

Good News for All

Willis found it hard to garner any enthusiasm as the young men filed into the gymnasium. Most of them looked insolent, with their pants sagging low and their voices set too high.

Willis, a new member, had agreed to help his church offer vocational options and spiritual guidance to young males in this blighted neighborhood. He just hoped he wouldn't get jacked before leaving.

Jared, one of the church's young ministers, had talked a lot about Brayton, one of the success stories from the neighborhood. Brayton started coming to the meetings when he was a junior in high school. Today, Brayton was doing very well in his first year of refrigeration school.

"Attention everybody," said Jared, raising his hands and standing in the front of the two aisles of folding chairs. "Please take a seat, so we can get started."

Jared explained the mission of All Saints Church, how it wanted to help young men, and then he introduced Brayton.

Brayton spoke about how he had grown tired of the streets.

"I started attending these meetings, and I tell you what," said Brayton. "I wasn't ready for the love I got from these men. They helped me, but mostly they showed me that God could love someone like me. So, I'm here to tell you, I don't care how bad off you think you are. You can find hope."

- 1. Why should all people—regardless of class, age, gender, or background—hear about Jesus?**
- 2. Who is the last person you shared the Good News of Jesus with? What happened?**
- 3. How could sharing the Good News of Jesus change an entire household?**

LESSON FOCUS: Salvation is for all people; share the Good News!

God Shows No Favoritism

Acts 10:34-38, KJV

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.

Acts 10:34-38, NIV

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

The Jews of the first century A.D. taught that God favored them over the Gentiles. They believed He loved them, but hated those of the other nations. This explains why the Lord needed to go to such lengths just to get Peter to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10:1-33).

Thus the apostle's opening line of his sermon might have caused wonder in his mind even as he said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (vs. 34). With these words, Peter recognized that God did not exclude people from His gracious offer of salvation based on race or

nationality. This marked the beginning of Jewish acceptance of Gentiles into the church and a realization that the saving work of Jesus applies to all people.

Next, Peter introduced Jesus to the household of Cornelius. He described His ministry as the One sent from God to convey His message to the "people of Israel" (vs. 36). He began with John the Baptist and Jesus' empowering by the Holy Spirit and continued with His ministry in both Galilee and Judea. What we have in verses 37-38 is likely a summary of the apostle's description of Jesus' ministry. He probably added other examples of His teaching and how He demonstrated God's power through the healing of the sick.

4. *How did Peter's opening comment in verse 34 represent a dramatic shift in the thinking of the apostle?*

5. *Why did Peter take the time to introduce Jesus to his audience before describing His saving work on the Cross?*

The Gospel Is for Everyone

Acts 10:39-43, KJV

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Acts 10:39-43, NIV

³⁹"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

As a Roman centurion, Cornelius should have known about the horrors of crucifixion; he likely had witnessed many such deaths. He would understand the horrible and cruel death Jesus suffered on the cross despite His innocence. No one had ever survived the brutal scourging followed by death hanging on a cross.

However, "God raised [Jesus] from the dead on the third day" (vs. 40). In order to confirm the reality of the Resurrection, Peter emphasized that many people, including Peter, saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. Jesus "ate and drank" in the presence of witnesses as a way to demonstrate the physical reality of what the apostles saw (vs. 41). Only someone with a physical body could eat and drink.

After His resurrection, the Savior commanded the apostles to preach the message of salvation, which meant that "everyone," regardless of nationality or race, who believes in Him would receive "forgiveness of sins" (vs. 43). Eternal life does not depend on keeping the Jewish law; it comes solely through faith, a trust on Jesus and Him alone.

6. *What was the significance of witnesses in regard to the Resurrection?*

7. *How does one receive the forgiveness of sins that Peter proclaimed?*

The Holy Spirit Responds to Saving Faith

Acts 10:44-47, KJV

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the

Acts 10:44-47, NIV

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The

circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Peter's mention of belief sparked an inner response of faith in those listening to him. The Holy Spirit came upon all those gathered in the home of Cornelius at the moment they believed the apostle's message. This repeat of what happened on Pentecost verified that the Lord was welcoming Gentiles into His Church solely on the basis of faith.

This astonished the Jewish Christians who had accompanied Peter to Caesarea. The new Gentile believers possessed the same gift of the Spirit as the ones in Jerusalem received when He came upon them. Luke says, "they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (vs. 46).

Peter, speaking to the Jewish believers who had come with him, made the case for baptizing the Gentiles who had received the Spirit in response to their faith. The Spirit had already regenerated these saints; the baptism symbolized their identification with Christ as well as their entrance into the church on equal footing as the Jewish Christians.

Once Peter realized that the Lord had broken down the traditional barriers between Jews and Gentiles within the Church, he agreed to stay with the new believers a few days (10:48). Now that they had put their faith in Jesus, they needed further instruction on the teachings of Jesus.

8. *At what point did the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles gathered at the home of Cornelius?*

So That All May Hear

It started in 1979 as a film shown in 250 U.S. theaters. Since then, the *Jesus* film, a project of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), has gone around the world. By 2001, it had been shown in every country, and by 2017, it had been translated into 1,500 languages. An estimated 8.1 billion people have seen the original film (or one of several related to it), resulting in 572 million decisions to follow the Lord. After each official showing, local counselors and pastors work with new believers to help them understand their decision and connect them with a local church. If none exists, one is often started.

In 1952, a young man in Argentina heard Billy Graham on the radio for the first time and prayed that God would help him become an evangelist. Later, Luis Palau became the Spanish interpreter for Graham before Palau started his own evangelical ministry in Central and South America. That ministry has expanded around the world, and by 2007 it was estimated that he had shared the Gospel with over 25 million people in 70 countries.

A film and rallies are two ways the message of Jesus is being shared around the world. However, most of us will share about Him just through talking with a friend or saying something about Jesus on a social media page. Things that reach millions of people are exciting and needed, but we also have our own roles to play in sharing our faith with people. Our children, neighbors, relatives—everyone needs to hear the story of Jesus.

9. *How did you first hear the Good News?*

10. *How could you and your church reach all the people in your community?*

11. *Why is it important that we use many different ways to share the Good News?*

12. *Why is it important for everyone to share about Jesus, not just people who have the gift of evangelism?*

God Does Not Show Favoritism

God does not have favorites. Everyone is special to God, and everyone in God's eyes is worthy to receive the Good News. All God desires is that we fear Him and have faith in what He says. Though it is impossible to please Him without faith, He does give everyone the opportunity to believe and thus receive the gift of salvation.

► *Determine your own strategy to share the Good News with those you know who are in need of salvation. List here those you want to share the Gospel with and set a goal of reaching out to them.*

KEY VERSE

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 10:34-38, KJV

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

—Acts 10:34-38, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 29 through December 5

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Deuteronomy 5:6-21—The Law of Justice.

Tues. Deuteronomy 5:23-33—Follow the Path of God's Law.

Wed. Romans 12:1-2, 9-21—Discern the Good, Acceptable, and Perfect.

Thurs. Deuteronomy 10:1-11—The Written Law and the Ark of Wood.

Fri. Matthew 5:17-20—Jesus Fulfills the Law.

Sat. Deuteronomy 27:14-26—Curses upon Disobedience.

Sun. Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 10:12-13, 28:1-2—Obey the Statutes and Ordinances.