

ME

- Have you ever realized too late that God was doing something... and you missed it
- Story about David: Meeting people at University > Sharing the gospel with my class >
- Remembering this makes me think about other times where maybe I:
- I misread a situation
- Someone was reaching out for help and I brushed them off
- Someone had spiritual hunger but I assumed they didn't
- God cracked open a door but I was too cautious or distracted to walk through it
- It's a humbling thing to see God at work around you and then to realize that maybe I missed out on being a part of what God was already doing.

Acts 10-11 is the story of God doing something massive... and His people nearly missing it. Not because they were bad. Not because they were prejudiced. But because God moved outside their expectations.

WE

We all do this:

- We cling to what we know.
- We hold onto our categories.
- We assume we know which people God is working in.
- We read Scripture through the lens of our own comfort.
- We interpret God's character through predictable patterns.

Here's the tension:

We don't actually think we resist inclusion.

We think they're welcoming.

Most of us think that we are quite open to what God is doing.

- But Acts 10–11 confronts us with a deeper truth:

For us to be a church that moves with the Holy Spirit, then we need to accept when He pushes us beyond our comfort, traditions, prejudices or assumptions

- Because He shows up in ways we don't expect.
- That's the danger of spiritual comfort and pride

We mistake "what God did last time" for "what God has do next time."

- **Disciples of Jesus are inclusive because God's heart is to welcome, redeem, and restore all people, and disciples reflect His heart.**

GOD

Turn to Acts 10.

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day^[a] he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Peter's Vision

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour^[b] to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation,^[c] for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to

visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

³⁰ And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour,^[d] and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Gentiles Hear the Good News

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the

gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

11 Now the apostles and the brothers^[a] who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party^[b] criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order:

¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

1. God Works in People Before We Even Notice (vv 1–8)

- Cornelius is praying, giving generously, seeking God, and responding to revelation — **before Peter knows he exists.**
- The Spirit is ahead of Peter.
- **Inclusion isn't about us expanding our hearts; it's about recognizing God's movement. He is moving to people long before we do. He's not waiting for people to measure up to our standards.**
- And God is already working in Peter too!

- We are told at least three times the detail that Peter was staying with a person who was a tanner by profession. This was seen as an unclean job because of how many dead animals they would be in contact with.
- So even in the little ways, God is preparing Peter to be more comfortable with where he is going to send him –to be with the unclean gentiles.
- If we wait for people to fit our categories before assuming God is at work, we will miss half the kingdom.

2. God Confronts Our Theology Before He Confronts Our Prejudice (vv9–23)

- Peter’s vision is not a challenge to his manners towards the unclean.
It’s a challenge to his **interpretation of Scripture**.
- Peter could quote Torah for why Gentiles were “unclean.”
He wasn’t a bigot.
He was being *biblical* as he understood it.
- Remember how much division there has ALWAYS been for the Jews and Gentiles. This is so ingrained in Peter, but not randomly or just culturally.
 - Jews were given clear instructions about Gentiles.
- **Then God says:**
“Do not call unclean what I have made clean.”
- This is massive:
God is correcting Peter’s **application** of Scripture in real time.
Not abolishing Scripture, fulfilling it in a deeper way.
- God wasn’t changing the Law. The Law had already done its job.
Jesus fulfilled it, and now God needed Peter to step into the fulfillment, not stay in the shadow.
- Peter begins to realize:
“My theology isn’t wrong, but my understanding is incomplete.”

- That's terrifying.
- And freeing.
- And necessary.

3. God Confirms His Work by His Spirit, Not Our Categories (vv10:24–48; 11:1–18)

- Peter preaches. The Spirit interrupts. Pentecost happens all over again.
- The Gentiles receive the Spirit *the same way* the Jews did.
- So Peter was pondering how this view he (and all the history of the Jews) has held for his whole life (separation of clean and unclean things), and what it now means that the God made them clean.
- When Peter returns to Jerusalem, He gets challenged by the circumcision party
- He was doing something that didn't line up with their theology.
- Sitting across the table they would have been able to lay out their theological position as to the scriptural reasons why Gentiles were unclean and why they should not be included.
- To see Peter, their leader, doing this must have felt like he was being disobedient to the Scriptures that are SUPER clear on these issues.
- “Why did you eat with them?” they ask
- They believed they had Scripture on their side.
- But in their dogma, they were wrong. God was the proof. His presence was the sign.
- Peter says the line that defines the whole story:
- **“Who was I to stand in God’s way?”**
(Acts 11:17)
- **It says they fell silent.**
Then they praise God, and Give him the glory.

- But not everyone — some will resurface in Acts 15.

Because change is slow.

And inclusion takes time.

YOU

- This reality that followers of Jesus are inclusive, isn't about making you nicer. It's about making you attentive to see where God is already working.

- The question is not:

“Who are you excluding?” Because you probably justify every way to Sunday

- The question is:

“Where is God moving in ways and places you don't expect?”

- In people you've written off
- In communities you don't understand
- In younger believers you think aren't ready
- In older believers you think are too stuck
- In people whose lifestyle or background makes you uncomfortable
- In people outside the church
- In people who are spiritually curious but not church-formed
- And perhaps most painfully:
- **Are you willing to let God correct the way you've read Scripture if His Spirit insists on it?**

- This is a discipleship question.

A humility question.

A courage question.

An obedience question.

WE

- The early church nearly missed God's turning point because they were loyal to how they understood Him yesterday.
- Now if you are familiar with Acts, we will see this attitude come back in greater force in Chapter 15. But here, in this moment we see them repenting.
- When they recognized God's presence and power in the situation, they said:
"Then God has granted repentance to the nations."
(Acts 11:18)
- They worshiped and brought Him glory
They repented of small vision. They embraced a bigger God.
- **This is what an inclusive church looks like:**
Not a church that tries to imitate society's idea of acceptance.
A church that **moves with the Holy Spirit** even when He pushes beyond our comfort, dogma, tradition, or assumptions.
- **Disciples of Jesus are inclusive because God's heart is to welcome, redeem, and restore all people, and disciples reflect His heart.**
- **Imagine if we all were inclusive followers of Jesus.**
- **Then every person who walked through these doors, who has already been prepared by God to be here, would meet a church prepared to love them well, and our dogma would never divide the people that Christ is drawing together.**

Gospel:

The heart of this story is that God welcomes people long before they ever know how to reach for Him.

Cornelius wasn't "clean," ready, or deserving — but God moved toward him in love, just as He moves toward us.

And Jesus is the proof: He came to welcome, redeem, and restore sinners by giving His life on the cross.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus removes every barrier that separates us from God.

Anyone who trusts Him — no matter their past, their doubts, or their story — is forgiven, cleansed, and brought into God's family.

So if you're standing on the outside looking in, hear this: Jesus has already made a place for you — all you need to do is

Let's pray:

Father, thank You that Your heart is wide and welcoming, and that You reached out to us long before we ever reached for You.

Open our eyes to see where You are already at work, and give us the courage to follow You into places, conversations, and relationships we might never have chosen on our own.

Where our assumptions are too small, correct us.

Where our hearts are too cautious, stretch us.

Where our love is too narrow, expand us to reflect the love of Jesus.

And for anyone who feels far from You today, draw them close, show them Your grace, and let them know You have already made room for them in Your family.

Make us a church that moves with Your Spirit and welcomes with Your heart.

Amen.

Eph 1:13-14

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,^l to the praise of his glory.