

By Faith Alone
Acts 10:34-48
Rev. Brian Bill
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The first sermon I gave was over 40 years ago at a Young Life gathering. I'm glad there is no audio or video evidence of that sermon! Over the last twenty years, I've been preaching multiple services nearly every weekend. You'd think I'd get the hang of it by now. I've been invigorated by preaching to eager congregations and have almost put myself to sleep a few times.

I also remember a few sermons where interruptions occurred. For instance, when I was an associate pastor, I found it very distracting when a man who sat near the front, would choose to clip his nails every week as soon as the sermon started. Other interruptions have included mics not working or times people had to be helped out of a service because of a health issue.

I'm getting more comfortable with cell phones going off and have learned to appreciate all the different and sometimes embarrassing ringtones. One of the more challenging interruptions occurred at our previous church when truckers would drive down 1-55 and our sound system would sometimes pick up their CB radios – “*Breaker, Breaker, 1-9*” is hard to ignore. At least it woke up those who were sleeping.

In Acts 10:34-48 we're going to hear a sermon that was preached to a very enthusiastic and eager congregation. Just as Peter the preacher was getting into the meat of his message, the sermon was not only interrupted, it came to a screeching halt.

I like the insight of Charles Spurgeon, “*Oh that our sermons were incomplete for the same cause that Peter's was, for the Holy Spirit, who speaks better by Himself than by the most earnest voice, caused a divinely joyful interruption... Surely a sermon produced under such circumstances, leading up to such results, and interrupted so divinely, deserves to be reverently studied.*”

Before we reverently study this sermon, let's put the text into context. Our main idea last weekend was *God is always at work...and sometimes we get to see it. When we don't see it...remember God is always at work.* We learned the Holy Spirit wants to *adjust our attitudes and align our actions.* We celebrated how God worked in two individuals, who were separated by 30 miles and by cultural and

religious distances, and were brought together by God's sovereign timing. Both Cornelius and Peter received divinely synchronized visions while praying. These visions prepared Cornelius for the gospel and prepared Peter to let go of his prejudices.

Since most of the first Christians had a Jewish background, it was natural for them to think that any non-Jewish person (Gentile) had to come to Christianity through Judaism. The thought of a Gentile getting saved without coming through the door of Judaism was a foreign thought to them. God made it clear both Jew and Gentile can come to Christ by faith alone, without having to be circumcised or by celebrating certain ceremonies or following strict food rules.

After learning it's OK to eat "pigs in a blanket" (come on, that's funny), Peter headed to the house of a Roman military officer named Cornelius in order to share the good news of the gospel with him. In Acts 10:33 we see how eager Cornelius was to hear the glories of the gospel: "***Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.***" The phrase, "***in the presence of God,***" is the idea of being "*before the face of God.*" No preacher could have asked for a more eager or attentive congregation!

Peter's Sermon Introduction

Listen to Peter's sermon introduction in verse 34-35: "***So Peter opened his mouth and said: '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.'***" The phrase "***opened his mouth***" was a solemn formula used to introduce something really important. It was commonly used to describe opening a door to some treasure. Because Peter's attitude had been adjusted and his actions aligned, he was now ready to preach the grace gospel.

This is huge because Jews believed they were God's favorites. However, God always intended to extend His favor to *everyone* who put faith in Him. This goes all the way back to what God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "***In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***" Romans 2:11 says, "***For God shows no partiality.***" Listen to what the enemies of Jesus said about Him in Luke 20:21, "***Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality.***"

God is drawn to those who show reverence for Him. I like the summary statement found at the end of Solomon's journal in Ecclesiastes 12:13: "***The end of the***

matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Verse 36 reminds us the message was first sent to the Jews: *“As for the Word that He sent to Israel...”* But it wasn’t supposed to stop there according to Romans 1:16: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

7 Essential Elements of the Gospel

After this brief introduction, Peter establishes seven essential elements of the grace gospel. These elements stand in contrast to what we often hear people say.

- **I’m sincere in what I believe.** The centurion was sincere but not saved.
- **I’m working at doing good works.** Good works are never good enough because no one is good enough to meet God’s standards.
- **I’m trying to clean up my life.** Come to Him now and He’ll do the cleaning.

The short sermon is filled with theologically dense language. Let’s listen in. Here’s the first essential element.

1. Assert that the gospel alone brings peace. Look at the middle section of verse 36: *“...preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ...”* It more literally reads this way: *“gospelizing peace through Jesus Christ.”* This brings us back to the message the sleepy shepherds heard from the angelic choir in Luke 2:14: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

Romans 5:10 declares we are enemies of God and are at war with Him. Romans 5:1 says we can be at peace *with* God through Jesus: *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In Ephesians 2:17, we see Jesus brings peace to those from a Jewish background and to those who are Gentiles: *“And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”*

Once we’re at peace *with* God, we can experience the peace *of* God and be at peace *with* others.

2. Acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all. Check out the five words found in the parenthesis at the end of verse 36: ***“He is Lord of all.”*** Jesus is Lord of Israelites and of Gentiles. 1 Timothy 6:15 says He is ***“King of kings and Lord of lords.”*** Listen. There is no way to be saved unless we confess Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:9: ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”***

I was surprised to see the phrase, *“Jesus Christ is Lord”* trending on Twitter Friday morning. I’m not sure why Twitter declared Jesus is Lord, but it is the truth, whether it is trending or not. Sometimes we fall into saying, *“we make Him Lord”* when we surrender to Him but actually, He *is* Lord, whether we submit to Him or not. Because He is Lord, as the song “Oh Holy Night” declares, we must *“fall on our knees and receive the gift of heaven.”*

This week I read a stunning quote from James Montgomery Boice: *“We often hear the ‘Savior’ characteristics of God stressed – His love, mercy, goodness and so on – but the matter of His lordship is absent. The distortion is particularly clear in evangelism. In modern practice the call to repentance is usually called an ‘invitation,’ which one can obviously accept or refuse. It is offered politely. Seldom do we hear presented God’s sovereign demand to repent or His demand for submission to the authority of His appointed King, Christ Jesus.”*

3. Absorb all Jesus said and did. Before someone can be saved by the Savior, they must know about the Savior. In verses 37-39, Peter summarizes what Jesus said and did, following the outline presented in the Gospel of Mark: ***“You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 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. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.”***

Peter tells Cornelius and his friends that they knew enough about the life of Jesus to submit to His Lordship. The phrase, ***“you yourselves know”*** is emphatic. Jesus ministered throughout the land of Israel and even into the surrounding countries. In Acts 26:26 when speaking to King Agrippa, Paul said these words, ***“for this has not been done in a corner.”***

The word ***“anointed”*** is the word for *“Messiah”* in Hebrew and *“Christ”* in Greek. Jesus is the long-awaited Savior, the one who fulfills prophecy and exhibits

the very power of God. By the way, all three members of the Trinity are evident in verse 38: ***“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit.”***

Jesus went about ***“doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.”*** Jesus did good things and He delivered people from the devil. He’s the bondage breaker. I’m reminded of the words to the song, “Chain Breaker” by Zach Williams.

*If you’ve got pain
He’s a pain taker
If you feel lost
He’s a way maker
If you need freedom or saving
He’s a prison-shaking Savior
If you’ve got chains
He’s a chain breaker*

If you don’t know much about Jesus, read one of the four gospels. I recommend you start with Mark or John. Then when you’re done, read all of them. If you hope to know Jesus, you must first know about Him.

4. Agree that Jesus died on a tree. The key part of the gospel is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Because of grace, He died in our place. Listen to the last part of verse 39: ***“They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree.”*** Peter picked up on this when he later wrote these words in 1 Peter 2:24: ***“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.”***

By using the phrase, ***“hanging Him on a tree,”*** Peter is referencing Deuteronomy 21:22-23: ***“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.”***

In Galatians 5:13 Paul writes: ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’”*** Here’s a deep thought. Jesus took the curse which belonged to us by becoming the curse for us. The curse is reversed when we repent and receive Christ into our lives.

5. Affirm that Jesus was raised from the dead. Aren't you glad we don't serve a dead Savior? Jesus has conquered sin, Satan and death itself by rising from the dead, validating everything He claimed. We see this in verse 40-41: ***“But God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear, 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.”***

The reality of the resurrection is the foundation of the Book of Acts. Listen to Acts 1:3: ***“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”*** Some time ago, when reading through Acts, I wrote the letter “R” in the margin whenever it was mentioned. I counted 24 times!

Jesus appeared to well over 500 people and even ate and drank with some of them to show He was raised from the dead bodily. Peter himself is one of those witnesses.

6. Admit you deserve judgment. While some churches have stopped preaching about Hell or judgment, in verse 42 Peter is given a direct order to preach that Jesus is the ultimate Judge: ***“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.”*** While our attention this week has been on the Supreme Court, only the Savior is Supreme! He is the One appointed by God Himself and He needs no hearings before He is confirmed.

Because of our sins, each of us deserve judgment, condemnation and a sentence resulting in eternal separation in Hell. 1 Peter 4:5 says everyone will have to appear before Judge Jesus: ***“But they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:10: ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”***

7. Accept Christ by faith alone for forgiveness of sins. The order here is important. If we don't first believe in coming judgment, we won't be interested in the coming of Jesus. If you know you are a condemned sinner, you'll be eager to hear how you can be saved. Or to say it another way, you must know you are lost before you'll want to be found. The bad news is bad, but that only makes the good news really good!

Check out verse 43: ***“To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”*** I love how all

the prophets in the Old Testament pointed to Christ and to the message of forgiveness. Let's pause and ponder the phrase, ***"everyone who believes in Him."*** The offer of forgiveness goes out to those from a Jewish background and to those who are Gentiles.

Listen to Acts 2:39: ***"For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off."*** After gathering to decide if Gentiles needed to become Jewish in order to be saved, the Jerusalem council concluded in Acts 15:9-11: ***"And He made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith... But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."***

Forgiveness is available for Jew, Gentile, Samaritan, American, Armenian, African, prostitute, adulterer, Democrat, Republican, and Independent. Luke 24:47: ***"and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."***

Our biggest need is to be forgiven for our sins. If you struggle with feeling forgiven, savor these Scriptures.

Psalm 103:12: ***"As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us."***

Psalm 130:3-4: ***"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared."***

Isaiah 38:17: ***"In love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back."***

Matthew 26:28: ***"For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."***

Luke 7:48: ***"And He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'"***

Ephesians 1:7: ***"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."***

So, here's the deal. You will either face Jesus as Judge or you will face Jesus as Justifier. You will either be condemned because of your sins or you'll be commended because the Savior has forgiven your sins. You'll either go to Heaven because Jesus has taken on your curse or you will be cursed forever in a hot place called Hell. Romans 6:23: ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

As a preacher, Peter is no doubt ready to move into application and an invitation. But as Peter gains steam, his sermon is suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted, not by someone clipping his fingernails but by the Holy Spirit Himself!

Sermon Application

I see four ways Peter's preaching was put into practice, even before Peter could finish. I'm reminded God doesn't need me or anyone else to accomplish His purposes.

One of my favorite images is when Solomon dedicated the temple and the glory of God so filled it the priests couldn't get in to do their work. Imagine the scene described in 2 Chronicles 7:1-2: *"As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house."*

I pray God's glory so fills this place and every person engaging in person or remotely that I could just sit down, and watch God do His work. Here are four things that happened.

1. The Holy Spirit was the seal of their salvation. We see this in verse 44: *"While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word."* When Cornelius and his full house heard the message of forgiveness, they believed and received on the spot without needing anymore preaching.

The six Jewish Christians who accompanied Peter had only seen the Holy Spirit poured out on Jews who believed in Jesus. They were flabbergasted to see the Spirit falling on Gentiles. Look at verse 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."* The word for "amazed" means "to astonish, to be beside oneself, to throw out of position."

Sometime later, Peter stood up to help other Jewish background believers see the Holy Spirit was also given to non-Jews who confessed Jesus as Savior and Lord. Listen to Acts 15:7-8: *"And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us.'"*

This is such a huge deal that this teaching is repeated throughout the New Testament. Paul put it this way in Romans 3:29-30: ***“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”***

2. Worship was their natural response. Verse 46 states these new believers were speaking languages they had never heard before, authenticating the gift of the Spirit being given to the Gentiles just as He was given to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost: ***“For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.”***

“Extolling” God means *“magnifying or enlarging”* Him. Psalm 34:3 says, ***“Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!”*** In Luke 1:46, Mary magnifies the Lord when she finds out she’s pregnant with Jesus: ***“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”***

3. Baptism was their first step of obedience. As we’ve already seen in the Book of Acts, baptism always follows belief. Look at verse 47: ***“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”*** The expected answer is a hearty “no.” Literally it reads like this, ***“Surely no one will now venture to forbid.”*** Baptism is the next step after belief.

Our next baptism services will be November 14-15. If you’re saved and you’ve not taken the plunge yet, fill out an online Connection Card and someone will contact you.

Both Jew and Gentile have free and full access in Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone! That’s exactly what we read in 1 Corinthians 12:13: ***“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”*** Baptism provides the believer with the opportunity to identify with Christ and to be incorporated into the church.

4. Gathering to grow was a priority. I almost missed the importance of the very last phrase in verse 48: ***“Then they asked him to remain for some days.”*** Peter was willing to linger in order to help them learn more about the Lord. He continued gathering with them so they could grow.

When I was discussing this with Beth, she pointed out from her Bible reading that Jesus did something similar after ministering to the Samaritan woman in John 4:41-42: ***“So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.”***

We’re called not just to evangelism but also to discipleship. We must go with the gospel, but we must also help people grow. They actually go together as stated by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*** We’re to make disciples *by* baptizing and teaching them!

Here’s the definition of a disciple we’ve adopted: *“A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.”*

I read a post this week by Craig Thompson called, *What is Keeping You From Church?* It’s posted on Sermon Extras if you’d like to read it. I’d like to share some of it, but want to say up front I know some are not able to gather in person because of health concerns for themselves or for their families. I totally respect that.

The concern over COVID among vulnerable populations makes sense. Even the concern among others who may not be vulnerable, but who do not want to be vectors for transmission is understandable. However, we cannot live this way forever.

As it relates to attending Bible study and public worship, even if you aren’t ready yet, you need to decide now what conditions will need to be met before you return to worship...Maybe you have a date in mind, “I’ll return in 2021.” Or, maybe you’re waiting until a vaccine is widely available...be careful if you do not have a line.

If your rationale for staying away from your church family hasn’t been carefully defined, you run the risk of never returning to church. If you do not draw a line in the sand right now and determine when you will return to worship, you may never return. You will find other things to fill your Sunday mornings and commitment to your church will wax and wane.

He concludes with an honest admission from a guy he sat down with: “My wife and I have really gotten into a bad habit. I admit it. I don’t have a good reason for not attending worship. It has just gotten really easy to get up and sit in front of our TV with a cup of coffee and listen to the sermon. Then, we get dressed and go to lunch. I know it is ridiculous. It’s not OK. We have to change that.”

Let’s be honest; some of you are comfortable on your couch or at the camp site or on the lake. You aren’t avoiding church gatherings out of concern for public health. If you’re still going to work, you’re sending your kids to school, you’re eating in restaurants...you need to be at church.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Let me say again. I realize some of you are not ready to gather in person and I get that. That’s why we put our services on COZI TV and why we’re now livestreaming. But we miss you...and can’t wait for you to come back. I would just appeal to you to make your decisions about gathering related to COVID, not about convenience.

On Friday I met with about 15 pastors and ministry leaders. We gathered simply to support one another during this time. Every pastor I know is working hard to shepherd their flock while longing for their people to come back for services and serving opportunities.

Here are a few questions that may be of help to you.

1. What are my health concerns?
2. Have I grown too comfortable staying at home?
3. What example am I setting for my family?
4. What example am I setting for unbelievers?
5. Am I growing stagnant in my walk with Christ?

Please understand I’m committed to grace and not trying to be judgmental. Everyone has to wrestle with these complicated issues and come to their own conclusion.

Our growth group has not been meeting regularly because of COVID but we did have a bonfire and celebrated communion on Wednesday night. We gathered at the home of Randy and Sharon Lynch. When we arrived, Randy told us his mom had died one hour earlier. After expressing our love and care, I offered to cancel our get together and he said, “*No, I need you guys. Would you please stay?*” After we celebrated communion, another group member said, “*I didn’t realize how much I missed this. I really needed it.*”

We were able to breathe God’s Word into his life because we were together. There’s power in gathering, isn’t there? When we left, he felt loved and was built up in his faith. We need each other. We weren’t meant to isolate long-term.

If you want to be saved today, you can be...or maybe the Holy Spirit interrupted my sermon and you already trusted Christ! Let’s hold on to these seven essential ingredients of the grace Gospel.

- 1. Assert that the gospel alone brings peace**
- 2. Acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all**
- 3. Absorb all Jesus did and said**
- 4. Agree that Jesus died on a tree**
- 5. Affirm that Jesus was raised from the dead**
- 6. Admit you deserve judgment**
- 7. Accept Christ by faith alone and receive forgiveness**

I want to give you the opportunity to do that right now as we end in prayer.

God, I admit I don’t have peace and I’m not at peace with others because I’m not at peace with You. I acknowledge Jesus is Lord of all, that He died in my place on the cross and He rose again from the dead. Because of my sins, I admit I deserve Your righteous judgment. I repent of how I’ve been living and receive Jesus Christ by faith. Please forgive me for my many sins and enable me to follow you faithfully for the rest of my life. Help me to grow so I can show You to others. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.