

There is Another King: Jesus

Luke – Acts

The Outreach to the Gentiles Begins

Acts 10:1 – 11:18

Introduction: Hudson's Move Inland

When he was 17, young Hudson was bored at home, waiting for his mom to come back from a trip. He grabbed one of his father's books and casually flipped through it. It happened to be about Jesus. For some reason, Hudson was riveted. He was so drawn to Jesus that he gave his life to him. When his mom returned from her trip, he was riveted again. When he told her what had happened to him, she said, "I know...I was praying for you, and God told me." In his heart, Hudson also began to feel strangely called to China. Being British, this came as a surprise even to him. But he began to prepare himself. He began to eat less and exercise more. Every Sunday evening, he went to the poorest areas of town to share his faith openly. He taught himself 600 Chinese characters by himself using a Chinese New Testament. At the tender age of 21, he went to Shanghai with a missionary group. He arrived in 1854 at the height of the great Taiping Rebellion.

Due to danger, government trade agreements, and missionary convention, the western missionaries were encamped in only five city ports. Though they thought the message of Jesus would spread fast, it was slow going. Hudson felt some measure of disappointment. Maybe it was the fact that the westerners dressed in heavy European clothing even in the heat; the Chinese would look at them and laugh! They were also staying in those cities to enjoy government protection and goods from their home countries that they could buy from merchant ships. Hudson felt that the western missionaries were somehow expecting the Chinese to accept western ways and western culture in addition to receiving Jesus. So he decided to wear Chinese clothes. He shaved the front part of his head, dyed the rest of his hair black, and wore a long braid like the Chinese. He learned more and more dialects instead of just Mandarin. And he decided to go inland, away from the coasts where all the foreign missionaries lived. This was very controversial. But the first time Hudson did this, he wasn't even recognized as a foreigner on the road. People came around to see him much more freely. And no one laughed at his clothes. People invited him into their homes as never before, and it was possible to get private conversations with people who seemed interested. Within three days of his arrival in 'inland China' he was offered a house to live in, and visitors streamed in. The name of Jesus spread like at no other time. Hudson Taylor later founded the China Inland Mission. By the year 1900, when Hudson Taylor stepped down from formal leadership of the organization, they had baptized 13,000 Chinese and had placed 700 native Chinese Christians in formal ministry. In 1932, they recorded well over 100,000 Chinese Christians. Now that they are in most countries in East and Southeast Asia (Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), who knows what the number is? Hudson Taylor has been called "one of the greatest missionaries of all time" (K.S. Latourette) and "the founder of a new era in missions" (Dr. R. Winters). He has been an inspiration to me in many ways.

Relevance to You:

Any time Christians prioritize Jesus over everything else, it becomes clear how the everything else sometimes hinders other people from receiving Jesus. That's what Hudson Taylor learned. It's also what Simon Peter, one of the earliest Christian leaders, learned as he brought the young Christian community across a racial/ethnic divide for the first time. **MAN, THIS IS EXCITING!** This event continues to have great importance to us, as we'll see. And it has profound implications for us. Because our campuses and our cities represent the world in a microcosm. The fact is that we have the opportunity to affect the entire world. The reality is that often we don't. We sit in places that are comfortable for us. We don't venture inland, so to speak. So how can we follow Jesus into this whole area?

Context in Summit:

We've gone through Jonah, where we have seen God call one of His people to be His messenger to a warlike, brutal people who were totally opposite him, who he hated. Yesterday we went through a thematic study of the Holy Spirit to make sure that we know that we are all messengers for Jesus. Now, we're going

to see another calling to an outsider. He is a representative of an oppressive government, but this time, the outsider is very close, both geographically and spiritually.

Context in Acts:

We are in the Book of Acts, chapters 10 – 11. This story is one of the pivotal events in the history of the early Christian church. It's a point where the Gentiles are received fully into the community. For most of this time, the community has been of mostly one ethnicity. There have been some recent biracial people included, the Samaritans. But now we're going to see a whole new ethnic group being reached: the Italians! Anyone of Italian descent here? More broadly, the Gentiles. These people have been overlooked. Christians have been to Caesaria. They have been north of Caesaria. But they have not reached the Gentiles.

The incident involves a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who is portrayed as being as Jewish as you can be while still being Gentile. The incident also involves Simon Peter, who is portrayed as being as Gentile as you can be while still being Jewish. The legitimate question from the Jewish Christians: Should the Gentiles be circumcised? Should they become like us? Should they become ethnically Jewish? Who needs to change in order for this people to be reached more effectively? The question is legitimate for them because it involved a serious theological question. God's answer was, "You need to change." We do not have theological bases to erect barriers like this any more. But how much more, then, do we need to hear this, because our barriers are merely cultural?

We can break this section down into 6 sections. Cornelius in 10:1 – 8, Simon Peter in 10:9 – 23; their introduction to each other in 10:24 – 33; Peter's speech in 10:34 – 43; Cornelius' belief and its confirmation in 10:44 – 48; and the Jerusalem Christians change in 11:1 – 18.

Cornelius, As Close As You Can Be to Jewish Without Being Circumcised: 10:1 – 8

Look at 10:1. "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort." Here is a high ranking officer in the Roman army: Cornelius. But despite how foreign he could have been, look at how close he is to being Jewish. Cornelius is described in 4 ways in v.2: (1) a devout man; (2) one who feared God with all his household; (3) gave many alms to the Jewish people; (4) prayed to God continually. How amazing that it's not enough to be a quote-unquote "good person." God has even better things for this Cornelius. The only way in which Cornelius is not Jewish is that he is not circumcised, as we find out in 11:3, when the Jewish Christians complain, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." Clearly what Luke is doing is honing our focus onto one issue. This man has not converted to Judaism via circumcision. And the question before us is: Can this man come to the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, without entering first through the Jewish community?

Well, an angel visits him in v.3. The angel tells him to send men to Joppa, asking for Simon Peter. 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.' 7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, 8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Peter, Already Edging Forward: 10:9 – 23

Now it's poetic of course that Simon Peter is in Joppa. Joppa was the place Jonah tried to run away from God's call to the Gentiles. Joppa is now the place Simon Peter receives God's call to the Gentiles. And Peter is poised to do better. Already he's staying at the home of a Jewish tanner, a person who works with the skins of dead animals. That would normally make that person ritually unclean. But Peter knows that Jesus has already dealt with Jewish uncleanness. He just needs to understand Jesus dealt with Gentile uncleanness, too. If Cornelius is as Jewish as you can be by still being Gentile, Peter is as Gentile as you can be by still being Jewish!

Peter is hungry, and sees a vision of food. That sounds a lot like me! I regularly have visions of In and Out Burger, from California. Peter's vision, though, is about a lot more than food. He sees all the animals that a kosher keeping Jewish person would never eat: pigs and lobster, for instance. And a voice in the vision

says, “KILL ‘EM!!! EAT ‘EM!!!” Peter says, “‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’ 15 Again a voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’ 16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.”

That is so weird! If it were me, I would be thinking, “Boy, I’d better just go downstairs and eat something.” Thankfully God spoke Peter’s language of something happening three times. Jesus had told Peter that Peter would deny him three times. Then after the resurrection, Jesus restored Peter by asking him three times, “Do you love me?” Now, once again there is a message given three times. You don’t get the sense that Peter needs to be told something three times, do you? Furthermore, God interprets it for Peter right away. At that very moment, Cornelius’ men arrive and ask for Peter. So in v.19, “While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, THREE men (!) are looking for you. 20 But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.’”

Notice that Peter already has “misgivings” in v.20, and the Spirit of God addresses them. “Go and accompany them without misgivings...” What are those misgivings? We’ll find out shortly. So in v.23, Peter is obedient. “So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”

The Encounter: 10:24 – 33

Then in v.24 – 33 we have the encounter. 24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am just a man.’ 27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.’

Now we understand Peter’s misgivings. They had to do with associating with a Gentile, a ‘foreigner’ he says, entering his house, and visiting him. Circle v.28 because it is key to understanding the whole scene, and much of biblical history. The reason Peter and the rest of the Jewish community believed that Gentiles were unclean was because up until Jesus, THEY WERE. This was NOT a problem of Jews misinterpreting their own Law. No, their law required a separation, and they were more or less accurate. This was also NOT a problem that the Jewish Law itself created an artificial problem. No, Israel was clean and the Gentiles were not. Israel was in covenant relationship with God, and the Gentiles were not. The Jewish Law just reminded them of that in the form of dietary laws. “Pigs and lobsters are bottom dwellers. They eat a lot of dead things. You are not to eat things associated with death, because you are alive; they are unholy and unclean; you are holy and clean.”

That means that before Jesus, ALL OF US GENTILES WERE UNCLEAR, FUNDAMENTALLY. For those of us who are not of Jewish descent, we had a problem. It’s not that someone just had the wrong perception of us. WE REALLY WERE UNCLEAR. So Peter’s misgivings are in some sense understandable.

But Peter says in v.28, ‘Yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.’ When Jesus came, he made it possible for all the Gentiles (on the one hand) and all of Israel (on the other) to be cleansed through him. Jesus cleanses all people at the fundamental level of who we are. That’s why the distinction is not between Jews and Gentiles any more, but those who have Jesus and those who do not. The old ways of symbolizing the uncleanness have ceased being THEOLOGICAL and have simply become CULTURAL. Peter has learned this. So he simply asks, “So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.”

Cornelius explains in v.30 – 32, “Well, I had a vision,” which must have been amazing for Peter to hear. Peter must have thought, “This situation has been totally orchestrated by the Lord!” And then he gets every preacher’s dream: Cornelius clears the floor and says, “Okay, we’re going to shut up, and I want you to tell us whatever it is that God wants us to hear!” Talk about a momentous opportunity! How funny that we

today say that God shows up to things. God set up this whole thing, and PETER is the one who shows up. He just has to walk into the setup and speak.

Peter's Speech, the Main Event: 10:34 – 43

That brings us to the focal point of the story, the fourth section: Peter's speech. It's set off by the phrase, 'opening his mouth,' which doubly calls our attention to it. The main theme running through this is that Jesus is for all people, for both Jews and Gentiles **AS** Jews and Gentiles. In v.34, Peter says, "God is not one to show partiality." Then in v.35, he clarifies that as: "but *in every nation* the one who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." In v.36, Peter says, 'The word which he sent to the sons of Israel,' but quickly follows that up with 'Jesus Christ – He is Lord of *all*.' Then in v.42, Jesus has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead, that is, *everyone*. And in v.43, 'Through his name *everyone* who believes receives forgiveness of sins.' Clearly, this speech is about how Jesus is Lord of both *Jews and Gentiles*.

Let's address some questions I'm sure we have. What does it mean to "do right"? To do the right thing? Does that mean that if you just pray and give alms, you're doing right, and God will accept you? No. It means being open to Jesus. Cornelius has been drawn towards Peter and the message of Jesus. That's what it means to "do right." In fact, Cornelius, according to v.37, already knows a few things about Jesus. He has heard 'the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee.' He knows about Jesus and is about to formally commit himself to Jesus. That is what it means to 'do right' in this passage. Doing right is coming to Jesus. And Peter's point is that anyone who does that, regardless of ethnic background, is welcome to God. If you are here at Summit and have not yet committed yourself to Jesus, and are feeling ready to do so, maybe this is the time to **DO THE RIGHT THING!**

If that's not clear enough, notice that starting in v.36, Peter summarizes the life of Jesus for Cornelius. This is a summary of everything Luke has written about Jesus in the prequel to Acts, the Gospel of Luke: "The word which He sent to **the sons of Israel**, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of **all**) – 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." The picture we get is that news about Jesus had traveled far and wide. This was by no means something that was buried deep within Israel. It was public, and was open to scrutiny of all kinds.

But Peter now talks about the most radical part. "They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead." That is the part that Cornelius was missing, because it wasn't totally public. Something happened that Cornelius couldn't imagine. Homer and all the Greek poets said that no one comes back from the dead. But now a Jewish prophet condemned as a traitor to Rome has risen from the dead. He's alive again? And Cornelius knows that this Jesus was utterly rejected by both Jew (especially if 'exulon' is translated 'tree') and Gentile. Israel didn't want him. Rome didn't want him. But if he rose from the dead, I guess that doesn't matter that much!

Now how many of us share Jesus that way? Probably none of us even refer to things like John the Baptist. Sometime we leave out the fact that Jesus lived in Israel. Why? Because somehow we think today that those things are just details, not important, not significant. In fact, if you're like me, it's surprising that Peter mentions this at all. Because Cornelius is Italian, not Jewish. Why explain all of this to him?

In fact, the second question we might have is, "If this is about being sensitive to ethnicity, then how come Peter doesn't make Jesus look more Italian?" Haven't we all seen drawings of Jesus that make Jesus look black? Latino? East Asian? Or, like in *The Passion*, white? We want to make him supposedly like ourselves, and more accessible. How come Peter doesn't do that? In fact, Peter suggests that we should not do that. Jesus was Jewish, Peter says. He doesn't suddenly become Italian. Why? Because it's a reminder to us that Jesus accepts us as we are, as Gentiles. In fact, the best way to honor Cornelius' Gentile ethnicity is to keep Jesus Jewish. Because as soon as Cornelius hears that Jesus is Jewish, he has to

ask, “Oh, well, who am I? Jesus welcomes me as a person of Italian descent as I am. Maybe he welcomes people of other ethnic groups as they are?”

Let me give you an example of that. In 1895, God moved among students in Germany. A fairly significant student movement started. In 1937, the Third Reich asked students to sign the notorious Aryan paragraph that would have excluded anyone non-Aryan. They almost did. In effect, they almost made Jesus into an Aryan. But they hesitated. They had international students in their midst and on their campuses. So they asked themselves what the impact would be. Of course, if they signed, they would have to kick the internationals out of the group. And they wouldn't be able to have international students at all on their campuses. So they decided they couldn't sign the Aryan paragraph. They had to keep Jesus' Jewishness to keep their groups open to non-Aryans. (Karl Kupisch, *Studenten Entdecken die Bibel*). Can we applaud them? That was a God-inspired act of courage!

I wish it were always as blatant as that. But usually it is not. Just last week, I was asked to speak to a class on world missions. It was a group of white suburban Christians who lived outside Boston. I asked them, “So this is a class on missions? What does it mean to us as Christians that the Muslim world hates George Bush more than any other President in history? If we care about God's mission to the whole world, and especially about reaching the Muslim world, what do we think about America's foreign policy?” Now perhaps there are no easy answers to that, but isn't that a question we should at least be asking, especially today?!? But there was silence in the room. Either they had never asked that question out loud, or that church wasn't a safe place for them to interact with that question. And I would pose that same question for you. Have we somehow invented a Jesus who looks American, talks like an American, thinks like an American, and has America's national interests on the top of his list? And so when we ask people to come to Jesus, do we also require them to become pro-American? What would it be like for us to not require that?

The mission of Jesus is much larger than the interests of any 1 group. And Jesus calls us to put his kingdom interest first. Even ahead of our national interest. Why? Because Jesus is above all nations, according to v.42 – 43. In those two verses, Peter gives Cornelius and his household two reasons to believe. Why believe in Jesus? First, because Jesus will be his Judge, not Caesar. In fact, he'll be everyone's judge at the end of history, in v.42. “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.” The second is that the massive weight of the Old Testament drives us only to Jesus in v.43: “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” That is the message Peter gives to Cornelius. Jesus will utter the final verdicts of history. And your response to him now determines whether your sins are forgiven or not. I can't help but enjoy the poetry of this: Even though both Jewish and Gentile powers judged Jesus, Jesus will be the one to judge all Jews and Gentiles in v.42 – 43.

Confirmation By the Spirit: 10:44 – 48

But before Peter can finish his speech, before he can say, “So would you like to believe in Jesus now?” Cornelius believes and God confirms it publicly. In v.44 – 48, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.” What is implied is that they believe in Jesus. That is the same thing that happened to the Jewish disciples at Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus has poured out his Spirit on the Gentiles as Gentiles, simply by faith in him. They were exalting God in all kinds of languages, in v.46, just like the Jewish disciples did back then. It was a symbol of THE WHOLE WORLD being reached for Jesus: the reversal of Babel. By speaking in different human languages, God is now announcing His claim over the WHOLE WORLD. In v.45, ‘All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed.’ Then Peter baptizes them, which is a gesture symbolizing that they are washed and new, and have entered the community of Jesus' people. Notice that the Christians are just trying to keep up with what God is doing?!?

The Community Changes: 11:1 – 18

But now it's time for the rest of the community to come along. In 11:1 – 18, we have the response of the Jerusalem Christian community. At first, they are not happy. Verse 1: “Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 And when Peter

came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, 3 saying, 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"

Peter responds by narrating the story from his point of view in v.4 – 17. "This is what God did. I had a vision. A voice said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Three times. The Spirit told me to go with these Gentiles to Caesaria to visit Cornelius. Cornelius said that he had seen an angel. The angel told him to get me and to hear about Jesus. As I was speaking, the Spirit fell on them, just like Jesus said. Therefore," in v.17, "if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Then in v.18, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also *the repentance that leads to life.*' That phrase 'the repentance that leads to life' is another way of saying 'the forgiveness of sins' back in 10:43. It is the message of Jesus, and Jesus himself called it by both names in Luke 24:47. Jesus commanded his disciples 'that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.' That is now happening in a full blown way.

So the Jewish Christian community changes their views. They welcome the Gentiles. Why is this a pivotal event? Because once again, this is the first time the Christian faith has spread into Gentile circles. So they are doing the very important task of stripping out their own cultural accoutrements and just letting Jesus be passed on. They are not waiting for the Gentiles to get circumcised and keep kosher until they share Jesus with them.

Let me tell you how Jesus is challenging me in this area. I live in an area of Boston that has a good number of Haitian families. Being immigrants, my neighbors speak French Creole. I have no idea how to speak French or French Creole. My family and I have lived there for four years now, and we are no closer to sharing our spiritual lives with them as we were when we first moved in. We've gotten to know our other neighbors, and even had spiritual conversations with them. But the language barrier in this case is high. Now, in this type of situation, do I wait for these neighbors of mine to start speaking English like me? No. So I feel like Jesus has been pressing me to learn French Creole this summer. What's even more challenging for me is that there are two drug dealing houses up the street. And Jesus is going to say to me one day to get to know them. Don't wait for them to get straightened out. It's not going to happen.

Jesus calls his people to take the initiative; don't assume that people are just going to be like you. Don't assume that they'll like the style of music you play for worship. Don't assume they'll like the same speakers, the same topics, the same to do things for fun. And don't wait for people to become like you. Take the initiative. Learn about them. Recognize what is of Jesus and is non-negotiable, and what is just your cultural preference.

From there, you can do at one or both of two things:

1. You can create space for others. That's what the Jerusalem Christians do for the Gentile Christians. The Jerusalem Christians simply welcome them in and allow them space. You might sponsor an ethnic-specific Bible study in the fellowship. Or you might even plant a new sister fellowship.
2. You can change. This is what Peter did. If you are going to be a representative from one group to another, you need to change. Not to say that 'they' are always right, or that culture is a non-negotiable. But you need to take on, to some extent, the language, customs, concerns, history, and even some of the likes and dislikes of other people. You need to make time in your schedule perhaps to go to the students' association of that group. You need to worship in a different church for a while, live in a different area, and eat what they eat. Move inland! Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9: "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak

I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”