

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**

**Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church**

**Sermon Title - A Hard Lesson To Swallow**

**Sermon Text - Acts 10:1-48**

**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

## **Introduction**

"I cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me,  
I see His wounds, His hands His feet, My Savior on that cursed tree"

When I think back to what Jesus did for me on that cursed tree, I can hardly fathom the love He would have to have for me to be willing to do that! It's so personal! He did that for me. But at the same time, it's universal! Not everyone will accept what Jesus did for them on that tree, but Jesus didn't just die for me and you, He died for the sins of the world and for every man, woman, boy and girl who ever lived! And when I think of the truth that that cursed tree became a symbol of life and the blessing of God for all who would call upon the Name of the Lord, I have a hard time taking it all in. But what we need to remember as we come to our lesson for today, is this: We were saved from our sins because of that sacrifice, but we must not sit back and rest in our secure position as children of God, we must, with a passion, seek to take the good news of Jesus to the lost of the world and while it's a hard lesson to swallow, that means hoping and praying that even our enemies might repent of their sins and come to know the same mercy God has given us! Never forget this passage of Scripture:

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Let's pray!

The passion to help others find what I've found in Jesus is the reason I'll never really retire in the sense that the world views retirement! I've just been called to another venue and while that was hard for me to accept initially, because I love you all so much, and the ministry God has blessed me to have here at Northshore Church for the last 23 years, I desire to be in the center of God's will and to build His kingdom wherever I live and breath for as long as God allows me to have life in this old body! Today we're going to look at a powerful story in Scripture that is fascinating, and after we've read the story, we will go back and examine some specific points to help us apply principles of this story to our own lives! So if you will join me in Acts 10:1-48 for a powerful Biblical story...

## **The Story**

Acts 10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Acts 10:2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

Acts 10:3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

Acts 10:5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.

Acts 10:6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

Acts 10:7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants.

Acts 10:8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

Acts 10:10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

Acts 10:11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

Acts 10:12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.

Acts 10:13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Acts 10:14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

Acts 10:15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Acts 10:16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Acts 10:17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.

Acts 10:18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

Acts 10:19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you.

Acts 10:20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Acts 10:21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

Acts 10:22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."

Acts 10:23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.

Acts 10:24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Acts 10:25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.

Acts 10:26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Acts 10:27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

Acts 10:28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

Acts 10:29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Acts 10:30 Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me

Acts 10:31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

Acts 10:32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.'

Acts 10:33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Acts 10:34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism

Acts 10:35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

Acts 10:36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

Acts 10:37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—

Acts 10:38 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.

Acts 10:39 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,

Acts 10:40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

Acts 10:41 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.

Acts 10:42 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.

Acts 10:43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

Acts 10:45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

Acts 10:46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,

Acts 10:47 "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Acts 10:48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

What a fantastic story that has some embedded lessons we desperately need to learn. So let's see what lessons we can take away from this story. And the first lesson is a big one so I'm going to spend a little more time on it!

**Lesson #1** - God loves people regardless of nationality and will go to extreme measures for them to experience a personal relationship with Him!

Acts 10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Acts 10:2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

Acts 10:3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

Cornelius was not Jewish or Christian, he was a Gentile, and yet God had heard the prayers of his very sincere heart! God sends an angel to him and gives him instructions, which he follows to a "t". Then we see God working in the heart and life of a Jewish Christian, Peter, to help him understand that God loves all people and wants them to know Him personally regardless of nationality, or race. God is in charge of this narrative. You see, back in the Old Testament, God had wanted His chosen people, the Hebrews, to be set apart from and to not participate in the pagan cultures that surrounded them because of the detestable wickedness involved. The Hebrews had misunderstood God's intentions for them to be set apart and had come to believe that they were somehow better than other people and were chosen simply because of their bloodline. But we see in Scripture that even in the Old Testament, God cared for others. Think about when Jonah was sent to the Ninevites, a very wicked people. Jonah knew how wicked they were so he refused to obey the Lord and fled by ship to Tarshish. A terrible storm threatened to sink the ship and Jonah knew he was to blame so he had them throw him overboard where he was swallowed by the great fish. You know the story of Jonah and the whale! He spent three days and nights inside the fish but God commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Jonah was ready to listen to The Lord and went to Nineveh. Here's what Jonah did...

Jonah 3:4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

His message was simple. But look what the Ninevites did...

Jonah 3:5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:6 When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

And here's what God did...

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

And here's what Jonah did and it reflected the attitude of the many of the Hebrew people...

Jonah 4:1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.

Jonah 4:2 He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to 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 4:3 Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah 4:4 But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Jonah 4:5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

Jonah 4:6 Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

Jonah 4:7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.

Jonah 4:8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

Jonah 4:9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

Jonah 4:10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

Jonah 4:11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

So lesson #1 is that God loves people regardless of nationality and will go to extreme measures for them to experience a personal relationship with Him! Now we will look at a second important lesson from our text in Acts. Remember Cornelius has sent some folks to find Peter. As they are on their way, something happens to Peter that brings us our second lesson...

**Lesson #2** – It's not the letter of the law, but the intent of the law that matters!

Acts 10:9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

Acts 10:10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

Acts 10:11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

Acts 10:12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.

Acts 10:13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Acts 10:14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

Acts 10:15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Acts 10:16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Remember that some of the additional laws other than the Ten Commandments had been given to the Hebrew people to help set them apart from the wicked, pagan cultures that surrounded them. God's intention was that by working with one small group of people like the Hebrews, He could then use them to take His message of love to a lost and dying world. But they had become hyper focused on the letter of the law instead of the purpose of the law. God's Word makes this very clear in The New Testament. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians...

2 Cor 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

And then these words in Romans...

Rom 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,  
Rom 8:2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Rom 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

Rom 8:4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Then these powerful words in Galatians...

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

If righteousness could be gained through the law it, but it can't! As we'll see in...

### **Lesson #3 – Your righteousness alone won't do, we all need Jesus!**

Again we read...

Acts 10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Acts 10:2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

The things Cornelius did were good things, but they weren't enough! God desires a personal relationship with us and this cannot be obtained simply through good deeds. Many people do good deeds, but know nothing of a personal relationship with God. That's so sad because God wants to be so much more to us than an impersonal God of the Universe who demands holiness! He desires a personal relationship with us and that's why He went to such lengths in both the Old and New Testament to make that clear. Listen to this conversation God had with the very man He gave the Ten Commandments to...

Exo 33:12 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.'

Exo 33:13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

Exo 33:14 The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Exo 33:15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

Exo 33:16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

Exo 33:17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

So even under the Old Covenant, it was not just about obeying the law, but about the relationship with God and experiencing His presence. God's Word makes it clear that the most important trait, or characteristic, that would set the Children of God apart from the world was the Presence of God in their lives! Not what they wore, or how well they kept the letter of the law, but how clear it was to those around them that God's presence was with them and that they trusted God's heart for them! And we must understand that there's a New Covenant because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. He made a way for us to have a personal relationship with the Father! He paid the price for our sin, so that we could have the presence of God in our lives by way of the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived a perfect life in order that His righteousness might cover our unrighteousness! Paul stated the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant beautifully in Philippians 3. There were people trying to force a return to the letter of the law under the Old Covenant. Paul responded...

Philippians 3:1 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

Philippians 3:2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

Philippians 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

And then after listing all of his religious and legalistic qualifications found on his old "religious leader" resume' Paul says this...

Philippians 3:7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Philippians 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Philippians 3:11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

There are 3 Bonus Lessons found in our text...

**Bonus lesson: When possible, do ministry as a team!**

Acts 10:23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.

Peter knew God was up to something and wanted others to experience God's work first hand, so he took some brothers from Joppa! We need to do ministry together more often! I can't tell you how many times I wish someone would have been with me to see God do some of the amazing things I witnessed in ministry!

**Bonus lesson: When God tells you He is going to do something, expect Him to make good on His word!**

Acts 10:24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Cornelius was told by the Angel of God that God had heard his prayers and was going to do something special, and Cornelius made plans based on God's promise! I love that! We need to have that kind of faith and plan for God to work His will and His way in our lives. Bank on it, plan on it, because God's word says...

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always,

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray continually,

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

And then in verse 23...

1 Thessalonians 5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.



### **Bonus lesson: Never worship the messenger!**

Acts 10:25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.

Acts 10:26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Too many times people get their eyes on a man! In our culture people want to idolize people. You'll see some of that going on with the Super Bowl today, but I'm afraid we are guilty of the same thing in churches. Don't idolize the messenger, keep Jesus front and center. In fact, a Godly leader would insist that Jesus be the priority. Listen to Paul's advice as a leader to those he was teaching...

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

1 Corinthians 10:33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

### **Lesson #3 – You're not the only one!**

Acts 10:28 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.

Let's face it, we all have a tendency to be exclusive. We love to belong to exclusive clubs. Membership has privileges. We like to think we've got it and they don't. It was not only true of the Jews, but has also become true of many Christians. Some denominations think they are the only ones who are going to make it to heaven. I once heard this amusing story that there was a tour in heaven for new arrivals...approaching a particular banquet room, St. Peter asks everyone on the tour to lower their voices and whispers... "the Christians in that banquet room think they are the only ones up here and we don't want to disappoint them!"

Never forget...

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish, but would have everlasting life!

Peter would later write these very powerful words that indicate he never forgot that if it weren't for God's mercy to him he would have remained in his lost condition and listen to his instructions to us...

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

1 Peter 2:12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

And now we come to the last lesson for today...

#### **Lesson #4 – Those who seek will find!**

Acts 10:34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism

Acts 10:35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

I believe that if a person desires to know God, God will get the message of hope to them. God saw Cornelius's heart! Remember?

Acts 10:3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

Remember what Jesus said?

Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

I watched a very moving film clip of a true story called "Peace Child," based on the book by the same name. Don and Carol Richardson became missionaries and moved to New Guinea to share the good news of Jesus with the Sawi people back in 1962. The Sawi people were headhunters and cannibals, and the different tribes were in a constant state of war with each other. However, Don and Carol with their 7 month old son in tow, began learning the language and Carol began treating the sick. They shared the gospel with them but it was not received and the fighting and killing continued between the tribes. Finally, Don and Carol told them they could no longer help them and would have to leave if the fighting didn't stop. The Sawi people wanted them to stay and continue helping them so they told them about one of their ancient customs. Each village would give an infant son to one of the warring tribes to live with them. As long as the child lived there would be peace between the tribes. The child given was known as the

“Peace Child!” Don and Carol finally had a way to relate to their culture and told them that God had offered His One and Only Son as a “Peace Child” to save the world from its sin! The people finally understood the gospel and received it. Other tribes soon accepted the gospel and now they are friends, work together and share leadership in their churches. It’s an amazing story. Listen to what one of the Sawi villager’s said 50 years later when Don and his son’s returned to see them...

“A SAWI VILLAGER (interpreted): When [the missionaries] came years ago, [we] were still living in darkness. God’s word has been planted here, the gospel has been received, this place is full of peace. It’s a safe place to live. We’re very blessed. I want to give thanks to God because the gospel came here. And I want you to know that when you leave on the airplane tomorrow, that we’re going to stay faithful to the gospel as long as we live. It’s everything to us.”

Quote taken from an article written by Amy K. Hall published on the Stand to Reason website STR.Org.

Let’s Pray!