

Sermon Summary | Sunday 19th April 2026 | Acts 10.1-33

Acts 10 is one of the great turning points in the story of the early church. Up to this point, God had set Israel apart from the nations. That distinction between Jew and Gentile was not simply human prejudice; it was part of God's plan for a time. Through Israel came God's promises, God's word, and finally the Messiah, Jesus. But now that Jesus has come, the old barrier is giving way. People once kept at a distance are being brought near. God welcomes the outsider.

The passage begins with Cornelius. He is an impressive man: devout, generous, prayerful, morally serious, and respectful towards God. He is not careless, cynical, immoral, or hostile. In many ways, he is exactly the kind of person others would admire. Yet he is still outside. He is near in one sense — spiritually awake and serious — but he is still a Gentile, outside the old covenant people of God.

The first great encouragement of the passage is that God sees him, God knows him, and God moves towards him. That speaks powerfully to those who feel on the edge of Christian things: interested but unsure, drawn but unsettled, beginning to pray, listen, or ask serious questions. Such stirrings should not be dismissed. They may be signs that God is at work in someone.

Yet there is also a warning. Cornelius is sincere, but sincerity is not salvation. He is serious about God, but he still needs Peter to come so he can hear the message. Ultimately, he still needs Jesus. Acts 10 reminds us that a person can be spiritually serious, morally thoughtful, religiously interested, and still need Christ. That is true outside church life, but it can also be true within it. Respectability, kindness, generosity, religious habit, and duty must not be mistaken for saving faith. Cornelius is near, but still outside.

The scene then shifts to Peter in Joppa. While Cornelius is praying in Caesarea, Peter is also praying. He becomes hungry, and while food is being prepared, he sees a vision: a sheet lowered from heaven, filled with animals, and a voice saying, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter is horrified, because he has never eaten anything the Jewish law marked as unclean. His reaction is not stubbornness or mere conservatism; it reflects a lifetime of obedience to God's law. The food laws had been one of the ways Israel was kept distinct from the nations.

But then comes the turning point: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." The vision is about food, but it is not mainly about food. Food is the sign; people are the point. God is preparing Peter to understand that the old Jew-Gentile division is no longer to keep people apart in the same way. If God has made them clean, Peter must not call them unclean. The welcome being declared here is not Peter's idea, nor a human programme of mere friendliness. It is God's own declaration.

That matters because the gospel is not simply an invitation to be more inclusive in a vague sense. Religious boundaries still matter. Sin still matters. Faith in Christ still matters. But now that Jesus has come, the decisive question is no longer whether someone has the right background, culture, or religious pedigree. The decisive question is what God has done in Christ. Outsiders are brought near, not by becoming impressive, respectable, or culturally acceptable, but by the cleansing work of God.

Acts 10 therefore speaks both to those who feel outside and to those who are already inside church life. To the enquirer, it says: you may be nearer than you think, but do not stop short of Jesus. To the recently awakened, it says: let interest become faith. To the long-time churchgoer, it says: do not confuse religious seriousness with knowing Christ. And to the church, it says: do not call unclean those whom God is bringing near.

God delights to bring outsiders in. That is not a side issue in Christianity. It is the story of grace. Every Christian is someone God has seen, summoned, cleansed, and welcomed through Jesus Christ.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Am I in danger of mistaking spiritual interest, moral seriousness, or religious habit for actually coming to Jesus Christ in faith?
2. Are there people I quietly think of as unlikely, unsuitable, or too far away — people whom God may already be drawing near through the gospel?