it’s a person by the road with a ***cardboard sign***. We have a knee-jerk, default reaction to people like these. That’s how Peter would have been with any Gentile, any Roman soldier. And so God spoke to Peter directly and repeatedly.

“As they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.” Acts 10:9

A huge step forward for the gospel was coming. What prepared the way for it? ***Two people were praying.*** One was a Roman soldier. The other was Peter. You expect Peter, the apostle, to be praying. The other guy is more surprising. But nothing was more surprising than the vision Peter saw.

A great sheet is lowered from heaven, filled with “all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.” When he is told to kill and eat Peter immediately says no. Why?

“Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is **common** or **unclean.**’” Acts 10:14

You can hear ***the pride in Peter’s protest***. “I have NEVER eaten anything like that.” I’m pure! I’m undefiled! I’m not like those pagan Gentiles who eat the nasty BBQ pork. I’m a brisket only guy! And I trim off most of the fat!

Here is God’s response to Peter:

“And the voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’” Acts 10:15, 28; 11:9

God repeated this message for Peter ***three times***. To make sure we get it, Luke also repeats the message three times here in Acts 10 and 11. The Bible never wastes words. When something is repeated - especially three times - it means **THIS IS IMPORTANT**. This is bold-faced and underlined, 60 point font, ALL CAPS, highlighted in bright yellow.

Here is the first of our three lessons about God:

1. God **Sees** everyone the same way

“And the voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’” Acts 10:15, 28; 11:9

We see people with their status: rich / poor; successful / unsuccessful; attractive / unattractive; popular / unpopular. We rank people. “Oh, she’s a 10!” “He’s just a 4.” ***We score EVERYTHING***. How many facebook friends do you have? How many likes do your posts get? How many subscribers do you have on your YouTube channel? How many followers for your Insta or Twitter? Everything is ranked. Therefore everyONE is ranked.

That is not how God works. God sees everyone the same. There is no “A crowd” and “B crowd” with God. ***All people are exactly equal in His eyes.*** Look again at verse 28.

1. God **Sees** everyone the same way

“Truly I understand that ***God shows no partiality***, but in every nation **anyone** who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35

This is so important for us to understand. No person or nation or group of people has any kind of advantage with God.

* **Americans** are not BLESSED with a privileged status before God.
* **Rich** people, attractive people, physically fit people, popular people are not amazing to God and closer to Him.
* **Religious people** - whether Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist - do not score more points with God and earn more of His favor.
* Those who call themselves **“Christian”** and are raised going to church and who follow all the “rules” for “good Christians,” are not born a step or two closer to heaven.

“God shows NO PARTIALITY.” He does not play favorites.

***The ground is level at the foot of the cross.*** No one has an advantage or head start. Trust me, if anyone thought they had a head start it was **Saul the Pharisee**, whom we met a couple of weeks ago. The Pharisees were the Bible scholars of the day - the most dedicated, the most zealous, the most educated, the most disciplined. Surely THEY were several steps closer to God and closer to heaven than the “common folk” and probably 1,000 steps closer than the “sinful folk.”

Cornelius was one of those “common, sinful” people. Yet God singled him out for a special visit - first from an angel and then from Peter, the big man himself. Peter would have been tempted to turn these Gentiles away, but God made His will clear:

1. God **Sees** everyone the same way

“The Spirit told me to go with them, ***making no distinction***.” Acts 11:12

This is so relevant for us. When you think about who the Lord would have you reach out to - who the Lord has placed in your life - are you tempted to make distinctions? ***Are you tempted to show partiality?***

* Are you drawn to people who are **JUST LIKE YOU** in terms of culture, finances and life stage?
* Are you inclined to avoid someone if they are too young or too old? If they don’t speak your language or look exactly like you? If they seem a little rough or crusty or strange? If their life choices don’t quite line up with yours? If their music is too loud or they drink or smoke too much?

Be careful here. Our deceitful hearts will say, **“THAT’S WISDOM.”** I’m just being wisely cautious with worldly neighbors. Maybe. Or maybe we regularly play favorites. We regularly make distinctions in terms of who we hang out with, who we make friends with, who we reach out to…

God sees all people the same. “***For God so loved THE WORLD***, that He gave His only Son…”

1. God **Sees** everyone the same way - with **Love** for lost sinners

“The Spirit told me to go with them, ***making no distinction***.” Acts 11:12

“God wills that no one would perish but that all would come to repentance.” God knows that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male or female, slave and free, rich and poor. All of us alike are SINNERS. All of us need Jesus EQUALLY. No one has an advantage. And God loves us all.

If **circumcised, law-keeping Jews** started out closer to God, their need of salvation is less. Picture the Pharisee ***at the top of a tall staircase***, just outside the pearly gates of heaven. He doesn’t need to be lifted out of a swamp and washed off to enter the glories of heaven, he just needs a little splash of water on his feet as he steps through the gates. The Bible rules this out completely.

1. God **Sees** everyone the same way - with **Love** for lost sinners

“There is **no distinction**. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:22-23

No one has a head start or privileged position. Every single one of us stands before God guilty. We fall short of His perfection. But praise the Lord, He loves us all so much that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! That is our second lesson about God. He sees everyone the same way; and:

1. God **Saves** everyone the same way

“What God has ***made clean***, do not call common.” Acts 10:15

What a picture of **salvation**. By the blood of Jesus, God makes you clean. “What can wash away my sin? Nothin’ but the blood of Jesus!” At the moment you call on Jesus to save you - to forgive your sins and make you His own - you are CLEAN. That is what the word JUSTIFIED means.

1. God **Saves** everyone the same way

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified** by his grace as a gift.” Romans 3:23-24

It is **not by works** that any person can be saved. You can’t do enough good to outweigh your bad. You can’t earn God’s favor and acceptance. The Good News is that JESUS has earned God’s favor and acceptance FOR YOU! Once you receive the gift of his grace by calling on Jesus in faith, you are JUSTIFIED. All of your sins are transferred to Jesus and all of His righteousness is transferred to you.

***How does God see you now?*** If you have called on Jesus in personal faith, when God looks at you He sees you as JUSTIFIED; RIGHTEOUS; Holy; clean; pure.

There is **only ONE way to be saved**. It’s not that gross, sinful people need the blood of Jesus and religious, nice people just need a little education. All of us need the blood of Jesus. There is no other way. Look at verse 43.

1. God **Saves** everyone the same way - by the **Blood** of Jesus

“Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins ***through his name***.” Acts 10:43

It’s not “everyone who does enough good deeds.” It’s not “everyone who “prays hard enough.” It’s not “everyone who gives enough of their money away.” It’s “everyone who BELIEVES in him.”

That’s it. Everyone is saved the same way - **by the blood of Jesus**. Nothing else can wash away your sin. *“****There is a fountain filled with blood****, drawn from Immanuel’s veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see the fountain in his day. And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away!”*

It is the NAME OF JESUS that saves. There is no other name that can save you. No one else died for you. No one else offered to take your place. Only Jesus. Here is how the other believers responded to Peter’s summary:

1. God **Saves** everyone the same way - by the **Blood** of Jesus

“Then to the Gentiles also God has granted ***repentance that leads to life.***” Acts 11:18

Even repentance and faith are gifts from God, not works we can take credit for.

* God loves all people WITHOUT EXCEPTION.
* Jesus died for all people WITHOUT DISTINCTION.

We can argue over whether Jesus died for all people or just for “the elect.” But what is clear in Scripture is that ***Jesus died for the whole world*** - for every tongue and tribe and nation - for the rich and the poor, the great and the small. Jesus died for all people WITHOUT DISTINCTION.

In the end, the only distinction that matters is whether you believe in Jesus or not; whether you follow Jesus or not; whether you belong to Jesus or not.

People from all cultures through all times have ***drawn lines to define themselves***. There have always been “in” people and “outsiders.” Back in those days there were Roman citizens and non-citizens. There were Jews and non-Jews. There were rich and poor. Slave and free. Men and women. But Jesus blew all of that up.

***He broke down every dividing wall*** and created a new and eternal distinction: one single thing separates people now and forever. Are you **IN CHRIST**, or not? Are you with Jesus or against Him? There is no middle ground with Jesus. You must either choose to trust in Him and give your whole life to Him or refuse Him.

There is only one way to be saved - by coming under the blood of Jesus, under the protection of His name.

* God sees everyone the same way - He loves us all and knows we are all sinners in need of His mercy and grace.
* God saves everyone the same way. He sent Jesus to pay the price on the cross for all who would call on Him in faith.
* One more lesson about God:
1. God **Seals** everyone the same way

“While Peter was still saying these things, ***the Holy Spirit fell*** on all who heard the word.” Acts 10:44

A seal is a **mark of ownership**, like the ring a king would use to seal a letter, pressing his unique mark into the wax to close a letter.

When the Holy Spirit was first poured out in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, the visible sign was that the twelve apostles all preached at the same time and people from at least 16 different nations heard the gospel in their own languages. Peter explained:

1. God **Seals** everyone the same way

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them ***just as on us*** at the beginning.” Acts 11:15

Right away God made it clear that ***all believers are equal***. There are not two or three levels in the church. We call this “the priesthood of all believers.” There is no “priestly class” that is higher or better than the “common class.” Pastors and missionaries are not “more holy” or more valued by God.

The way God marks people as His own is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. God **Seals** everyone the same way

“I remembered the word of the Lord… ‘John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 11:16

At a couple of key moments in Acts God makes the baptism of the Spirit extra visible by enabling people to speak in languages they did not know. As with other events in Acts, that doesn’t mean we should try to repeat these events, but rather apply the principles from them.

How can you know that you belong to Jesus and will go to heaven? The answer is, you know ***you have the Holy Spirit***!

1. God **Seals** everyone the same way - through the **Holy Spirit**

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, ***were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit***.” Eph. 1:13

At the moment you trusted in Jesus, ***God placed His seal of ownership on you***. He baptized or immersed you in the Holy Spirit and your eternal soul was forever changed. Nothing can ever remove that divine imprint from your soul. The Holy Spirit forever lives in you and you are one with Him. And this isn’t something you have to wonder about - the Christian KNOWS he or she has the Holy Spirit.

1. God **Seals** everyone the same way - through the **Holy Spirit**

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Romans 8:16

If you do NOT know for sure that you have the Holy Spirit, please talk with a Christian friend, your small group leader, me or Jason or one of the elders. Every Christian should have a deep and personal and abiding PEACE in knowing you have the Holy Spirit. You belong to Jesus.

There are **two sides to this connection**: first the wonderful ***peace and joy*** of knowing your sins are forgiven and the Spirit is with you. And second, the absence of that peace when you sin and how you suddenly feel ***conviction and guilt*** until you come back and repent. If you don’t have that peace and joy in the Lord and especially if you don’t feel guilty when you do something wrong, settle the issue with Jesus today! Call on the name of the Lord to forgive you and cleanse you and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit!

**Kumar story** - p. 84ff in *Pioneering Movements* (Addison)

Kumar was from ***a priestly family in north India***, but his father died when Kumar was only two, so his family went from riches to rags; from high status to very low status. His mom had to get a regular job and Kumar had to pay for his own education by doing laundry and cooking.

It happened that the school that offered him a scholarship was a Christian school, so **he began to hear about Jesus** even as he helped serve in the Hindu temple, praying and meditating for eight hours every Friday, and blessing those who came to the temple.

But as Kumar prayed and blessed people, ***he did not feel any peace himself***. One day he saw a vision showing him the God of gods would come to him. A couple of years later he had another vision, this time of angels and Jesus descending for the day of judgment. Kumar knew that he was not worthy to stand in the glorious presence of Jesus.

Stories like this one about Kumar and of Cornelius teach us that **God SEES everyone the same way**. He shows no distinction. He does not play favorites. It also teaches us that **God SAVES everyone the same way** - by the blood of Jesus!

After Kumar’s two visions, he concluded that Jesus was the God of gods and chose to break with his family and their traditions - and so was baptized as a follower of Jesus. His mother immediately kicked him out of the house.

Kumar became a math tutor to pay the bills and started doing evangelism and planting churches in his free time. He set a goal of planting **100 new churches**. Within a few years he had planted ***11 churches***, but knew he could never plant 100 churches in his lifetime, if everything depended on him.

He went to a training on multiplying disciplemakers and instantly knew that if reaching people and planting churches depended on HIM there could only be small results. But if ***ALL BELIEVERS were mobilized*** to share the gospel and plant new churches, the results would be limitless. Believers could truly MULTIPLY.

This new conviction was tested when Israel became a Christian. **Israel** was an illiterate street sweeper. As Israel started to reach out to non-believers and lead some to Christ, could Kumar trust him to baptize and disciple them? Could an illiterate street sweeper who was learning to read from his 12 year old daughter become a church planter?

Kumar realized that deep down he still believed that he, Kumar, was superior to Israel. Once the Lord demolished that pride, it opened the way for ***a true movement to explode in that part of India***.

Just one year later Kumar and his team ***surpassed 100 church plants***. One year after that, in 2009, they had over 400. He linked up with other multiplying church planters in the region and together they surpassed a vision to see ***over 10,000 new churches*** in their area.

**Do we truly believe** that God sees and saves and seals everyone the same way? Do we truly believe that every Christian has the same Holy Spirit and therefore the same power to share the good news and be a part of a miraculous movement?

Let’s pray that God’s heart and God’s view would become our own!