**Study Notes on Acts 10:23-48**

*By Joshua M. Weidmann*

*Friday, October 24, 2014*

NOTE: These notes are not intended to read as an article or well-rounded written work. Rather, this is a collage of different research and resources that will assist in the preparation of a sermon.

**Working Sermon Title**: **Un|Done**: God’s redemption plan reconcile to all people

**Summary of the Passage**: Peter obeys God’s prompting to go to Caesarea after seeing the vision given to him by God demonstrating no partiality; upon his arrival he preaches the Gospel and the Holy Spirit is given to the Gentiles.

**Outline of the passage:**

1. **Jews and gentiles meet under God’s directive**
2. **23b-24** In obedience, they left and went to Joppa and Cornelius was waiting and ready
3. **25-26** Cornelius’ expresses his joy and gratitude and Peter redirects Cornelius’ eyes to God.
4. **27-29** The Gentiles were gathered and Peter acknowledges the significance of His presence with them was a directive from God, but asked why they had requested him.
5. **30-33** Cornelius replies to Peter by telling him what he had seen and heard from God.
6. **Peter preaches the Gospel for all men**
7. **34-35** Peter states the thesis statement of his vision and that God shows no partiality.
8. **36-38** Peter recounts the good news of Jesus Christ becoming man and bringing peace and freedom.
9. **39-41** Peter tells of the death and resurrection of Christ
10. **42** The command Jesus gave to his followers to proclaim Him as Lord
11. **43** The prophets validate the truth forgiveness is in Christ alone.
12. **The Holy Spirit fills the Gentiles**
13. **44-46** The Holy Spirit came to those who heard the Gospel that was just preached through Peter.
14. **47-48** Peter commanded that they be baptized at once.

**The Main Point of the Passage:**

**Exegetical Idea**: The Holy Spirit is given to the Gentiles through Peter’s meeting with Cornelius in Caesarea.

**Theological Idea**: A person’s ethnic background and social statues doesn’t matter or merit faith in Christ; the Holy Spirit is given according to God’s gracious will (cf. Gal 3:28).

**Applicational Idea**: We should have no prejudices in Christ, yet full anticipate that God will give salvation to whomever He desires. We live redeemed and we start to call all men to redemption.

**Possible Preaching Outline**:

Main preaching point: There is no partiality in God.

1. God was fulfilling his plan, despite the comfort level of those involved in fulfilling it (vv 24-33)
2. There is no partiality in God – the Gospel of Jesus is proof of God’s power to forgive all who believe (vv. 34-43)
3. The Holy Spirit is our eternal hope and immediate empowerment for action (vv. 44-48)

**CONTEXT BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PASSAGE:**

**10:1-8** — **A devout man of God, Cornelius, was doing good and God’s eyes so an angel of the Lord came to him and told him to send for Simon Peter.**

31 Miles North of where Peter was in Joppa At Caesarea there was a man named **Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. (Acts 10:1- 2, ESV)**

* A Gentile who worshiped Israel’s God and was in some way attached to a synagogue but who had not submitted to Jewish conversion rites (esp. circumcision). He followed two of the primary expressions of Jewish piety— prayer and almsgiving. Alms are gifts to the poor.
* This passage stood out to me, because it was by a holy man, not an Israelite, that God spoke a clear message to get Peter so that hope could be brought to all men.
* I love that Cornelius is spoken of as a devout man, who prays and gives AND fears the Lord. This is recounted about him later in Acts as well.
* ItwasbecauseofhisdiligencethatGoddidgreatthingsthroughhim-namely bringing Peter to call all gentiles into the fold of God.

**10:9-16 — Peter had a saw a vision in a dream three times of unclean animals portrayed on a sheet and the Lord told him to kill and eat the animals.**

* **Acts 10:9 -** Houses in Judea typically had flat roofs accessible by ladders or stairs.
* **The Unclean animals comes from the Jewish law** which forbade the  consumption of unclean animals (see Lev. 11:2–47). The command from Jesus to **kill and eat** made no sense to Peter, since it would have violated Jewish food laws

**10:17-23 —GOD’S TIMING IS EVERYTHING!** While Peter was perplexed about the meaning of his dream, the messengers of Cornelius arrive telling them about Cornelius and the holy angel that came to him.

**This is the longest conversion story in the book of Acts.** Most of the other conversion stories are between 1 and 14 verses. Saul’s story, retold 3 times, takes up 34 verses. This story takes up 66 verse. This shows the significance of this story.

* The Holy Spirit coming to dwell with men is the most significant story in the book of acts.
* The fact that HS came to dwell with Gentiles is of great importance!

**Exegesis and Commentary:**

**23b: The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.**

**The next day** indicates that there was no hesitation. This was about a 2-day walk from Joppa to Caesarea up the coastline (31 miles).

There were at least 6 other Christians that joined him on this journey, with he two men that were sent by Cornelius, we see this by the statement \*\*“Some of the brothers”\*\*. These would have been Christians because they are referred to as “brothers”. In Acts 11, when Peter accounts for what happened, he said, “These six brothers also accompanied me.”

**“And on the following day they entered Caesarea”** - We know that this was the third largest port city in the Roman Empire at the time. It was the former Roman capitol of Judea. It was one of Herod the Great’s Architectural Triumphs because he had made a powerful port and a massive city. Now, in this passage we will see that this was the site of the first gentile conversion to Christianity.

This city has been mentioned in Acts already in the following passages:

* Acts 8: After the death of Stephen in Acts chapter 8, Phillip BOLDLY keeps preaching – Samaria, not far from here to the east, and then came to Caesarea and kept teaching. He risked his life.
* Acts 9:30: After Paul’s conversion, he joined the disciples in Jerusalem and preached against the Hellenists. They sought to kill him, so the “Brothers” (disciples) sent him to Caesarea to get him out of the country. They chose to send him to Tarsus, which is located in Southern Turkey.
* Acts 18:22: Paul landed back after being in Corinth and stopped to say hi to the church before going on to Antioch. Notice the growing number of Christians after this initial conversion and Paul’s the care for other Christians.
* Acts 23:23-27:1: Paul spent quite a bit of time trial and prison on Caesarea. He was originally guarded and sent to Caesarea to keep him from being killed by the Jews in Jerusalem.

**[25] When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. [26] But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”**

Cornelius had authentic excitement that God had fulfilled his request and brought Peter to his presents. Cornelius fell and began to **worship** Peter. His excitement over God’s fulfillment caused him to worship the object of what God delivered rather than to worship the God who delivered the object. We do this too: We pray for things and then begin to be so excited for how God has delivered that to us that we forget to worship the God who gave it.

The act of Cornelius **bowing at Peter’s feet** may have caused Peter to grow prideful—hear a Roman centurion was bowing before a Jew. But instead of Peter getting puffed up, he pointed in Cornelius to Christ. We too must remember our morality whenever we are flattered or honored as we use this opportunity to give glory to God.

Peter had the right response, “I to them just a man.” Herod had the opposite response in Acts 12:20 – 23.

**[27] And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. [28] 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. [29] So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”**

There was a **large gathering** there waiting for Peter’s arrival. This speaks to Cornelius’ influence that he would have so many people with him. It also gives us a glimpse that he would have been wealthy and powerful enough that he had a house where a large group of people could fit.

It was **against the law for a Jew to be with the Gentiles** because they were seen as unclean because (as Mike said last week) of what they ate and their religious/non-religious practices. This was not necessarily outlined in the OT but it would have been the later customs of strict Jewish traditions about the uncleanness of Gentiles. All of the oral laws and of the Jewish traditions of purity made it virtually impossible for them to associate with Gentiles without becoming ritually unclean.

Peter has this attitude of “This may be unlawful for me to be with you according to tradition, but it is not according to God.” Surely he was uncomfortable, but he knew that he was at the center of God’s will.

**God has shown me** refers to the vision of vv. 10–16. This shows how Peter understood his vision. It certainly had firmed in his mind now four days after the vision.

**When I was sent for,** Peter acknowledges, I **came right away without objection.** He knew that God was moving and he was in tune with the Spirit’s moving. Remember, God had told him that He sent the men at the door, so to go. He was walking in confidence in Christ, but he wanted to make sure they had heard the Lord too. He asks the to explain, **“why you sent for me.”**

The biggest statement that Peter makes in these verses, before giving his sermon, is that God had made it clear to him that God had showed him that he should **not call any person common or unclean.** This was a huge paradigm shift: to this point the Jewish people knew that God had given them favor, but now for this to be outside the Jewish people was unbelievable – and even hard to understand (as we will see in 11:2).

I could illustrate and better define why it was that the Jews considered them unclean. Mention types of food that I consider unclean:

* + - * Tongue taco
      * Fried Brain Sandwich
      * Century Egg (in Malaysia) - *Tell my story of this*

**“What God has called clean don’t call common or unclean”** is mentioned three times in this story. That should make the importance of it clear to us. We are not to see any partiality in Christ.

**[30] And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing [31] and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. [32] Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ [33] 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.”**

**The ninth hour** would have been around 3 PM. This was not in the night, but a vision that he saw in the bright afternoon sun.

We are told in verse 2 that he was a **devout man**, meaning that he was diligent and worked hard and in his work acknowledged that he was working under the eye of a higher power. But we also know that he prayed and gave alms to the poor.

Joke: Did you hear about the guy that was begging for alms and was given legs instead? ☺

Notice the gratitude in Cornelius’ tone: **you were kind enough to come.**

Verses 30 through 32 are a recap of what happened in 3 through 8 of this same chapter. After he recounts what had happened he says, **“Now therefore we are all her in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”** This shows that:

* Cornelius really acknowledge that God had sent him
* They didn’t know what God had commanded, but were anxious to hear it.
* They understood, by Peter’s rebuke in vs. 26, that he was not the one to be worshiped but it was the God that was with Peter that was to be acknowledge.
* He knew they were in God’s presence

**The Gospel is preached**

Peter preaches to the people that are gathered there at the house. He had to preach – if he didn’t how would they hear? It is as if Cornelius knew that, so he said, “Go on… preach to us! Peter did:

**[34] So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, [35] but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.**

This is a HUGE statement: **God shows no partiality**. I need to have people underline this in their Bibles. We see this elsewhere in Scripture:

* Luke 20:21, “So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.”
* Romans 2:11, “For God shows no partiality.”
* Ephesians 6:9, “Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”
* 2 Chronicles 19:7, “Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes.”
* Peter 1:17, “[17] And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,”

**We are told to no show any partiality either:**

* Deuteronomy 16:19, “You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.”
* 1 Timothy 5:21, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.”
* James 2:1, “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

Definitions:

* The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The good news that sinners and those who were once opposed to God in their sin are now welcomed into his family through the atoning sacrifice of God’s own son Jesus Christ.
* Who is it for? Everyone! Define: All people (Rom 8:28) are wicked and in need of reconciliation with God. Everyone needs to the gospel to be set back in a right relationship with God.

It is only by God’s grace that a person can be saved and reconciled unto God. He enlightens wicked hearts to His love and mercy and reconciles them to Himself.

**[36] As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), [37] you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.**

Peter acknowledge that the good **word** **that he sent to Israel** was something that was given straight to God’s chosen people but now was going to be given to all men.

The **good news** was the **peace through Jesus.** This is what everyone needs! All humankind needs peace, ultimately with God. Peter, a believing Jew, recognizes that **Jesus is Lord.**

The message that Peter gives here is a summary of what Jesus did in his earthy ministry, and the eternal impact of it. It contains no scriptural proofs and was cut short before Peter could give an invitation to trust in Christ: the Spirit fell before he was even done. It is quite likely, of course, that the speech was an extended one, of which Luke gives an abbreviated account.

Verse 38 is a brief summary of all that God did through Jesus, but it acknowledges where His power came from. This may be Peter’s way of saying – “You may have heard the details, but let me make clear for you what happened.”

**[39] And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, [40] but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, [41] not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.**

Peter gives some validity to what he is saying by claiming to be a part of the **witnesses** of all that Jesus did in Jerusalem and in the rest of Israel—**the country of the Jews**.

The cross is referred to as **a tree**, making a clear connection with the use of the same word (Gk. *xylon*) in the Septuagint translation of Deut. 21:23, “cursed by God is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” Jesus was put in a position that the OT says is “cursed by God,” thus taking on himself the penalty for sin. See Gal. 3:13. *[From ESV Study Bible]*

The Gospel of Christ is not complete without a mention of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. In verse 40 Peter makes it clear that it was by the **power of God** that **Jesus raised on the third day** and able to appear to them again. Peter is saying, “I saw him with my own eyes.”

He was not **seen by everyone** but only by those who were chosen to be witnesses. Peter was one of those. **Who ate and drank with him** shows that Jesus was not a ghost or a spirit but had a real physical body after his resurrection. Eating and drinking are signs of sharing close personal fellowship.

**[42] And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.**

How will they know if someone doesn’t preach to them? “[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” - Romans 10:14 ESV

There are people around the world that are given his “General revelation” and are waiting for someone to tell them the truth of Jesus Christ. How are they to find their way if we are partial with this truth and don’t take it to everyone?

USE THE ILLUSTRATION OF EMRY in the Starbucks in Chicago.

Peter got his mission: **he was to communicate to all people that Jesus was appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead**. Simply put: he is the only key to reconciliation to God, He judges who is in and who is not.

**[43] To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”**

**All the prophets bear witness** means all people, including the words of those in the past. Similar in idea to Acts 3:18, “ [18] But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.” God said things and was clear through the prophets, and he was making it clear (again giving validation) of the truth of God’s fulfillment of his redemption plan in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We are to **believe in him** and when we do that we **receive forgiveness of sins**. This is the grace of God given to us. This grace only comes **through His name.** This is the good news of Jesus!

Peter’s precise recount of the gospel made clear that: Christ lived a perfect life of servant hood to God; His death on the Cross was for us; His resurrection proved the power of God; There were personal witnesses; this was the fulfillment of the prophets; it demands our personal faith.

A gospel message doesn’t have to be long and technical, it can be direct, short and spirit-led to call people to faith and then give them the gift of forgiveness.

**[44] While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. [45] And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. [46] For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,**

Before Peter was even done speaking the Holy Spirit fell on the people that were listening.

I love transformation stories that are dramatic and have a big “aha” moment at the end of an event (alter call). But I also like it when someone tells me that God came to them in the stillness of their heart, or in the middle of a message and everything just “clicked.” God moves whenever God wants to move.

**The Holy Spirit fell** on them and filled their heart, in the same way He did at Pentecost. This **amazed the believers in Christ that were circumcised (Jews)** as they new were seeing God’s grace given to people outside “the chosen people.” God was showing them that He would give mercy to whomever he wants to give mercy too.

Have you ever had the feeling like, “this person is too far gone, they will never hear the truth of Christ.” This is wrong for us to think this way; there is no partiality in God. This was a paradigm shift for the Jews.

The **Holy Spirit coming** to the Gentiles was a seal that their salvation was real. The fact that they had not followed any Mosaic ceremonial laws (such as those concerning circumcision, sacrifice, and dietary restrictions) before receiving the gift of the Spirit is an important point, as soon becomes evident (see 11:15–17). It makes it clear that they were not saved on their own righteousness but solely upon the righteousness of Christ.

There was a visible and audible impact of the Spirit on the people. They all started **speaking in tongues.** This was not a spiritual language but, like chapter 2 at Pentecost, languages that were not native to them. Perhaps for the Jews they started speaking Hebrew and praising their God in their language, even though they didn’t previously know it.

Speaking in tongues also occurred at Pentecost (2:4), later with the Ephesian 12 (19:6), and perhaps also among the Samaritans (8:18). In every case speaking in tongues validates that those in view belong to the people of God and have received the Holy Spirit in new covenant fullness. *[From ESV Study Bible]*

The praise of God outwardly demonstrated the Spirit’s presence and God’s acceptance of Gentiles without circumcision (which had been required for conversion to Judaism).

**[47] “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.**

We know that Baptism is the outward sign of the inward transformation. It is a public way to say, “I am all in” and to show that you understand you are “dead in your sins and alive in Christ.” Notice the proximity of faith to their baptism – as soon as they had believed, they made the decision (or peter prompted them) to be baptized.

To be **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** (see also 2:38; 8:16) is not different from being baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

Right away they took care of the baptisms. Then notice that **they asked him to stay for a few days.** This was against tradition, but that didn’t matter any more. They were all a part of God’s family now. They could stay together and eat together and it was all-acceptable to them and to God. This was a bold step for one who formerly was so concerned about clean and unclean foods. The fact they asked Peter to stay also speaks to their hunger to want to learn more.

**Some concluding thoughts:**

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel in the early church was their hesitancy to believe that Jesus was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

* We see Paul wresting with this in Roman 11.
* We see Peter again struggling with this in Galatians 2:11-14

Yet, God was making it clear that the Gospel is for everyone. There should be no barriers – language, culture, ethnic, economic, educational, etc. – to keep us from telling others about Christ.

Cornelius and Peter were very different:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CORNELIUS**   * Gentile * Wealthy * Military man | **PETER**   * Jew * Poor * Fisherman |

But God’s plan was for both of them to be saved. A new chapter was written that day in Cornelius’ house as the Jewish roots of faith were now applied to all men through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. They both needed each other to fulfill what God had instructed them to do. This was a good picture of the body being formed, with both Jew and Gentile being essential.