

Doctrine of the Gospel

Acts 10: 34-48

Exegetical Statement:

In a stunning passage, we see Peter confronted of prejudice and is confronted with the gospel. We see Peter repent and turn towards Jesus and proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. In this text, we see a clear picture of the gospel, God's heart for the nations, and a framework for racial reconciliation.

Section Breaks:

- Peter's Recognizes The Gentiles (Thesis): v. 35
- The Gospel spans from Israel to Judea: v. 36- 37
- The Gospel Message: v.38-42
- The Gospel Spreads: 42-43
- The Spirit Moves: v. 44-46
- The People Are Baptized and Discipled v. 47-48

Chapter 10 Setup:

Peter has been ministering to the Jews and building the church within their midst. Peter is given a vision of a sheet with kosher and unclean food. He says that he cannot eat it as it's common. God corrects him that it is "What God has made clean, do not call common. He is told this three times. Cornelius (a Roman Centurion) is sends men to get Peter in Joppa (modern day Jaffa) and bring him to Caesarea. Cornelius is seen as righteous for being devout, well spoken, and caring for the poor.

Peter is staying with a taxidermist who was considered unclean.

When Cornelius visits during Peter's time of prayer, Peter initially ignores the summons from Cornelius and is prompted by the spirit to go downstairs without hesitation. He then sees the men and points out. V.28 "You yourselves know how unlawful (this refers to Social law or Taboo) it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. Peter repents of his correction from God on racism and responds in obedience.

Anchor Text:

V.34 Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality,

- First use of all nations

- The Israelites knew that the Messiah would call the Gentiles, however, the Israelites had twisted the text to talk about favoritism and racial pride.

V.35 but in every nation.... Is acceptable to him

- Second use of all nations

Anyone who (a) fears him and (b) does what is right

V.36 The word that he sent to Israel

Preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ

(He is Lord of all):

- Third use of the collective of all

V.37 What happened throughout all Judea

- Describing John making a way and preparing the way for Jesus

V.38 God anointed Jesus with the spirit and with power

- He is the messiah

- He is King

V.38 Doing Good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him

- Doing good

- Meeting oppression

- He is righteous

- He is countering the darkness of the devil

- He has authority and is authority

V.39 We are witnesses of all

- Apostles

- We both Judea (Gentiles) and Israel

V.39 The put him to death by hanging him on a tree

- He bore the curse of God's judgement

- Innocent and blameless

V. 40 God raised him on the third day and made him to appear

- Risen

- Conquering death

V.41 Not to all the people

-First to Israel in communion of covenant, witnessed by the Apostles in communion
breaking of his body and shedding of his blood

V.42 Commanded us to preach and testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead

-Commanded to preach

-Testify that he is the Messiah. They knew the requirements of the law, of the prophets, and observing his life.

-That he lived a righteous life and is the son of God and has the grounds to be the judge.

Living and dead. He is the judge for all time. The cross reaches forwards and backwards.

V. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness

-He was who the Israelites were waiting for, that the gentiles needed, and the world would be redeemed by.

-We are made right through his sacrifice

V. 44 Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word

-The Gentiles are brought in

-They hear (repent and believe) and receive the Holy Spirit.

V.45 even on the Gentiles

-The Jews are amazed that the spirit comes even on the Gentiles

-From common to royal. From Enemy to brother. From foreigner to friend.

V. 46 Speaking in tongues and extoling God

-The gentiles receive the gifts of the spirit

-The spirit is equipping them to be sent out

V. 47 Can anyone withhold water for baptizing?

-Is there still skepticism of the racial, cultural, spiritual divide? God has conquered it.

V. 48 Baptized in Christ

-Grafted in

-A foretaste of the New Creation

Outline:

The Gospel and Race

1. Introductions and terms
1. Gospel
2. Race is not Ethnicity (Evil of American Slavery)
1. Race / Nation (Citizenship)
2. Ethnicity (Skin tone, Language, Culture)
2. Vision (Creation | Fall)
1. Peter's vision in Chapter 9
2. Peter's view of the Gentiles
3. Verdict (Fall | Redemption)
1. Peter's realization of Gentiles
2. Old Testament view of Justice
1. Why was Cornelius God Fearing
4. Vindication (Redemption | New Creation)
1. Peter's repentance
2. Gentiles are brought in
3. Jesus party in Baptism

WORKING DRAFT:

This morning we are discussing the Doctrine of the Gospel. I love this series because we are seeking to understand how God interacts with us and our world. It is through a true understanding of the gospel that we can interpret the world around us with the spirit's leading.

We will look at 3 things: we will describe the doctrine, how it changes us, and how can we live out the gospel in the midst of racial division and injustice.

Before we start, I want to preface this sermon by saying that your elders love you. We want to point you to Jesus and see the gospel change this city Socially, Spiritually, and Culturally. This morning we are talking through a difficult and awkward topic of Racial Division and Injustice. To that end, I want you to know that we are talking about this because God cares for the nations and we want to be a church that is a foretaste of the coming kingdom of all nations, tongues, and tribes. This can be a difficult and sensitive topic but we want to continue the conversation here to equip you with what the bible says on this subject. We are not going to solve the issue of race in an hour. But we want to equip you, the saints, for the redemptive work of reconciliation and justice for our city, nation, and world.

Please join me in prayer...

There's a term that is floating its way through our conversations and vernacular. It's the term *Woke*. It's a state of being aware to the deep divisions between dominant and minority cultures.

It's the awareness of deep systems of injustice throughout our history, especially in the American context. What if awareness is not enough? While I get the intention behind the term, while I get the need to have a term to describe brokenness and division, we have a word that describes this in the world of faith, in the concept of sin. What about a hope or even better a sure promise that sin and injustice has an end?

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is often translated as the good news. It is the good and true story that God has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us.

Jesus fulfills the old testament law and lives a completely perfect and just life. Even so, he is put to death and bears the weight of all sin and evil for the world. By doing so, he is sacrificed on our behalf and takes our place for the wages of sin. Not only is our sin paid for, but Jesus gives us the righteousness of his life. In doing so, we are free from the weight of our sin and are therefore we are able to enter into a covenant relationship with God and his people. Through this, we receive his spirit to not only to save us from an eternity without him but to sanctify us in the present, to make us more and more like Jesus. In Acts 10, we will see not only how the gospel changes Peter and Cornelius, but how the gospel addresses race by superseding our need to find our identity in social and power institutions. The gospel makes us a new united people.

How Does the Gospel Counter Identity in Social Hierarchies?

Let's set the scene for Peter. Peter was one of the twelve apostles and a part of Jesus's earthly ministry. Peter knew Jesus, ate with Jesus, traveled with Jesus, and ministered with Jesus. The text describes Peter as devout and connected to his Jewish heritage. He followed the customs, he worshiped with his people, he observed a strict kosher diet, he observed the laws that set Jews apart from Roman society and made them conspicuously different. Earlier in Chapter 10, Peter is in the midst of his afternoon prayers as laid out by custom and has a vision of large white sheet, some translations describe the sheet as a sail of a ship. As the sheet opens, Peter encounters a bounty of animals, he is instructed to rise, kill, and eat. Based on Old Testament law, he refuses the bounty as he has never consumed anything that is not kosher, calling the food *common*

and *unclean*. This vision occurs again and the spirit tells Peter “What God has made clean, do not call common.” The same vision repeats three times and Peter is given the same message.

At the same time Peter is having this vision, a Roman Centurion (think a Captain) named Cornelius is visited by the spirit. The spirit says “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Send men to Joppa and bring...Peter” (v4-5). He is described as a man that is devout and is honored for his alms and prayers. He is devout in the eyes of Jews in his context but he is not Jewish by ethnicity. He worships with Jews, goes to synagogue, he follows prayer rituals and food customs, he prays for his family and community, and he meets the needs of the poor in his context. However, he is still an outsider.

Do you see the contrast? Peter is a member of an oppressed group living under Roman rule, Cornelius is an enforcer of oppression of the occupied land from Rome. Peter comes from a distinct group and a chosen people in the Israelites, Cornelius worships this same God but is not of the nation of Israel. Given their context, Peter is seen as superior in religion and socially inferior; while Cornelius is seen as inferior in religion and socially superior.

Let’s define a couple of terms. We typically think of Nation and Race as the same thing. However, they are different. The nation of Israel described here is a collection of people that share customs but span multiple regions and languages. Whereas, Race is a term for capturing our physical distinctions and characteristics including color. For nuance, I will use the term Ethnicity as an encompassing term to describe language, diet, norms, and broader customs.

For Jews of this time, they had a framework for thinking through the differences between ethnicities. They had two categories: Israelites and Gentiles. This distinction may seem foreign but

you can think of it as the ultimate form of us and them. You can't blame them right? You are God's chosen people. You have a rich history and heritage of God blessing you and leading your people through trial and tribulation. You are currently oppressed by another nation in a long series of oppressors that God has used to discipline your people and you are awaiting the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah is the figure who will end the oppression, restore you and correct the injustice that has incurred from slavery and strict laws, and bring your nation to himself. However, in waiting for the Messiah, the social identity of the Jewish people drifts into an idol of restoration of power rather than a permanent hope of being God's people. It's an identity rooted in revolution and not a identity secured in redemption.

As Peter's vision comes to end, he is perplexed with what is wrong with calling something that is common and unclean? This distinction between Jews and Gentiles is well known and entrenched into society. He awakes from the vision and is greeted by Cornelius's men to leave Joppa and go to Caesarea (the military outpost in Israel). The spirit tells Peter to rise and go without hesitation with these men. Peter then questions the men who have come and he is told of their mission to go see Cornelius. Peter reminds them that is unlawful, also translated as socially taboo, for Peter to stay with a Gentile. Add to this situation, that Cornelius is not just any gentile, but it is an officer in the Roman army. As a note of irony, Peter is currently in Joppa. The same city that Jonah was in when he was asked to travel to Nineveh before rebelling against God's call to preach to the oppressors of his day and is briefly swallowed by a whale.

Peter follows the men and later arrives at Cornelius's house, Cornelius describes his encounter with the spirit and says something remarkable, "So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord (v.33)." Let's catch a couple of points, the spirit called both Cornelius and Peter. His call to Cornelius is to fetch Peter.

He has authority to do this from the military context, however in this case his call is out of obedience to invite Peter to proclaim what God has commanded Peter to do with his life. To steal Peter Craig's thunder when he preaches later, Peter's commandment from the Lord is the great commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. Peter is called by God to go with Cornelius's men without hesitation and go to Cornelius. His obedience is to cross the cultural, religious, social, and power barriers to meet with Cornelius. The only thing that unites Peter and Cornelius is the God that they serve. They are still separate in everything else.

Do you feel the awkwardness? The spirit is challenging Peter's worldview, the privilege of being God's chosen people, his social construct, and the understanding of the power dynamics in his world. Peter even reinforces the social implications by commenting that it is unlawful for a Jew to stay with a Gentile.

The implication is that he would be found ceremonially unclean. Now here's an interesting point, Peter is saying this while staying with Simon the Tanner, who is essentially a taxidermist.

Jews were not allowed to touch or be around things that were dead for the same reason of being deemed unclean. Peter is caught between two evils and concedes that it is more grievous to cross the social barrier of staying with Gentile than it is being near a dead animal because the Taxidermist is Jewish. Peter's prejudice is quite palpable which explains the need for the spirit to reveal this error three times that what God has made clean do not call uncommon. God is showing Peter that the identity of racial distinction is broken because of Jesus.

Then the vision is clear. "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. (v.34). Anyone. Peter understands the vision. The common and uncommon are united. Jew and Gentile are brought together and the promise of Abraham becomes clearer that through his family (the nation of Israel) all of the nations of the world would be blessed. To borrow a phrase from activist and artist, Propaganda, "Jesus is

calling us to unity not sameness.” Rich, diverse, unity under the the risen savior and King Jesus.

NPR recently ran a story about a famous blues musician by the name of Darryl Davis. Darryl is a mainstay of the artform and travels extensively throughout the south. Over the years, Darryl has developed a collection that is quite peculiar. He collects Klu Klux Klan robes from members leaving the organization.

Throughout his travels, he has collected over 200 robes from members including a former KKK member who was in his wedding. His approach has been simply by pursuing former oppressors and pointing out the similarities between them. Even through an art form, Darryl sees his call to blues music as a vehicle to break down the walls of prejudice. From despised to united because of and through Jesus.

How Does the Gospel Address Identity in Institutional Structures?

Notice in the argument of the passage, that after addressing the wrong of identity resting in social hierarchy, Peter then walks through the error of our identity resting in institutions of power by making the case that Jesus is Lord of all. All authority is under his rule and now over the Gentiles as well. Earlier in Chapter 10, we see Cornelius bow to Peter when they first meet, Peter corrects Cornelius by saying that he is just a man. Let that sit for a moment, the head of the Roman guard, bowing to a citizen of Israel. Oppressor humbly bowing to the oppressed. Peter’s proclamation of the gospel points out that the power dynamic that drove distance between the Jews and Gentiles is secondary to the prevailing Lordship of Jesus.

We see this dynamic in Cornelius being honored for his alms and service to the poor. He is honored for pursuing justice even while his role is under the very oppressor that is causing the systemic issues of taxation, economic imbalance, and persecution of the early church. He prays, the spirit stirs, and he is faithful and obedient to seeking the welfare of those around him.

Peter goes on to explain how the institution in the community of faith shifts and is united by Jesus. “As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.” He was the embodiment of the law and the promises of God. “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone receives forgiveness of sins through his name.(v.43) He sufficiently meets the law’s requirements for a perfect life, sufficiently bears the weight of our sin, sheds his blood in place of our punishment, raised to satisfactorily to defeat the curse of sin and death for all time, and exalted and seated at the right hand of God to secure our past, present and future hope as his people. Jesus is the Messiah that the Jews longed for, the hope and savior that the Gentiles did not have access to, and the reconciliation of all nations, tongues, and tribes. The institutions that separated Jews and Gentiles is broken.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised (Jews) who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out EVEN on the Gentiles....Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. (v. 44-47)

Keep in mind that prior to this passage, we have not seen the gospel presented to Gentiles en mass or have seen the Holy Spirit poured out on as many Gentiles in one moment.

The Gentiles are no longer outsiders in power and religious institutions. They are brought in not only in faith but also in community. Baptized in, received the spirit, and sent with the same unifying mission of the great commission for God’s glory and our good.

The Hope of Racial Reconciliation

With the constructs of social barriers, the weight of institutions of power, leveled under the Lordship of Jesus, we are united together as God’s people. What a powerful thought that we are

not left isolated by an identity supremely governed by our ethnicity and race. We are also not left with an identity that is not predicated on institutions of division of education, economics, housing, or elements that would keep us alienated from our brothers and sisters. We bring our diversity, our history, our circumstances with us to be used by God for unity through the power of the gospel. The gospel is our true identity, future and present hope, and source of joy. The gospel when lived out leads to redeemed and diverse people, who are reconciled under the Savior and Lord of all.

The issue of race is not solely a political or social issue, it's a gospel issue. It's how we respond to a world that deeply needs Jesus. The world's hope is truly found in the sovereign, holy, and just God. All pain, injustice, tears, death, racism, shame, and anger is ended. Injustice has an end. The world needs this hope. As his people, until Jesus's coming, we participate in this reconciliation work by countering injustice. We are peacemakers to counter injustice and bring God's mercy to the stranger, orphan, and the widow. We model Jesus by being a people of truth and advocating and intervening against systemic injustices.

We have a family that recently moved into our neighborhood. At first glance, they seemed difficult to approach. They have rough looking tattoos, coarse language, cultural barriers, and honestly reminders of my own sin and wrestling through my own mexican heritage and identity. I just want comfort and I have the belief that my girls are safer in not engaging these neighbors. That is until I had a Peter moment. I had the three time reminder and holy spirit gut punch that the gospel is for all and my actions were sinful. In repentance, I engaged and I can tell you that I love this family. Our oldest prays for Paul and his family. We serve them and we are getting to know them more and more. It's messy, it's awkward, but I am thankful that our girls are seeing a foretaste of the coming kingdom.

Conclusion

With the Gospel, we see no partiality and a unification under our King Jesus. This allows us the freedom to see the dignity, image of God, and a need for a savior in all. This allows us to pursue hard conversations around race humbly, it allows us to seek the spirit's power for countering social injustice and systemic injustice. It allows us to bring the gifts of our time, talents, and treasures for the great commission.

For some of you, the gospel is pressing on you. You may have little exposure to the church, you may have been wronged, you may feel a weight that you have neglected the gospel. For you, hear the gospel this morning and know that you are loved beyond what you can grasp and in spite of what you have done. Look to the truths and promises of his love for you. Pray that his spirit impresses on your heart and that you would know that He is good.

For those who know Jesus. I would pray that the spirit stirs you on where can proclaim and live out the gospel in this area of racial division and injustice. I would encourage you in three specific domains. The head, heart, and hands. Think of head about what we know. Heart in how we feel. And Hands in what we do.

For head, I would encourage to look at the bible and look for God's heart for justice. I would encourage you to go and learn about injustices in our community, nation, and our world. I would encourage you to seek out conversations with brothers and sisters of color and different classes than you and ask to hear their story as they are willing to share.

For your heart, I would encourage you to ask a dangerous prayer that God would stir your heart and show you where you can participate in God's restorative and redemptive work.

Remember that we are in a kingdom of already and not yet.

This means that God will ultimately end all injustice and until then He is actively bringing justice and eradicating the darkness of the world through the church. We are going to see sin and

injustice but it will ultimately come to an end. Pray that he would show you where you, your family, your CG, and neighborhood churches can participate with the church through the power of the spirit to live out the gospel.

This takes us to our third area of response with our hands.

What do we do? In one word, I would say engage. Seek his truth, let it stir your affections, and follow the spirit. Live out the gospel that you have been given and seek to proclaim it in the darkness. From now and until he returns, we get to participate in this work. Would you consider that proximity is necessary for reconciliation, that distance will breed suspicion. Engage your neighbors, engage your workplaces, engage your communities, and be compelled by the hope that you have been given.

This may seem like a lot, however we have been given the same spirit that rose Christ from the dead. He is within us, working among us all, ahead of us and inviting us to participate. It's important that we consider all three. Without head knowledge, we are socially conscious without a forever hope and truly addressing the deepest need of our neighbors. Without heart, we are legalist do-gooders who rely on self-righteous passion which will burn out or harm others. Without hands, we are idle intellectuals who understand the issues and deeper sin but we are choosing to neglect our neighbor. Being woke is fine but let's make sure that we are alive first and foremost.

For those new to City Life, we have mercy ministries that are engaged and developing relationships throughout the city to serve the community and share the gospel. Show up at one of them and listen, love, ask questions. To learn more about these efforts and to see where you can get plugged in, please come by after the sermon and check out our connections table in the foyer.

May we be a people who love justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Let's pray.



Communion:

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

On the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for[a] you. Do this in remembrance of me." [b] 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.