

**PP Acts: To the End of the Earth**

Part 24-Acts 10:9-33 *The Door Opens*

4/17-18/2021

The temple of God in Jerusalem had a 5' wall that separated the Court of Gentiles from the temple itself

Stone blocks were placed next to the gates, with a message that served as a warning to Gentiles Written in Latin and Greek, they said in English: **PP** *"No foreigner may enter ... the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death which will ensue."*

Paul referred to this when he wrote, **PP** *"But now in Christ Jesus [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For [Christ] Himself is our peace, Who has made [Jew and Gentile] one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility."* Ephesians 2:13-14

These signs weren't from God, they were put there by zealous men who lost the mission of Israel His plan is for the nations to have access to Him, Jews and Gentiles, people of every color, language, and ethnicity

That wall was referred to as the *'dividing wall of hostility'*, and Christ was about to destroy it The moment the door opened wide for the Gentiles was about to occur in our passage in **Acts 10**

Historians say that at no time in history was the world more divided than the 1st century

There were seemingly unbridgeable divisions between every social group on earth

Divisions between the wealthy and poor, slave and free, men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and children, educated and uneducated, Jew and Gentiles, non Jewish people

In every case, the life of Jesus Christ in His people would overcome those divisions and what we will see today was the tearing down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile

Gentiles for centuries had treated the Jews with scorn, cruelty, mocking them for their circumcision, their Sabbath day rest, their worship of an invisible God, their laws

Gentiles were murderously hateful toward Jews; Jews viewed Gentiles as spiritually unclean, meaning they looked at a Gentile as a living, walking contagion of spiritual filth

Rabbis commanded that no Jew should ever teach a Gentile the Law of God, some even taught that God created Gentiles so there would be fuel for the fires of hell to burn

To touch a Gentile, or even touch something belonging to a Gentile was to contaminate your soul, leaving you unclean before God, barring you from His presence and peace

Jewish parents would hold a wedding and a funeral the same day if their daughter wed a Gentile Strict Jews taught that no one should help a Gentile woman give birth, for it was a terrible thing in God's eyes to aid in bringing another Gentile into the world

They were to shake the dust off their sandals if they had been walking on Gentile land, for even the dust and dirt of the Gentiles was morally unclean and would contaminate their land

This was, of course, not God's view, it was not biblical, but the Jewish people had drifted far from the loving heart of God by the 1st century

**PP** *"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* Isaiah 49:6

So lost was the great covenant and mission God had given to Israel, that we will see much in Acts devoted to the work of the Holy Spirit in overcoming this spiritual blindness

If the gospel of Jesus Christ was to go to the end of the earth, the church must love all, and it would begin in earnest with Peter

***“The next day, 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***

Peter was in the seacoast town of Joppa and was unknowingly about to meet a devout Roman Centurion who had been told by an angel to send for the Apostle

Cornelius was his name and he sent 3 people to ask Peter to come to Caesarea 30 miles away

As they neared Joppa, Peter was up on Simon the Tanner’s roof praying, at noon

Roofs then nearly always flat and were used for sleeping during hot months, for meals and also for private times of conversation and prayer

While waiting for lunch, ***“he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’” Acts 10:11-13***

Not a dream but a ‘*vision*’ (17, 19), from God, preparing Peter for what was about to happen

Friends, there are in each of us, we must humbly be aware, attitudes, thoughts, beliefs that are contrary to God’s, and we often cannot see them until God makes us aware

Peter clearly proved this for unknowingly, in his heart, was favoritism, prejudice, and life-long error taught him in Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people

Look again at the sheet filled with ***‘all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds’ 10:13***

When God created life on earth, He told Adam and Eve that all the fruit and vegetables were theirs to eat and enjoy, but not animals...not until He flooded the earth

Post-flood, He said to Noah that fruit and vegetables and now animals are for the food of people

When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, and He set His laws before them, He restricted what animals they could eat

**PP** ***“You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” Leviticus 20:25–26***

Contrary to some thinking, this wasn’t primarily for *physical* health, but *moral* health

By distinguishing between clean and unclean animals, God was showing that He is holy, utterly distinct from all creation and His people were to be holy, different from all other nations

With these Kosher food laws, Israel would show the world the God Who sets His people apart from the world to be His holy people

As a result of compliance, social life with Gentiles was nearly impossible for the Jews as nearly all social life revolved around eating together

Peter was taught and raised to never, eat unclean animals: ***“But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’” 10:14***

While he kept the dietary laws, problems emerged in his and every Jewish heart:

First, Israel began to believe they were intrinsically superior to Gentiles, whom they called dogs

Second, they began to believe holiness could be gained through eating the right foods

And third, they began to pridefully believe that they alone could be the people of God

Jesus was showing Peter that one of the main ways that distinguished Jews from Gentiles was abolished, threatening his entire worldview, Jews were not better than Gentiles

In short, this vision wasn't so much about food, as it was the ethnic prejudice of Peter  
 So Jesus tells a protesting Peter, ***“What God has made clean, do not call common.” 10:15***  
 He reminds Peter that He told him He had abolished these dietary laws years earlier: **PP *“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)” Mark 7:18-19***

But centuries of false belief are slow to change, and Peter was left *‘inwardly perplexed’* 17  
 The vision repeated 3x's and the Spirit was about to personally intervene

The 3 men from Cornelius arrived (17), and before Peter went down from the roof, ***“the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.’” 19-20***

To appreciate how difficult this was going to be for Peter, we need to know that Jews did not go into Gentile homes, and only rarely would allow Gentiles to come into theirs and they certainly would never eat food prepared by the unclean hands of a Gentile

They believed that whatever a Gentile touched became morally unclean and that the contagion could spread, so the object was either burned, or cleansed

When it came to food, if it had become unclean by a Gentile, then a demon named Shibta could reside on it, which could enter you ate and torment your body

They established elaborate purification rites to cleanse their hands morally before eating

But here, Peter ***‘invited them in to be his guests’*** (23), showing us that his heart was changing

The next day they set out for Caesarea and I want to take note of three things:

**PP First**, Peter was no longer his formerly proud self, but a humble disciple of Jesus  
***“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am a man.’”***

Gone is the arrogant, petulant, reactive man, He has been transformed by the power of Jesus  
 There is no ability to take down a dividing wall of hostility without Christ-wrought humility  
 If a Gentile expressed interest in Judaism and attended worship in a synagogue, he would have to sit in the back as observers and not participants

If he wanted to be accepted socially by the Jews, he would have to undergo circumcision

Devout Jews believed that God didn't save Gentiles unless they spiritually became Jews first

But Peter had gotten the lesson of the vision, and it humbled his heart and rid it of favoritism

**PP Second**, Cornelius had invited all he loved to hear the gospel taught

***“And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends....Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” 10:24, 33***

Christian, are you filled with expectation, anticipation of what God is going to do in saving your family and your friends?

Are you gathering them together, giving them every opportunity you can to hear and be saved?  
 I have had several tell me that they are inviting their friends and family to our church, they are getting these sermons to them, and they are talking about Jesus with them

We are witnesses of Jesus, and we take the first step toward them with the invitation to hear

So invite, share your story of salvation, ask them to come to church, take responsibility for their hearing the gospel

**PP Finally**, the ground is absolutely level at the foot of the cross

*“And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful 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. So when I was sent for, I came without objection.’” 28-29*

Notice verse 34 and you will see what Peter suddenly learned: *“God shows no partiality”*

Jews were not superior to Gentiles, and Gentiles were not superior to Jews

There is no one more deserving of God’s grace, or less deserving than you are

Did you know that there were 3 kinds of Gentiles in the Jewish mind?

One was the plain ordinary Gentile that a Jew would avoid at all costs if possible

Another one was a little better on the scale, which was the ‘God-fearer’, like Cornelius (10:22)

This second class of Gentile believed in the Hebrew ethics, but had never been circumcised, therefore was not a proselyte, not included in the promises of Judaism

The third level of Gentile was the proselyte who had come into Judaism, was circumcised and considered to be a Jew in the spiritual sense

But that was Peter’s old way of thinking, changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ which tells us

God loves everyone, and whether a person is Jew or Gentile, white or black, American or Iranian, the ground is level at the foot of the cross

The place where Jesus died, and by faith, anyone can be saved

Amen?

Pray