

Acts 10:34-38

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: “Now I really am beginning to understand that God does not show favoritism, ³⁵but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶He sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

³⁷“You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. ³⁸God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him.

God’s Favorites

I.

Shocking. That was truly the correct word to describe this new information.

In the past, people had always just accepted it. This is the way things were. It seemed that things had *always* been this way. God forbid that anyone would ever expect that things would ever be any different. In fact, this was such a part of life that one didn’t even consider the whys and wherefores, it simply *is*. Don’t question it. Don’t try to change it. Just roll with it.

It began with hunger pangs. If you’ve ever been really, really hungry, you can begin to understand. Your mind just focuses on food. You want something to eat. In Peter’s case, however, the hunger pangs went from thoughts of food to the unthinkable.

“[Peter] saw heaven opened and an object coming down. It was like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of the sky. ¹³Then a voice said to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’” (Acts 10:11-13, EHV). No matter how hungry you are there are just some things that are beyond the concept of food. Tarantulas are considered a delicacy in some parts of the world, but I don’t know if I could bring myself to eat one. The sheet in Peter’s vision contained all kinds of choices. God’s voice spoke in the vision. “Kill and eat!” It was as if he was saying: “There’s food here; all kinds of choices; you pick.”

“But Peter said, ‘Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything impure or unclean’” (Acts 10:14, EHV). There was a problem with this sheet filled with living animals from which Peter was to choose—all the animals contained in it were foods that God had previously told his people were to be considered “unclean,” foods that were not to be eaten by Jewish people. “Yet the voice came to him a second time: ‘What God has made clean, you must not continue to call unclean’” (Acts 10:15, EHV).

Apparently the whirlwind roller coaster ride of his emotions wasn’t yet over. Imagine the number of shocks Peter’s system had been through in the last few years. He had become one of Jesus’ disciples; *that* had been difficult in and of itself. Along with the others, he had believed Jesus to be the One who was to come—the Messiah who had been promised for centuries. The shocks hadn’t ended, however. Everyone thought Messiah would break the rule of the Roman world and restore the physical kingdom of Israel. “Everyone” had been wrong. Peter and the others had to come to grips with the facts—Jesus was a King of a different kind.

Following Jesus' death and resurrection, for weeks Peter had remained timid—downright terrified of what might happen to himself and the others from the Roman government and the Jewish religious establishment. Then Pentecost came and Peter became bold in his proclamation of what Jesus had really come to do. He turned from a timid, scared, uneducated man into one of the boldest proclaimers of the gospel there ever was.

But now...*this!*? “What God has made clean, you must not continue to call unclean” (Acts 10:15, EHV). All of a sudden all the Old Testament dietary laws were simply to be ignored? It seemed too much to ask; too much to bear.

The shock to Peter's system about dietary things was really to prepare him for something far more important. There were other parts of Jewish Ceremonial Law. Gentiles—people who were not Jewish—were to be avoided according to the Ceremonial Law. Jews weren't to eat with them, certainly weren't to meet with them, weren't even to associate with them. The vision about clean and unclean foods had been something to prepare him to understand that restrictions from the Ceremonial Law for Old Testament believers were no longer in place.

A man named Cornelius had sent some men to meet with Peter. Cornelius was a God-fearing man; he was what the Jews called a “proselyte,” or a convert to Judaism, yet he hadn't completely adopted all of Jewish customs and had not become Jewish by circumcision, which the Jews required.

Peter went to Cornelius' house and met with him; something that would have been unthinkable to him only days before. “Then Peter began to speak: ‘Now I really am beginning to understand that God does not show favoritism, ³⁵but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him’” (Acts 10:34-35, EHV).

The shocking news Peter had learned he was already applying. Restrictions of the Ceremonial Law were lifted—not only concerning what food a person could choose to eat, but more importantly, with whom one could associate.

II.

God had designed Old Testament laws to keep the Jewish people separate and distinct from the other nations, but there had been a reason. The line of the Savior was to remain intact until he would be born. Often the Jewish people began to think that because they had been set apart by God for his purposes, they were more important and more valuable than any other people. They thought that Jewish people were more highly favored by God than any other people. Certainly they believed that spiritually Jews were better than Gentiles, even proselytes who had begun to worship the true God.

Human nature loves to play the comparison game. One looks around and takes stock of the others in the room—or in your circle of friends—or among your coworkers—or...the other people sitting in the pews right here in church with you today. Do you ever start to sound like that Pharisee in one of Jesus' parables? You know the one: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11, EHV).

What Peter had learned by means of a vision was a timeless truth: God does not show favoritism. Thank God it is true.

III.

“He sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36 EHV). Cornelius had already been studying the Old Testament. He knew about God's promises of a Messiah to come. Perhaps he had also

heard rumblings of what Jesus had done and bits and pieces of what that might have meant. Peter wanted him to know what “peace” meant. Jesus came to bring peace between human beings and God. Real peace can only come because sins have been forgiven.

“You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. ³⁸God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:34, EHV). The context of what Peter says as he speaks to Cornelius indicates that Cornelius would have known about Jesus’ baptism. The baptism of Jesus installed Jesus into his office as the Messiah. He was the great Prophet who was to come, but he was more than a prophet; he was also a great King, the King who rules God’s people for eternity and fights their battles for them. He is even more than that, however; Jesus is also the greatest High Priest. He gave his life as the sacrifice required to pay for the sins of the people.

Peter tells Cornelius that the miracles of Jesus testified to the fact that he is both truly human and truly God. Because of who he was—and is—Jesus indeed had what it took to establish real peace between God and mankind. He healed those oppressed by the Devil—especially the oppression caused by the guilt of our sins.

IV.

Thank God that he does not show favoritism! Your sins have been paid for. Mine have been paid for. Every person’s sins have been paid for. It is shocking, but true. How blessed we are by God’s grace! God does not show favoritism! The only thing that prevents a person from the forgiveness Jesus won for all is his or her own rejection of the truth—a rejection of the forgiveness Jesus won.

What a gift Peter’s vision was! That vision inspired him to share the gospel without favoritism to people who weren’t Jewish. I’m pretty sure most of us here are not of Jewish descent, yet God does not show favoritism. Jesus came for us. Give thanks to God for the forgiveness you have in Christ Jesus. Live your life reflecting the fact that God’s lack of favoritism means that you, too, have become a member of God’s family by faith.

Peter’s original barriers to sharing the gospel were built up by Old Testament Ceremonial Law. We have barriers of our own making, perhaps. Racial barriers. Social barriers. Perhaps it “feels” easier to share the Good News about Jesus only with people who are “the same” as we are socially or intellectually or in whatever distinction you can think of. Break the barriers. Everyone needs to know: God loves them, too. The forgiveness Jesus won is forgiveness for all. How tragic if someone doesn’t know. Share the good news: God does not show favoritism. Amen.