

Alderwood Community Church
April 25, 2010

God's Sovereign Alignment
Acts 10:1-48

Big Idea: God takes great delight in aligning genuine seekers with His messengers.

Intro: Remember the day that you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Think about all the people that God had brought into your life who influenced you toward Christ.

Our text describes a pivotal point in the history of the church.

Acts 2- Pentecost- Peter shares the gospel with the Jews.

Acts 8- Philip and Peter share the gospel with the Samaritans.

Acts 10- Peter shares the gospel with the Gentiles. (Cornelius)

All of this is a fulfillment of Acts 1:8!

1. God's Sovereign Preparation (10:1-20)

A. God prepares the one who needs to hear the gospel. (10:1-8)

Vrs. 1 Cornelius was stationed at Caesarea, a garrison city named after Augustus Caesar, the administrative capital of the province of Judea, boasting a splendid harbor built by Herod the Great. **Show Map:** Caesarea is 65 northwest of Jerusalem and 30 north of Joppa (Jaffa). (Show one of my pictures from Israel???)

Luke introduces him as *a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment* (1). 'Regiment' translates *speira*, usually 'cohort', which consisted of six 'centuries' (100 men), each under the command of a 'centurion'. Ten cohorts made up a legion. So a centurion corresponded approximately to a 'captain' or 'company commander' in our day.

We also learn that Cornelius was a religious man. He expressed generosity to the needy and prayed to God regularly. Whether 'God-fearing' is to be understood in a general sense that Cornelius was religious (as in verse 35) or in the more technical sense that he had become 'a God-fearer', 'a proselyte of Judaism', is disputed. If the latter is correct, it means that he had accepted the monotheism and ethical standards of the Jews, and attended synagogue services, but had not become a full proselyte and been circumcised. So, although later (22) he is described as 'respected by all the Jewish people', he was still a Gentile, an outsider, excluded from God's covenant with Israel.

It is difficult for us to grasp the animosity in those days between the Jews on the one hand and the Gentiles (including even the 'God-fearers') on the other. The Old Testament did not support such prejudice. On the contrary, even though there are a number of prophecies against the hostile nations, the Word of God also affirms that God had a purpose for them. By choosing and blessing one family, he intended to bless all the families of the earth. (Genesis 12:1-4)

So psalmists and prophets foretold the day when God's Messiah would inherit the nations, the Lord's servant would be their light, all nations would 'flow' to the Lord's house, and God would pour out his Spirit on all humankind. The tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favoritism, became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as 'dogs', and developed traditions which kept them apart. No orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile, even a God-fearer, or invite such into his home (see verse 28). On the contrary, 'all familiar intercourse with Gentiles was forbidden' and 'no pious Jew would of course have sat down at the table of a Gentile'.

This, then was the entrenched prejudice which had to be overcome before Gentiles could be admitted into the Christian community on equal terms with Jews, and before the church could become a truly multi-racial, multi-cultural society. We saw in Acts 8 the special steps God took to prevent the perpetuation of the Jewish-Samaritan schism in the church; God has to make preparation for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. Luke regards this episode as being so important that he narrates it twice, first in his own words (Acts 10), and then in Peter's when Peter explained to the Jerusalem church what had happened (11:1-18).

Vrs. 1-2 Before He could save the Gentiles, God had to prepare Peter to bring the message and Cornelius to hear the message. Salvation is a divine work of grace, but God works through human channels. Angels can deliver God's messages to lost men, but they cannot preach the Gospel to them. That is our privilege—and responsibility.

Appl: It is interesting to see how religious a person can be and still not be saved. Certainly, Cornelius was sincere in his obedience to God's Law, his fasting, and his generosity to the Jewish people.

Illus: In many respects, John Wesley was like Cornelius. He was a religious man, a church member, a minister, and the son of a minister. He belonged to a "religious club" at Oxford, the purpose of which was the perfecting of the Christian life. Wesley served as a foreign missionary, but even as he preached to others, he had no assurance of his own personal salvation.

On May 24, 1738, Wesley reluctantly attended a small meeting in London where someone was reading aloud from Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. "About a quarter before nine," Wesley wrote in his journal, "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." The result was the great Wesleyan revival that not only swept many into the kingdom, but also helped transform British society through Christian social action.

Appl: Good people do go to hell! It takes more than religion! A person must put their faith in Jesus Christ and trust him for the forgiveness of sins.

This is a perfect example of a person following the light that they are given, believing God and God leading them to the truth about his Son.

A question many people struggle with is: What about those who have never heard about Jesus?

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”

Romans 1:18-25

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 29:13-14a

²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” Acts 17:26-27

B. God prepares the one who needs to share the gospel. (10:9-20)

- (1) God called Peter to become a fisher of men. (Matt. 4:18)
- (2) God told Peter that he would be instrumental in establishing the church. (Matt. 16:17-19)
“Keys of the kingdom...Upon this rock I will build my church.”
- (3) God had to break down Peter’s prejudice (10:9-20)

Peter had a relapse in Antioch. Peter was eating with the Gentiles, when his Jewish friends arrived, he left the table of Gentiles to join the Jews. The apostle Paul rebuked Peter for this act of prejudice.

The Jews as a whole continued to struggle with prejudice against the Gentiles. Acts 15, the Jerusalem counsel was called to help resolve this issue.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

Chuck Swindoll- *“Prejudices are like cockroaches. Once you think they are gone, they creep back unnoticed, infesting the dark corner of our hearts. It takes consistent maintenance to completely eliminate them.”*

The church and every society has struggled with this issue of prejudice.

How has God been preparing you? Your background- upbringing, experiences, people, sermons, books, conversations, prejudices.

Notice: God is the one who prepares the hearts of those who will receive the gospel.
 God is the one who prepares the hearts of those who will share the gospel.

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Phil. 2:13

God is the initiator in this whole process. Luke 19:10 *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

2. Our Obedient Participation (10:21-33) (Cornelius- 10:7-8)

(10:29) Peter responded, *“I came without raising any objection.”* Can you say that for every time that God prompts you to initiate a relationship and/or conversation that will lead to a discussion about Jesus Christ?

(10:33) Cornelius set it up perfectly for Peter. It shows Cornelius heart was wide open to the truth. *“Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”*

3. A Clear Presentation (10:34-43)

(A) **God does not show favoritism**, but loves and desires people from all nations to receive his gift of forgiveness and eternal life. (10:34-35)

“And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Rev. 5:9-10

(B) **Here is the essence of the Gospel.** (10:36-43)

(1) The life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (10:36-42)

For they had killed him *by hanging him on a tree* (39b). Peter was under no necessity to call the cross ‘a tree’; he did it by design, in order to indicate that Jesus was bearing in our place the ‘curse’ or judgment of God on our sins.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus were more than significant events; they also constituted the gospel, which *he commanded us* (the apostles again) *to preach*, in the first instance *to the people, i.e. the Jews*. But the scope of the gospel was universal. So the apostles were also to proclaim him as ‘Lord of all’ (36), as judge of all and as Savior of all who believe. They were *to*

testify that he would return on the judgment day, since he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (42). All will be included; none can escape. Yet we need not fear the judgment of Christ, since he is also the one who bestows salvation. Long before the apostles began to testify to him as Savior, all the prophets did so in the Old Testament, and still do through their written words: they testify about him, the unique, historical, incarnate, crucified and resurrected Jesus, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (43), that is, through the efficacy of who he is and what he has done. This ‘everyone’ includes Gentiles as well as Jews: the phrase ‘crashes through the barrier’ of race and nationality.

(2) Forgiveness of sins through His name. (10:43)

“Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

(3) It takes more than being religious or good.

Most people struggle in their understanding of the place of good works in relationship with God. Good works or our human efforts to please God can never be the basis of our salvation but are clearly the evidence of it.

⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10*

(4) Our salvation is totally based on faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Justification: How are the benefits of the cross transferred into our lives?

Answer: It is by faith in Jesus Christ that we are declared right (justified) before God. God’s gift of faith is the recognition of our utter moral bankruptcy and our inability to earn God’s favor and that we must receive and rest on Jesus Christ, who has done it all.

4. The Evidence of Salvation. (10:44-48)

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Rom. 8:9

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:15-16

Illus: Harry Ironside tells a personal story at this point. It concerns the death of his father. As his father was dying, he kept muttering something, and the family couldn’t quite understand what it was. But finally they got it. Mr. Ironside was thinking about this vision, thinking about the sheet full of animals. He was saying, “A great sheet and wild beasts and, and, and...” He couldn’t quite finish it. A friend bent over and whispered, “John, it says, ‘creeping things’ ”.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “That is how I got in. Just a poor good-for-nothing creeping thing, but I got in—saved by grace.” It is only by the grace of God that any of us are saved!

Conclusion/Invitation:

1. You have a choice! You can either embrace Jesus by faith as your Lord and Savior and have your sins forgiven and experience eternal life....OR You can meet Him as the judge of the living and the dead and face his judgment. (Acts 10:42-43)
2. How has God been preparing you to be His messenger?
3. Who is your Cornelius? Who is the seeker God has brought into your life with whom God intends for you to share the message of grace and salvation with?