



INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back...Parents if you want, feel free to send your kids with Berklee, so we can give them a little space to play and YOU a little time to rest and reflect...(PAUSE)...Hey before we get started, can we thank again our friends here at The Well for the use of this amazing space?...(CLAP)...I'll tell ya: This week I thought long and hard about changing our mission statement from "*Sharing the Freedom & Family Of Christ*" to "*You're Welcome To Join Us, If You Can Find Us.*" No but seriously, this really is a gift to be here, not just because it's a place in which can continue pausing together, BUT because if you recall, earlier this Fall we took some time to layout a kind of *picture of success* we believe God inviting us to uphold this season; namely, success being simply *learning to trust and rest in Christ for every area of life.*

And ya know, one of reasons we believe that to BE God's definition of success is cuz, despite our love for progress and advancement, Scripture really never calls us to build the kingdom or even move ourselves along some conveyor belt of maturity. No, that's always Jesus' job. Ours is to take a back-seat to what He's doing and HAS done...BY simply learning to trust and rest in Him - a part of which, of course, is pausing each week like this...And so in that way, while we're definitely gonna keep praying and searching for a long-term gathering space/and I hope you ARE praying/will join us *each Tuesday at 6:30pm* as WE pray online together, the reality is, THIS time of Pause is less about where or how we meet than about WHAT'S being said.

SO if ya have a Bible and I hope ya do, go ahead and make your way to the *Book of Acts Ch.10* so that WE can hear, what I believe God wants to SAY to us tonight. Let's follow-along as we hear the reading of God's word from *Acts 10*. And we're gonna read the whole chapter so make sure you follow along...**Eva reads vv.1-8; Harry 9-33; Jude: 34-48**...

TEXT:

Thanks everyone! Could we thank all of them for reading?...So we're continuing our "True Myth" series tonight, BUT from a different text than I'd originally planned prior to last week. And that's BECAUSE I want us to consider this question together: *What In The World Is God Up To?* Feels applicable right? - certainly something I've been asking myself this week as I've talked to dozens of people, and looked at dozens of gathering spaces. But too, something I find most of us, if we're honest, are asking at one time or another - "*God where are you? Why's this happening? How's this supposed to work? ...What are you doing?*"

And ya know, honestly the *Book of Acts* is a great place to start when asking that question BECAUSE it's quite literally the source book of the early church - chronicles *what God was up to* Post-Resurrection/which we talked about last week AND is therefore STILL up to today! And *Acts 10* in particular, as you heard read, is a great story because it shows us *what God is up to* BY connecting the stories of 2 seemingly opposite characters - Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius being an unsaved Gentile, but essentially representing the best of the Gentile non-Christian world. And Peter of course, being a Jew and one of the leading Apostles OF Christ. And I say Cornelius represents the best of the unsaved world, cuz ya notice, we're told that he's "*a centurion of the Italian Cohort,*" - so a really exceptional leader, since centurions were

commanders of at least 100 soldiers in the Roman army and the Italian Cohort was a kind of elite squad of the 6 best centurions. So Cornelius is a leader of men here! But he's also, it says, "*a devout man who feared God with all his household.*" So he's a spiritually faithful family-man too - A guy who appears to love and lead his family really well. Not to mention, he's generous in his community. It says he "*gave alms or gifts, generously to the people/the poor, and prayed continually to God.*" So let's be clear, Cornelius is man who's professionally/relationally successful AND personally moral...AND YET, not a Christian...as evidenced by the fact that God has to SPEAK to him via this vision to seek out Peter, so that Peter will then come, and as **vv.34-48** show, PREACH the Gospel so that he can get saved and baptized! So let me put this in perspective here, cuz it's really pretty radical. Most people think that becoming a Christ-follower is a sorta call to a new morality of sorts - ya know, stop drinkin', stop dancin' and stop hangin' out with those who do. But really what Cornelius shows us is that Christianity is a CHALLENGE to morality. Cuz Cornelius is like one of the best people alive. He's been good. He's been generous, faithful, hasn't let power go to his head...And therefore, he must be saved!¹...See, while Cornelius is a REPRESENTATION of the best of the non-Christian world; he's also a REMINDER that before God, as **Isaiah 64:6** says, "*even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.*" Nothing we DO can make us acceptable to God. Only by faith in what Christ has DONE are we forgiven of our sin and saved into God's family!

So here's Cornelius: Not saved, but in a sense desperately seeking God...All the while, in a completely different town/on a completely different day Peter is receiving a completely different vision or WORD from God...Specifically, of a sheet coming down from heaven, and in this sheet there being a number of animals that Jews thought of as unclean/not kosher: things like birds, reptiles, and of course...pigs. So what you've got is...Your first "pigs in a blanket!" See what I did there?...And so with these unclean animals a voice from heaven tells Peter, "*to Kill, and eat,*" to which Peter, of course, responds by saying, "*Not a chance, Lord. I've never touched anything unclean.*" Now ya gotta appreciate the magnitude of what's going on here: For 1400 years Jews had avoided these kinds of animals precisely BECAUSE God had told em they were unclean! It was part of the OT law. But NOW God is saying to Peter, "*Eat up bro!*" You understand, that's like a Republican or Democrat receiving a dream in which a voter ballot descends from heaven and being told to VOTE for all the opposing candidates. Or where I come from, like a Baptist pastor having a dream in which a sheet descends from heaven with a joint and a bottle of Jack in it and being told to drink and smoke up. You'd be like, "*Uh...*" And so God responds to Peter saying, "*Peter, what I've made clean, don't call unclean!*"...And as Peter's trying to figure out what all this means someone knocks at his door, and there stands Cornelius and a bunch of Gentile soldiers saying, "*An angel told us to come to talk to you*"...at which point Peter begins to realize that this WORD He's received from the Lord/this vision; it's not about food, but about God's power to make any and all people acceptable before Him. As Peter says in **vv.34-35** "*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.*"...And so like with Cornelius, we get this REMINDER with Peter too that just like Jews couldn't eat certain animals

¹ Insight about Cornelius adapted from "Acts, Chapter 10, Tim Keller, on converted by the spirit."

cuz eating em would make em unclean, so too SIN defiles every person, making us by nature, unclean and unable to enter God's presence...BUT with Jesus having died and risen from the dead, which you see Peter explain in **vv.36-43**, our defilement has been removed, so that ANYONE - Jew/Gentile, Upstanding or Outcast, Educated or Uneducated, Black, White, Brown - ANYONE, who simply places their trust in Jesus' work on their behalf is made clean/ acceptable to God. I love the way Tim Keller says it, "*The Gospel is NOT you develop a righteousness of your own and offer it to God, but GOD develops a righteousness and GIFTS it TO you in Christ!*"² Or as Pastor Chris Green says: "*Humanity has one problem: sin; there's one Savior: Jesus; we're all part of 1 race: human; and together we have one hope: resurrection.*"³ The word of the Gospel FOR everyone THROUGH anyone! That's the story here!

So let's pull this together and again ask, "***What Is God Up To?***" 3 Questions I want you to consider: ***First***, very simply: **WHAT Is He Doing Here?** And I don't want you to try an interpret everything or jump to what it might all mean for us yet, but just at the most basic level, ***WHAT Is God Doing here?*** Anyone?...**(PAUSE)**...Yeah, at the most basic level, God is exercising His Sovereignty right?... You know what sovereignty is? It's Lordship. It's the ability to reign and exercise authority, as a "sovereign." Or more specifically, for God, it's His ability to operate life like you would operate a beautiful tapestry; namely, embroidering every circumstance into a gorgeous pattern for our good and His glory.⁴ - Weaving for example His working with Cornelius and Peter, who were totally different people, in different towns, on different days, receiving different visions, into one tapestry of the Gospel being FOR everyone THROUGH anyone! That's God's sovereignty/***That's What He's Doing*** here; the measure of which of course is the cross and resurrection...And ya know why it's good news? It means God is CERTAIN...When all else in your life; your choices, desires, decisions, circumstance, situations, appear uncertain; He's certain. And so you can trust Him to embroider well, as it were, even when you don't yet see the pattern! ***That's What He's Doing!***

So ***Second***, let me ask you: **HOW's He Doing That?** What elements are involved in God's sovereignty here? Anyone?...**(PAUSE)**...Yeah, His Word and People right? Cuz you got His Word coming to both Cornelius and Peter by way of visions. Then you got Peter preaching His Word to Cornelius and the Gentiles. And then Cornelius and the Gentiles getting saved by receiving the Word!...His Word and People...And you understand, that's SUCH good news, because so many people/maybe YOU tonight feel like you're searching for God in some way; maybe in answer to a prayer, or help with a certain situation, or just cuz you sense you need to find more purpose or passion in life. And if you're honest, you're a little/maybe a lot...scared that you won't find Him/like you're gonna somehow miss Him/ya know that you won't pull the right levers to get God to drop in your life. But Friend, what this account shows you is that while God often works in mysterious ways that we don't always understand at first/neither Cornelius

² Justified by Faith - Bible: The Whole Story—Redemption and Restoration—March 8, 2008 - Romans 3:21–28 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

³ Cited in "*Standing in God's Way' of Racial Integration*" // Acts 10:34–11:17 // SENT #14 - J.D. Greear

⁴ Embroidery analogy from Joni Eareckson Tada

nor Peter at first understood what God was doing, we CAN know HOW God is working; namely, through His word AND people! So you wanna get clarity/direction in some area of your life/help a friend get clarity? Surround yourself/them with people who are learning to trust and rest in God's word together! Really serve your Missional Family/DNA Group/Invite a friend INTO both. Gather every Sunday and invite someone to gather with you! Because **WHAT God's doing** is sovereignly weaving together a beautiful tapestry... THROUGH His word and people!

So **Finally**, let me ask you: **WHY is God doing all this?** Anyone wanna venture an answer?... (PAUSE)... Yes! God's exercising His sovereignty, through His word and people, IN ORDER TO... advance the Gospel and save! See, **Acts 10** here is a kind of turning point in both the book and church history, because after this, what you find is the message of Jesus just EXPLODING out among the Gentiles, and largely just through a bunch of unknown guys and gals committed to simply passing onto others the Jesus who's brought em joy - Acts calls em "witnesses" - just everyday people telling stories of Jesus and His impact on the everyday stuff of their lives, in hopes of seeing friends, neighbors, coworkers come to trust Jesus with em. So not attorneys with cases to make, or apologists with arguments to impose, or legislators with programs to implement, but "witnesses" with a wonderful Lord and Savior to represent. And if you look in **vv.43-44**, you see the beautiful simplicity of it. Cuz Peter says, *"To him (that's Jesus) all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (And) while Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word."* **You see that?** People of all kinds/this cosmopolitan/multi-cultural salvation. And not through particular gathering spaces, or ceremonies, or coming forward to an altar, upholding a tradition, making a resolution, attending a class, or certainly not after having cleaned up their lives, but SIMPLY through faith in the message of Jesus - believing that Jesus died for YOU and embracing that as your own! Or as we say, *"learning to trust and rest in Christ for everything!"* Simple as that... And ya know what's beautiful about this? It shows that while salvation is ONLY through faith in Jesus, God shows NO favoritism. Anyone can come because it's based on grace. The Gospel is the most inclusive-exclusivity there is... So you understand, as a kind of pilot-plant OF this salvation, WE GET to be this multi-cultural community in which we don't, ya know, lose our, you might call it, "1st or 2nd race" - our being male and female or black, white, brown. God's not gender-fluid or colorblind - No! Rather, we GET a "3rd race"... of being beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. And that "3rd race" gets elevated above and becomes weightier than the other two,⁵ in a way that brings this beautiful unity in diversity, and subsequently shows off a God who - **What's He Up To?** - Sovereignly using His word and people to save! **Amen?**

And so, in closing here: I think the big question of this text is very simply: Will WE be up to what HE'S up to... which is to say, will WE/YOU simply trust this God who's willing and able to weave everything together for your good and His glory, as evidenced by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And then commit to carry the news of Him, as you're Going, Connecting and Pausing, for the salvation of ALL! That's WHAT God's up to and I believe what He's excitedly inviting US to be up to as well!... **Let's Pray...**

⁵ Insights about simplicity of faith and multiculturalism adapted from "'Standing in God's Way' of Racial Integration" // Acts 10:34-11:17 // SENT #14 - J.D. Greear