

A GOSPEL WITHOUT PREJUDICE
February 5, 2017 morning service
Acts 10:24-43

Thank you, team. Praise the Lord. Take your Bible this morning and go to the book of Acts chapter 10. We appreciate you, Jerry, you being with us for the weekend for DNOW. You give Dr. Wilton our hello when you see the boss. Amen. That's good, good. It's wonderful to see all of you on a great, great celebration day here at Olive. I am preaching for ten weeks and one or two weeks off of it but for ten weeks up to Easter regarding ten major sermons in the book of Acts. Today is number four. We come to the tenth chapter of Acts and find the fourth primary sermon that was preached and recorded in Acts.

I was with a seminary professor on Friday night in a preaching meeting. He said, "What are you preaching on these days?" I said, "I'm doing the great sermons in Acts. Not my great sermons but taking the great sermons of Acts and trying to preach on them." He said, "I've never heard of that." I said, "Neither have I so I'm going to do it. We're going to go through." He said, "Well I'll be tuning in and seeing how you do in days to come." I got a little nervous to start with but, hey, don't fear man. Let me tell you, God's watching all the time even when the seminary professor's not looking, alright? So you live your life in a way to please Him and the seminary can be pleased or repent. Amen. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Well we come to this message that I've entitled, "A Gospel Without Prejudice." In this tenth chapter we find two men. Now God's church since its inception has always moved forward. It has marched forward and God says, "The gates of hell will not prevail against My church. My church is going forward." That does not mean the church has always been what it should be. There have been times of rift and division within the church. There have been hours and centuries of prejudice within the church.

Here in this passage we find prejudice between Jew and Gentile, between circumcision and the uncircumcised. We find prejudice between Catholic and Protestant. We sometimes find in the church a division of prejudice between liberal theology and fundamentalism and its theology. Yet while men have these differences God causes His church to go forward. In our text today we find two men, a Jew and a Gentile, and they are separate and then God is going to show them how to be overcomers and to walk together.

Cornelius is the first one and you find him right there in chapter 10 as it begins the chapter that Cornelius was a man of Caesarea. Now Caesarea is Caesar's palace on the sea. It was a Roman city. Roman soldiers were there of which Cornelius was one. You find that text says he was a centurion. A hundred men reported to a Centurion. Century, a hundred, so a hundred men came to him. They were of the Italian cohort. They were enlisted out of Italy and they came under the auspices of this great man, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, commander, a tough-minded, iron

disciplined, well-trained, brave-hearted, God fearing, generous, moral, good man, lost. Just like a lot of people that come to our church. Good people, hardworking, moral, giving money, praying. That's what Cornelius did but he didn't know God. When the hour of prayer had come, the Bible tells us that in the ninth hour he had a vision. In that vision an angel came and said, "Cornelius, send people from Caesarea down to Joppa." That's 30 miles down the seacoast, present day Tel Aviv.

He said, "Send them down to Joppa and find one named Simon, Simon Peter. He's lodging at Simon the tanner's house and he will come and speak to you." Cornelius sent a small band south out of Caesarea, down to Joppa to Simon the tanner's house. That's all the address he had. It was easy to find. You could smell the tanner's house. While they were en route, Peter went to pray. It's amazing what'll happen if you'll just pray. While Peter was hungry and he was praying, the Bible tells us that he fell into a trance. He had a vision and he saw a sheet come down from heaven. In that sheet were all kinds of animals, those that flew, those that crawled, and those that walked, those of the sea, clean and unclean. God said, "Peter, eat," and he said, "No, Lord." I'm going to preach on that tonight." He said the sheet came down a second time. No. The sheet came down a third time. There was a knock at the door and the spirit said to Peter, "Those men need you. Go with them." The men had come from Caesarea and said, "We've come from the Centurion's house, one named Cornelius, and he has need of Simon Peter," and he said, "I'm the man you need."

He brought them in. They spent the night. The next morning they got up and made the 30 mile journey back north to Caesarea and when they got there we pick up the text in verse number 24 as Peter and Cornelius's group are arriving along with some friends that Peter brought along and the Bible says:

On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. [Now this preacher was already in a sweat. Here's the crowd. Let me tell you, a preacher will be ready to preach before his hat hits the ground when he gets a crowd. Peter's there.] 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. 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."

Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

[In verse 34 Peter starts to preach.] *Opening his mouth, Peter said:*

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 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. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 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. 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. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”¹

Peter was not done but he was done because God gave the invitation right there, right in the middle of the sermon. Before he could turn and say, “Jon, let’s sing a song,” the Spirit of God fell and people were gloriously saved. The Spirit of God filled them and God did a work right in the middle of the preaching of Simon Peter. Peter was prejudiced. He had never eaten a meal or spent a night or stepped foot in the home of a Gentile. He’d been saved but he had never understood that the gospel was also for the Gentile and to the ends of the earth he thought it to be Jewish only. But when God let that sheet down he looked in there and he said, “Lord, I can’t eat that. It’s against the law.” God said, “Take and eat.” “No, Lord.” I’m going to preach on that phrase tonight. Isn’t that a great phrase? No, Lord. God tells you to do something and you say, “No, Lord.” Well if He’s Lord, it’s yes.

Peter got the picture that there was nothing unholy. The King James says no man was common. *Koinos* is the Greek reference in that. We get our word *koinonia*, fellowship, that we all have things common. We’re all one in *koinonia*. Peter, no man unholy, no man unclean and Peter got it. Up to Caesarea we went preaching the gospel and seeing a multitude or people come to be saved. Let me share with you just a few truths out of this text today.

Number one, I want you to see that God does not show partiality. Look at it right here in the text in verse 34. Peter, opening his mouth, the first word of the sermon, I most certainly now understand that God is not one to show partiality. Verse 28. No one is unholy or unclean. God does not show partiality. You may be prejudiced but God is not prejudiced. The church may show partiality but God never shows partiality.

¹ Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Deuteronomy 10:17. *For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor can [you buy Him to do so. He will not] take a bribe.* Romans 2:11. *For there is no partiality with God.* Galatians 2:6. *But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality).* In Ephesians 2:11-14 one of the greatest texts on no partiality found in all of the word of God in Ephesians 2:11. *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.*

It used to be Jew and Gentile but God tore down the wall. He said, "There is no partiality." God loves every man in this room. Every nation, every tribe, every ethnicity, every background, every problem. God shows no partiality. Any religion that preaches that a man cannot come to God or is not welcome because of the color of his skin, the ethnicity of which he is born or the background on which he's found, those people preaching that are devils dressed in angel's robes. It's hellish, hellish, hellish to be prejudiced. The gospel is not prejudiced. Jesus died for every man.

Now the church struggles. The church has not always been warm and welcome but she's learning. It's not just in our culture. Let me tell you, in every culture they struggle. Every culture because naturally we like folk like us. If I can just get Tate High School students and Pace High School students to love Jesus together, I've had revival. I throw in a little Washington and Pine Forest and it takes really the move of the Holy Ghost to get all that together. If you get those Miltonites in there, Lord God, I'm just telling you.

God shows no partiality. We divide up a lot of different ways but we are no more than devils. We are no more than devils in angel's robes when we show prejudice to any man for any reason of any stripes. God shows no partiality.

Secondly, God requires all men to believe. Now watch this. While God shows no partiality, He loves all men, He requires every man to believe. Friend, you'll not go to heaven by the way you look, the way you're baptized. You will not join a church to get there. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God makes that requirement of every man and every woman. Notice in verses 42 and 43. *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.* Jesus is the Judge of all people alive and everybody dead in the graveyard. He's the Judge.

A few days ago I was invited down to the courthouse in Pensacola to pray the opening prayer and the closing prayer for the investiture of a new circuit court judge of the First Circuit. Judge Jeff Lewis is a member of our church. I've never seen so many

judges in one room in all of my life. There were more black robes in that place than there were red robes when I graduated from high school. Every judge around came. They lined them up. They were there. They were up at the front. They wanted me to pray so I obliged them. I closed my opening prayer this way. I make my prayer in the name of the one who is the Judge before whom we will all one day stand even Jesus my Lord. Every judge will stand before Christ. Every person in the penitentiary will stand before Christ. Every taxpaying citizen will stand before Christ. He is the Judge of the living and the dead according to verse 42. Then verse 43. *Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.*

Friend, you must believe. If you're going to get saved, you must believe on Christ. There is no other way. There are three great texts in Acts about that. In Acts 2:38 Peter said to them in another place. We already preached on this text. *"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* In Acts 4:12. *"There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."* Acts 16:31 when they were in jail at Philippi and they said, "What must we do to be saved?" *They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

You must put your faith in Christ. You must believe on Him. The way you believe is put your full eternal weight and trust on Christ. Just like all of you that are sitting down right now. You've put your full weight and trust on that bench and it's holding you. You must put your full weight of eternity on Christ.

Last Friday night I was preaching up in a church in Baker, Florida at the church in a men's conference at Pilgrim Rest Church. They had marvelous music much like we have here. It was a band-driven service, very good. After they finished, every light in the house came down. It got black as midnight in there and then up on the screens came the introduction for the next preacher and I was the next preacher.

It's a brand new auditorium. They don't have pews like we have. They have these big, wide, plush chairs that are all hooked together. There'll be like three of them here and four and then six as it gets wider. I'm on the front row. When the singer said, "Sit down," and the house went black I sat down but there was no chair behind me. During the music I'd kind of moved over a little and I sat down and I sat down some more and I sat down some more. My Bible sat down. Boom. The preacher, he's 6'7", he reached over and picked me up and sat me in my chair. I thought to myself in my mind, I thought, he thinks, oh my, I have got an old man in here that's lost his mind. He can't even stand up or sit down. What are we going to do? My Lord, what kind of preacher have I hired to come up here and preach to us? I've never been so grateful for a dark auditorium in all my life.

Let me tell you, friend, if you don't put your full weight and trust on Jesus Christ, you will miss eternity. You'll do more than sit in the floor. You'll bust hell wide open.

He's not a good way to heaven. He's the only way to heaven. God makes no prejudice. He loves every man but I'm telling you, God cuts no deal. He requires every man, woman, boy, and child to come and believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only name given whereby you must and can be saved.

God doesn't show partiality. God requires all men to believe. Thirdly in this text, I'm telling you that God forgives all sin when we confess. Now don't miss this. Look in verse 43. *Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.* Sins. Every sin, when you confess Christ, is forgiven. Now Peter's preaching. Who's listening to Peter? Well we know Cornelius is there. He's a Roman centurion. We know his family's there. Hey, boys and girls, teenagers, college students, I don't know what you've done but I'm here to tell you, God will forgive all your sins when you come to Christ. All the porn you look at, God'll forgive it. He expects you to change your lifestyle. He'll give you power to do it. Every word you've ever spoken. Every time you've ever lied.

I'm telling you, there were family members in this room. Cornelius had friends, his friends. He'd invited a host of friends. You're in here today and you've come as a friend. I'm here to tell you, God will forgive you of your sins. I met an elderly couple in the first service. They came. They've just moved to Pensacola this week and their family comes to church here. They're senior adults and they've had to move here. Like some of our people move off to go be with family, they've moved here to be with family. They came in and sat right here in this section in the early service. I don't know those people. I met them this morning. They seemed like good, wonderful people.

Let me tell you, Cornelius was a good man but he was lost. Friend, if you're here today, Jesus will forgive you but I've come with a burden today. I've come with a burden for Cornelius. You see, I know every Sunday I preach to military personnel. I preach to people just like Cornelius. Many are active in the military and scores are retired out of the military because we live in a Navy town. Dear military man or woman, God will forgive your sins but you must come to Him.

Dwight David Eisenhower was a five-star general. He was the Supreme commander of NATO in 1951 and later elected as the 34th president of the United States and after he was elected he was baptized and made his public profession of faith in Christ. Today the motto of the United States because President Eisenhower brought it to Congress and pushed it through Congress, our motto today is "In God We Trust." It's on all your money. It's the motto of America. And he added two words through Congress to the pledge of the flag of the United States. Before he got this passed, we pledge one nation indivisible but Eisenhower said we need to insert two words, one nation under God. Can you imagine trying to put that in the pledge in 2017? You talk about rights. You talk about boycott. Why people go crazy but Eisenhower had bowed his life and he said, "We must thrust God back into America."

Some of you that serve our country in the military need God in your life. You've never trusted Him. You're good. You give money, you pray prayers, but you've never asked Christ to save you. Cornelius.

It's one of my favorite movies I've ever watched. Sergeant York, Alvin York, World War I. He's from Tennessee, the back hills of Tennessee. I'm telling you, he was, oh man, he was from way back in the hills. No electricity. York was coming home one night and lightning hit him. He went to church and got gloriously saved. After that he got his draft notice. He told his pastor, he said, "I'm not going to serve. The Bible says you're not supposed to kill and I'm not going to war." Alvin York began to pray. He took the Bible in one hand and the Constitution in the other. He said, "I have a hard time putting these two things together," but he served. He received the Medal of Honor. He was a phenomenal soldier. It all started when he bowed his knee to Christ.

This past week Beth in my office said, "Pastor, there's a family here I'd like you to see." I said, "I can go right now." I had a cancellation. I said, "I'll go." I went across town and I went into the home of Harrell and his wife. They've been married 63 years. Up on his wall were two shadow boxes filled with ribbons, military honors. I didn't know what any of that was except two. I said, "Harrell, tell me about this. This is a bronze star. I know what a bronze star is." I said, "Tell me about that." Harrell told me about being in the firefight. Then I looked down at the bottom. I said, "I know a purple heart when I see it, Harrell. Tell me about the purple heart." He told me. He's about to die if God doesn't raise him up. He's sick. He's got weeks and months maybe. Maybe years, I don't know. God only knows but he's a sick man.

I knelt next to his chair just like I'm kneeling here and I took his hand. I said, "Harrell, I want you to tell me, have you ever trusted Jesus?" He said, "Oh yes, pastor. I was a 14-year-old boy." He said, "Now I've had some days when I didn't live like I was supposed to." I said, "We all have, Harrell." I said, "You've served our country well." He said, "I've tried." Then he looked me right in the eye and he said, "Pastor, I can tell you, when God calls this soldier is ready to go. When I was 14 I gave my heart and life to Christ." He looked over at his sweet wife. They don't have any children. He said, "I love her." He said, "I wasn't a Baptist when we got married. She was a Baptist and so I was baptized and joined the church." He said, "Her daddy was a preacher and there was another boy that liked her when I came. Her daddy held me under. I thought I was going to drown. I think he was trying to get rid of me." He's so funny. He prayed and we cried. That old soldier was ready to go.

I want to ask you today. You're active military. You're going to fly a multimillion dollar jet, helicopter. If that thing goes down, are you ready to go up? Some of you are going to be mechanics. You're going to be like my good friend, Don Weidner, that used to sit right back there on that front row, second section. He taught out at NAS for years. I said, "Don, what do you do?" He said, "I teach them how to get the sand out of the engines so they can keep going in desert storms." He said, "You know, pastor, you get dirt in an engine, it doesn't work very well. It eats the rotors up."

Some of you are going to pack parachutes. You're military. Friend, you're going to die and they're going to take you to Barrancas and ask me to come and they're going to put the American flag over your casket. We're going to wait out there. You're going to get a fly by when you die because everybody buried at Barrancas gets a fly by. It's not official but everybody gets one because they're always practicing. Every time I go there I have to wait just a minute. Every now and then they get a Blue Angel flyover. It's not official but they come by nonetheless and I wait for a moment.

Some of you are going to serve this country, be honored, have ribbons, and die without having the proper flag which is the flag of the cross across your soul and you're going to die lost because you've never come to the captain of your salvation and said, "God, I serve you." That's what Cornelius did. I'm telling you, God will forgive your sin. I don't care what you've done. Some of you have done some heinous things, wickedness. God says, "I wipe it all away. Hallelujah. What a Savior."

God shows no prejudice. God requires all to believe. God forgives all sin. Then lastly, very quickly, God unites His church. Peter's preaching, the Spirit of God fell, the Spirit of God came on them, they began to speak in tongues just like they did at Pentecost and Peter said, "What He did for the Jew now He's done for the Gentile. God's put us all together." They were baptized in the Holy Spirit. He said, "Now it's time," and he commanded them. He moved into general mode and he commanded them to be baptized. Friend, after you get saved it is a command. Just like these four girls, you ought to be baptized right after you get saved. Then it says, the last sentence, line of chapter 10. Then they asked him, Peter, to stay on for a few days. Peter had never spent the night in a Gentile's house. He did then. What did it? The Spirit of God put them together.

The gospel is without prejudice. Of course in our culture, that that haunts us is black and white. I never knew a black man until I was a senior in high school. There are still no black people that live at the end of the mountain where I'm from. I remember the first black man I ever saw, ever met or talked to, to say hello. He came in my daddy's store. He was working on the road. They were on a construction group. They came in to eat and they asked for a certain thing. We didn't have it. The next week my daddy ordered what they wanted and we had it for them. Those men would come in. I'd never met a man of color before. I was just a little toe-headed, redheaded kid running around on the mountain. I looked that old boy over when he came in. I never shook his hand before.

I never knew a black man's name until I met Eugene Harris. Eugene Harris played basketball at Florida State University. He and I played against each other in high school. He played for Scottsboro. I played for Pisgah. We were the two best teams in north Alabama. I'd guard him. He'd guard me. I played junior college and he played at FSU. You can guess who was good. I ran him all over that gym. My tongue was that long when that game was over. We beat them twice that year because he was all they had and bless God, I wasn't all we had. His brother Charles became my dear friend and is til today. Charles called me a few days ago. He said, "Teddy." That's my

given name. That's what people know me as until 1972. After that I became Ted. He called me the other day. He said, "Teddy?" I said, "Yes, Charles." He said, "I'm dying." I said, "What?" He said, "I don't know how long I've got but I'm sick and I'm dying. I called to ask my friend to pray for me." I prayed for Charles on the phone.

He lived over in Scottsboro across the track up on the mountain, on the hill. You didn't go up there, not if you looked like me, if you wanted to get down. It was a rough side of town, across the tracks we'd call it, but I went over there. Charles Harris walked me in and walked me out. Sports did more for my prejudice than the gospel did but I brought my sports to the church and God helped us break down some walls. Friend, there's prejudice in the church. There's prejudice in this room. It may be about color but it may be about other stuff. We all struggle with prejudice. I have it. I don't understand people that wear clothes with big holes tore all in them. I've said to some girls in this church. I said, "If your momma won't buy you pants I'll buy you a pair of britches." I found out that jeans with holes cost more than the ones I buy that ain't got holes.

Sometimes you'll be prejudiced against tattoos. I don't have a tattoo. I'm not getting one. I'm not man enough to get a tattoo nor an earring. I ain't doing neither one of them, alright? You can like me or not like me. I don't give a rip. I ain't doing that. I can't wait to see some of these big NBA stars. I wish I could live to be 110 to see their chest go down here. Those big eagle wings going... That bird's going to land after awhile, I'm telling you.

You see, it helps us to laugh a little bit but we have prejudice. That old boy taking up money on the corner, panhandling. If you're not careful you'll say, "Why doesn't he get a job?" It's easy to be prejudiced. Friend, it's more than skin color. You can be prejudiced on a lot of levels and we'll struggle with it until the day we die. I grew up in the 70s. Oh you should have seen it. Son, it's curly when it gets down here on my collar. It looks good too. I see people with long hair and I think, look in the mirror a few years ago. I was at a senior adult meeting the other day. An elderly lady walked up to me. She said, "I liked your hair when it was longer." Thank God in Jesus' name, everything that gets in my heart doesn't come out of my mouth because what I thought I almost said. I liked you when you were younger, but I wanted to keep my member and my job, Amen.

I'm just telling you, it's easy to get prejudiced. You see, some of you didn't like old Jerry singing because he didn't dress like Jon. God help us. That's what I'm telling you, friend. There's no one holy, uncommon, unclean – you ever seen the movie? I'm nearly done but I've had a long day but I'm going to preach until I get it all done. Have ya'll ever seen the movie, "Shenandoah"? You remember the best part where Jimmy Stewart is in the room and the boys, the military, comes to ask for the hand of his daughter? Jimmy's smoking that cigar. He asked if he could marry the daughter and, "Do you like her?" "Oh yes, sir. I love her." "I didn't ask you if you loved her. I asked you, do you like her?" He said, "Son, I loved that girl's momma for three years before I

liked her.” He said, “Do you understand what I’m saying?” That boy said, “No.” “You will. Yes, you can have her but if you ever don’t like her, bring her back to me.”

Dear friend, let me tell you, you’re not just supposed to love everybody in this church. You’re supposed to like everybody in this church. That’s without prejudice. Oh Lord. You see, God doesn’t just love you. When you come in repentance and when you walk, He likes you enough to come after you. Friend, you’ve got to love folks in this church enough to pray for them. You’ve got to like them enough to go get them, to care for them. We’ve got a member right now in jail. His wife walked in here this morning weeping. “Pastor, would somebody go see my husband?” You say, “Well should he be in jail?” It doesn’t matter if he’s supposed to be there or not. The judicial will take care of that. Let the grace of God rule at Olive Baptist Church enough that we’ll not just love him and pray for him but go like him. Jesus said, “If you’re going to be like Me to the least of these and those in the jail and the sick, you go and minister life.”

You say, “Preacher, they won’t repent.” That’s not your pay grade. You leave that to God. You never know when the Holy Ghost is going to fall just like the 10th chapter of Acts.