

## ***ALL NATIONS, ACTS 10***

◆Intro: When Aaron Daniels got home from Birmingham, Alabama one May, he hugged his wife, kissed his children and announced that things were going to be different. He lit a fire and burned his KKK robe. He vowed to abolish racist language in his home. And he offered a prayer to God to change his life and that of his family. What had happened to this 34 year old cable television lineman? Hint: He met a Jew. Daniels has run the gamut. Messed with drugs in High School. Cut class and flunked out. Got married. God divorced. And he hated life. Though he grew up in what was called a “Christian home” they didn’t ever actually read the Bible. In 1991 he found an outlet for the hate he felt in the Klan. By 1993 Aaron was a Khalif, a second in command, in 2 counties. In 1994 he was promoted to Grand Dragon as he lived a life of rallying in the streets and chanting racist lingo. But then, at a Promise Keeper convention, this Alabama Klansman met a Galilean Jew who built the world. A sheet was lowered from the sky and a message sent. The black man, the white man, the red skin, the yellow, the brown. God has made all humanity in his image. It is human kind that God prizes.

◆**1. God wants me to feel his compassion for people of other nations and religions.** But we so easily do not feel that, do we.

◆A. There are really multiple conversions going on in Acts 10, aren’t there? I mean, Cornelius is an obvious one. But perhaps the greater conversion of Act 10 is Peter’s. The Jewish people in the first century felt a lot like Aaron Daniels. The doctrine of Israel’e election and place in history has become twisted into a rope of favoritism. Peter was no terrorist. But Peter had in his gut the reactions and feelings of his culture. Gentiles were

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despised as dogs. Jewish tradition (and I say tradition in contrast to Jewish scripture; there's a difference) had led to a host of legalities.

◆“He said to them: “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.” Acts 10:28, NIV.

◆Peter uses the term “athemitos” meaning “not righteous”. This isn't God-revealed law. This is ancient custom law Peter is talking about. Lets read what Hebrew scriptures actually say about the Gentiles (literally “ethne” from which we get “ethnic”)

◆*Ps. 22:27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.*

◆*Isa. 2:2 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.*

◆*Isa. 49:6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*

◆But just how deep seated was this Jewish repulsion to the Gentile? It's a bit ironic, but probably intentional by the Holy Spirit, that in this very town, Joppa where Peter is staying, a few centuries earlier Jonah had tried to run away from the call to preach to the “ethne”. Lets read it in his own words.

◆Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to

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Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

◆Jonah doesn't even try to hide the fact that he doesn't want God to be kind to the gentiles! They are repulsive to him. Jews felt about Gentiles like they felt about the ceremonially unclean animals that Peter saw in his vision. So that you can feel it, imagine a Fujian native offering you a leaf loaded with bug larva for dinner. Are you gonna eat it? Or think of the two guys at a restaurant for breakfast when one ordered cow tongue!

◆“What are you thinking?” asks his friend. “How could you eat something that came out of an animals MOUTH!?” Gross. You don't know what's been in that cows mouth. How can that be sanitary? I would never eat something that came from an animals mouth!

◆His friend asked, “Well, what are you having?”

◆ “I'll just have a couple of eggs.”

◆Well, that's kinda how Jonah felt about the pagans of his day. Jonah was repulsed. He didn't want to deal with those gentile Assyrians. Peter stands in the line of Jonah. A good Jew avoided the gentiles. But that's about to change. You can tell this event is significant for Peter. Check out verse 16. How many times did God lower a sheet full of unclean dietary choices to Peter? Three. Where else does that number appear in Peter's story? His three-fold denial, as well as Jesus' three-fold question “Do you love me, Peter?” And his three-fold instruction to feed God's sheep. So my guess is, the third time Peter has the vision, his heart's eyes are wide open and God's got his attention. Peter is relearning what Jonah was supposed to

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learn 800 years earlier. Namely that God is not just interested in Israel. He is interested in his whole world.

◆*“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 3:6, NIV.*

◆B. What do you *feel* when it comes to people different from you? What does your heart *feel* when you are walking through, say, Menards, and you see a man in a turban? Or if you’re standing behind a huge head of dreadlocks in line? Repulsion? Avoidance? Discomfort? Does skin color block us from seeing a person behind the different look? Does accent unsettle us? Or can you see past cultural differences into humanness?

◆Here’s something helpful. When we remember who we are in comparison to God, it helps us get perspective on others. In verse 26 Cornelius falls down at Peter’s feet, like he’s a god or something. Peter rightly corrects him. “I’m only a man...” Things are dawning on Peter in the process. Maybe it is dawning on you too: don’t let others treat you like a god; and don’t treat others like a dog. All ground is level at the cross. When we get used to thinking highly of ourselves, we treat others worse. Listen! Nobody is off limits with God. God saved Paul, the Christian assassin! God saved Peter, the fearful. If any group of people should be welcoming to people of different races its God’s people. If any gathering could reflect the diversity of people groups, the Church is certainly the most appropriate place for it.

◆*“And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your*

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*blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Revelation 5:9, NIV.*

◆ You might find it interesting to note that God is working among the Muslims of the world today. More Muslims have become Christians in the last 15 years than in the last 15 centuries! According to the Denison Forum (6/9/15), an ISIS fighter who says he "enjoyed killing Christians" has told missionaries that he has been having dreams of a man in white. The man told him, "You are killing my people." Before the fighter murdered one Christian, the believer said, "I know you will kill me, but I give to you my Bible." He killed the Christian, then took his Bible and began to read it. Jesus appeared to him again, calling him to become a Christian. Now the man is asking missionaries how he can become a follower of Christ and be disciplined. God is very much interested in Muslim people. God wants to save into his family the Brazilian as much as the American, the black man as much as the white. Think of it. Unless someone here is Jewish by heritage, all of us calling ourselves the family of Christ here today are in fact "gentiles". We are the "ethne". If Peter didn't learn the lesson of Acts 10 you and I might not even be a part of God's family today!

**◆2. God wants me to share his truth with people of other nations and religions.**

◆A. We need to notice something in our text that might get skipped over. The lesson that God does not have favorites does not mean that God doesn't have truth. One common assumption often lined up with being

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racially reconciled, or being ethnically tolerant is that one must also be morally tolerant or religiously tolerant as well. (And so you might hear people try to lump sexual preference in with civil rights, but one is a physical state and the other is a moral choice.) In America it is legal to chose your religion. And for the most part we still have many of the rights that go along with that. It's often called the people's First Right and it is captured in the First Amendment to our Constitution. I quote,

◆“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

◆Now, First Century Palestine was similar to our First Amendment, but not exactly. The Roman Empire controlled the land of Israel at the time. Cornelius was a Roman officer over 100 men, hence the title “centurion”. In Roman law was very tolerant of ethnic religions and allowed them, *as long as the conquered people would also worship the Roman Emperor whom they considered god*. So, Cornel is a bit of a departure from Roman practice.

◆v2 he was *devout/devoted, God-fearing* (believed in one true God), and *generous*, (so he lived his allegiance to God.) He was also in the regular habit of talking with and to God (prayer)

◆v22 tells us he's *righteous* and *God-fearing*, and *respected by the Jewish people*.

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◆v 31 we find that Cornel prayed and God heard him, and Cornel gave away his wealth to help those who had little.

◆Everything indicates that the Centurion had come to believe the Jewish faith was on the right track. But for all this, and his godly behavior, Peter still preaches the message of Christ. Check it out.

◆“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 by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He 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. He 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. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”” Acts 10:36-43, NIV.

◆That’s not religious tolerance. That’s religious conviction. That’s belief that something is actually true and true for everyone, for every nation, tribe, and tongue. While pagan persons are to be considered acceptable to God, this does not indicate that pagan religion is to be tolerated as acceptable to God. Bible commentator Lenski asks, “If Cornelius’s honest pagan conviction had been sufficient, why did he seek the synagogue (Jewish church). If the synagogue had been sufficient, why was Peter here?”

◆Peter here points out that all human history culminates in one person. Peter says that Jesus “is the one whom God appointed to

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judge the living and the dead.” Peter says that all the OT prophets spoke looking forward to him. Just what does this mean? It means this: you and I cannot be just fine with letting, say our Muslim neighbor, or our Hindu doctor, or our Native American buddy just keep to their own ways while we keep to ours. If God is the God of all nations, then he wants us to tell all nations about the True Religion; that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the only way to salvation after this life and the hope of satisfaction and victory in this one.

◆And it means that when it comes to your struggles, evils, fights, pains, you need to turn to this person, Jesus, for power and help.

◆**Conclusion:** You know, the melting pot concept and the welcoming of the world's peoples to our shores owes its origin to the Christian faith that built this country. Ever since Jesus day, Christian people have been setting out from their own lands, and their own kind to go to people and nations vastly different with the goal of bringing them into the family of God.

Sometimes we fret about the possible coming of refugees and immigrants to our land these days. Will Al-Qaida slip in? Will Spanish speaking people become a majority? Perhaps we needn't be so nervous, especially if we are Christ-followers. We want to reach these people too! Christ is Lord of Mexico whether it seems so or not. Christ is Lord of Iraq and Afghanistan too. God is already there. It's God's planet. And you know where it's headed? Towards God's end where people of every color and background bow before the same one God who made us all.