

EVANGELISM WITHOUT BORDERS

Acts 10:34-35

The idea of world-wide evangelism forms an important part of the history of Christianity, especially in the United States. Good reason exists for that focus – Jesus commissioned his church to do that very thing (*Matthew 28:18-20*). But, while that mission holds a defining place in the church’s Jesus-given identity, we also recognize that Christian history reveals many misunderstandings and even abuses in fulfillment of that mission. As a church commissioned to represent Jesus in our community, we will consider the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 as a way of thinking about the mission we have inherited from Jesus and the problems that can frustrate its fulfillment.

The apostle Peter and the centurion Cornelius

- Acts opens with Jesus giving his apostles the responsibility of announcing the restoration of “the kingdom to Israel”¹ through their Holy-Spirit empowered activity throughout the world (*Acts 1:6-8*).
- Jesus’ commission to his apostles clearly announced the inclusive nature of the kingdom (*Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8*), a nature God always intended (*Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Isaiah 19:23-25*).
- Even though the Bible outlines the universal nature of God’s kingdom, God had given very specific promises to the Jewish people that some of them came to believe indicated God would treat them better than other people (*cf. Genesis 13:14-17; Exodus 19:5-6; Ezekiel 37:1-28*).
- Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit’s Jesus-directed teachings (*cf. John 16:12-14*), added important insights into God’s plan that counter the misunderstandings held by some of the Jewish people.
 - Israel’s rejection of Jesus led to their “hardening” (*Romans 11:1*) and their salvation, Paul wrote, depended upon “the fullness of the Gentiles” being brought into it (*Romans 11:25-26*).
 - God did plan special blessings for Israel, but “Israel” refers to one’s character rather than ethnicity (*Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8*).
 - Jesus changes the identity of his people so that they are no longer “Jew nor Greek” and, at the same time, makes them “Abraham’s offspring” (*Galatians 3:27-29*).
- Consider, therefore, the story of Peter and Cornelius:

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

Acts 10:1-8

"a devout man who feared God"

Acts 10:9-33

"What God has made clean, do not call common"

Acts 10:34-48

"God shows no partiality"

Applications

- The Christian mission builds on an elevated view of all humanity.
- Too often, however, we interpret the world through our narrow, personal filters.
- Prejudices of all kinds diminish the good news about Jesus.
- We also compromise the good news about Jesus when we fail to share it with the people around us.
- God no longer dramatically breaks into our world as He did in the case of Cornelius; He has already made His point in situations like the one between Peter and Cornelius. We must therefore learn to pay attention to the things God has done as recorded in the Bible so that we can learn what things we should be doing today.