

Acts 10.24-11.18

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[0:00] Hi, my name is Andrew. If we've not met, I'm one of the leaders here in Harvest Church. I'm speaking this morning. We're going to be in the book of Acts. We're continuing our series working through the book of Acts, devoted to God, each other and mission.

The big picture story of Acts, the early church. Today I've got quite a long passage for us to work through. In fact, I'm actually only going to read part of the passage.

But if you've got your Bible with you, Acts chapter 10 is where we're going to turn to. I'm going to read verses 24 to 46 of Acts chapter 10. And I'd like to encourage you, after the meeting another time, continue reading through to verse 18 of chapter 11, as well as the whole story is unveiled in that.

So Acts 10, 24, 46. The next day, so this is a continuation of the passage Rob preached on two weeks ago around Cornelius, who went and had a vision, had to go and ask someone to go and find Peter to come along to explain the gospel.

And this is, we're breaking in the middle of that story. The next day, Peter started out with them. These were the people who went to find him on behalf of Cornelius. And some of the brothers from Joppa went along. The following day, he arrived in Caesarea.

[1:16] Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. I could just say, that just strikes me now.

We've all got relatives and close friends who need to hear the gospel, I imagine. Let's not be shy of inviting them along to hear the gospel when somebody's coming to share the truth of Jesus.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said. I'm only a man myself. Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

He said to them, you are well aware that it's against our law for a Jew to associate with the Gentile or visit him. But God, I have that, but God, has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.

So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?

Cornelius answered, four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour at three in the afternoon.

[2:21] Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me. Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

Sent a dropper for Simon who is called Peter. Peter, he's a guest in the home of Simon the Tanner who lives by the sea. So I sent for you immediately and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

Then Peter began to speak. I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how 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.

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him, that's Jesus, by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

[3:40] He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses who God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Can I just state that last sentence again for a moment?

Everyone who believes in him, that's Jesus, receives forgiveness of sins through his name. You may not yet know that, but you can today. And that can become reality in your life today.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

And in fact, I'm just going to also read a couple of verses from the middle of Acts 11. Verse 18, Peter ends up going back to Jerusalem telling them what's happened.

[4 : 53] And it says this in verse 18, When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

Hallelujah. That's us, by the way. We're Gentiles. Unless you have a Jewish ancestry, Gentiles were people who weren't the people of God. That's in non-Jews.

We each come to know, wow, the fullness of life in God. How precious that is. We can be forgiven. Repentance unto life.

What we've just read marks a massive turning point in the book of Acts. And indeed, in the story of Christianity. It's one of those moments where you've got to go, oh, wow.

Hang on. Everything's changed from here on. Up until this point in time, the Jewish Christians felt or believed that Jesus had only died for them. That the gospel was only for them.

[5 : 55] And here, the revelation happens. Actually, the gospel's for everyone. It's for all, regardless of background. Regardless of race, religion, or anything else. The gospel is for all.

It's such an important moment in the history of Christianity. Christianity. In one sense, without it, we wouldn't be here. Gathered today. That's important.

And so I'd like us just to focus on three particular verses from this passage. To be frank, I could probably preach ten sermons from this passage rather than just one.

So I'm picking a few verses which I feel particularly God wants to speak to us about today. And the first of these is this. It's Acts 10, 28. You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.

But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. And I'd love us to ask the question of ourselves.

[7 : 02] Do we do that? Do we think the gospel is only for people like us? Do we recognize this for everyone?

Regardless of any of our prejudices, for want of a better word. Regardless of any of our prejudgments we may have made about other people.

Regardless of whether people are like us or come from a completely different culture, background, language, race, religion, socioeconomic group, different road, whatever it may well be.

The gospel is for all of us. Without distinction. We shouldn't call any person unclean or impure. That they can't come under the gospel.

It's a worldview change. God is the judge of all. He knows the heart of all mankind. Only he can judge.

[8 : 02] In Psalm 7, 11, I think it is, he's described as the righteous judge. The righteous judge. Not us.

Him. Therefore, let's not judge others through whatever lens we may be wearing. Whatever prejudice. Whatever thing we may carry with us.

Jesus in Matthew 7, 1 is recorded as saying, Don't judge or you too will be judged. That's so weird words, aren't they?

How easy it is for us to make judgments about other people. And our thinking, our opinions, need to come under God.

We need his view and perspective at all times. Sometimes we need to particularly stop and pause because we can just rush into things. Because that's how we always did it.

[9 : 01] Or that's how we always saw these things. So that's how we always treated the situational circumstances. God wants to break through our rules. The things we've imposed on our lives.

He wants to free us from wrong perspectives. He wants to give us his perspective. And his perspective in the gospel is that ultimately all would come to know Jesus.

All would come to know the Father's love because of Jesus' death on the cross. God's desire is that everyone should know him. So how can we allow our views to stop others coming to know Jesus? Now of course we don't have prejudices, do we? Let me name a few which I came up with. Class. Culture.

Thinking. Language. Hopes and dreams. Socioeconomic status. Folk who are more spiritual. Wealth. Possessions.

[10:14] Friends. Community. Marital status. And there's a whole load more we could come up with. And for some of us, we'll hold some of those things so dearly that it stops us being able to see what God's doing in somebody's life.

And this passage is very clearly wanting to challenge that. In fact, I feel like even now the Spirit of God's just wanting to stir some things in some of us. Let's just pray for a moment.

We'll look to God. Jesus, we want to see you. We need to see you. We need to gaze on you. And as we do that, would you reveal those things we carry in our hearts which stop us loving others? Which change our perspective.

On how we love people with your love. Oh God, come and root those things out of our hearts and lives. Things we perhaps have felt comfortable with in our lives for maybe the large majority of our lives.

[11:28] God, grant us a pure heart. Grant us a mindset which reflects yours. That we wouldn't judge anyone impure, unclean, or any other word like that.

But that we would have an open heart, an open mind. To love the people you've put around us regardless of our circumstances or theirs.

Oh Jesus, work in us. Free us from those things that have held us captive. We look to you, God. We're aware we can't do this. We need your revelation to shine light into our hearts. Come do that even now. Shine your light into our hearts.

Reveal where Where we just Allow things to get in our way.

[12:38] In your way. For people seeing the gospel, the truth of the gospel through our lives. Help us to put them aside.

To lay them down. Renew our minds, Lord God. In Jesus' most precious name.

Amen. Amen. I'd like to move on to the second passage.

Which I'd like us to look at. It's from verse 34-35. I now realise how... This is Peter saying this. I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism.

But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. Wow. God accepts men from every nation.

[13:42] Because this was a nation thing at this point. Who fear him and do what is right. In fact, God accepts every person. Regardless of nation. Or anything else.

Who fear him. And do what is right. Oh.

Help us not to show favouritism, God. Help us to reflect you. That we wouldn't favour others. Help us to know the reality of this.

Please hear what I'm going to say carefully. We are all equally accepted. And acceptable to God through Christ's sacrifice for our sin. Before we came into Christ, we were all equal in our sin.

It alienated us from God. End of. Regardless of how nice or bad we thought our sins were. Now in Christ, we are all equal in Christ. There is no grounds, therefore, for any favouritism of any person whatsoever.

[14:56] Not one of us has a better standing than another in Christ. We are all completely equal. Whether we've known Christ for a few minutes, a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or a few decades.

We're all equal in Christ. In James, we read this. As believers, don't show favouritism.

It's fairly clear, isn't it? It's fairly unequivocal. Don't show favouritism. I wonder how we're doing on that score.

I'm ready to another list. This was the question I asked myself. Do we despise or reject people who are not like us?

Perhaps people we fear. People who just don't look like us. Don't behave like us. Don't have our gifts, our strengths, the things we appreciate more than others.

[16:10] People who behave differently. Who talk differently. People we may favour for what we can get from them.

Or what we think they can give us. Friends, let's treat each other as God treats us.

With no favouritism. The third passage I want to focus on is this.

Actually, I didn't read this verse fine enough. I read the following one. Acts 11, 17. So if God gave them the same gift, that is salvation as he gives us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?

Obviously, this is Peter talking to a council in Jerusalem. But he recognises a really important truth here, which we need to hear and grab hold of.

[17 : 14] The gift of salvation through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, through God's grace in Christ, is the only basis for life, for the life we have. But when we allow our prejudices, our differences, or when we start to show favouritism to others, we stand at this point he's warning about.

Who am I to go against what God said? In other words, to oppose God. We need to recognise that ultimately sin opposes God.

It's saying, God, you're not in control. I'm in control. Who are we to oppose God?

By showing favour, by allowing our prejudices to prevent us from reaching out with the gospel to each other and to the world around us.

I don't know about you, I find this really challenging. Do I want to oppose God? Have I got the nerve to try to oppose God, who is almighty God, who is the maker and sustainer of the heavens, who knows me inside out, who knows all about me, whose sons died for my sin?

[18 : 49] Dare I oppose God? And yet I can do that through how I live. We risk opposing God.

We say, I'm the final arbiter, not you, God. I'm the one who decides, not you. I get to decide who my friends are. I get to decide who or how I treat people, all those different things.

Friends, we need a change in our thinking. If we're in that place, we need a change in our thinking.

We actually, first of all, we need to repent. If we're opposing God, we need to repent. We need to cry out for God's forgiveness.

We need to call it out for what it is and repent. And then as we do that, we need to say, God, renew my thinking. Help me to see people as you see them.

Help me to love people that you've put around me. Oh God, help me to display your grace and mercy just as you have to me and my brothers and sisters that I would not treat anybody differently.

[19 : 50] There is a flip side to this. You may feel that you have experienced prejudice.

You have experienced the opposite to favouritism. You've been ignored and others have been favoured over you. And you may be thinking, yeah, but where do I stand?

What do I do? Friends, we probably have all experienced that in one place or another. That doesn't make it right. It doesn't make it good and I hope it's not happened in our church. But knowing that we can all get things wrong, it may have.

We need to forgive. Forgive as God forgives us. That's what we're called to do. We let it go. We let that person free.

God can deal with them. I don't need to worry about them. God deals with them. But I need to sort my attitude out. And that starts by me saying, I forgive. And for some of us today, we may need to do just that.

[21 : 06] I forgive them for what they've done to me. And how that's impacted my life. I'm going to bring this to a conclusions point.

Friends, in Harvest Church, we're looking to be a church who loves the stranger. The alien, the friendless, the hurting, the successful, they've got it all together.

The oppressed, the person who feels awkward, the lonely, the afraid. That's the gospel. It's for all of those people and so many more. You could come up with 20, 50, 100,000 more categories.

To do this, we need to be ruthless. Ruthless in dealing with our prejudices. Our attitudes.

Recognising we all start in the same place of the grace of God. Alienated to God, brought into relationship with God. Let's make sure we do that.

[22 : 23] I'm not bringing this because something's happened, by the way, in life. The church may think, oh, this is a bit heavy, isn't it, Andrew? Something happened, something going on in the church? No. This is the word of God. This is where we got to in the book of Acts.

This is why we work through the scriptures because we come to things which perhaps are challenging, which we may not like to hear, but we need to hear. Let's cast off all the sin which so easily entangles us.

Let's deal with those attitudes. Let's be that church who love unconditionally because we're loved unconditionally.

I'm going to lead us in prayer. If you'd like to join me in this prayer, please do. It's going to be a prayer of both repentance but also asking God to help us to live our lives well for him.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you love us and that you're holy and you have the best plans for our lives.

[23 : 47] thank you that while we were steeped in sin and shame, Jesus came on a rescue mission for us to restore us to you and on that basis we all stand before you the same, equally loved, equally acceptable, equally forgiven by you.

I pray, Father God, let that be what defines our lives and how we look out for and how we treat one another, both people in this church but the people you've put us around.

That we would demonstrate the fullness of the gospel, the amazing nature of the gospel that we accept each and every one without judgment, without favoritism and into doing we bring the love and grace of God which you've poured into our lives and we share it with somebody else that they too would come to know you.

Forgive us, Lord, where we've got it wrong, our God. Work in our lives that we wouldn't be like that but that we would reflect you in every aspect of our lives for your glory and honor, please, Lord God. Amen. Amen. We're going to come to worship God again, surrender ourselves to God. Katie, I'm wondering, I think I saw on your song list Holy, Holy, Holy.

[25 : 29] Could we go there? Is that okay? That would be wonderful. Just give the band a moment to come up but you may want to stand in the meantime. Thank you.