

Day 7 : Acts 10:44-48 – The Spirit Falls

Prayerfully read: Acts 2

Understanding

As Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit “fell” (v44) or was “poured out” (v45) on the believing Gentile hearers. They began to speak great things about God in foreign languages, just as the Jewish believers had on the Day of Pentecost (v46, 2:1-13).

“Those of the circumcision” (v45) means “the Jews”. Luke refers to them in this way because circumcision was the essential sign that divided between Jew and non-Jew: it was the initiation rite through which one became Jewish. Circumcision would become a matter of great controversy as the church struggled to understand just what God was now doing (as will be seen in the following chapters).

Peter immediately understood (having been prepared by the visions) what this meant. God was indicating that these believers were now also part of the church. They had the same Spirit as the Jewish believers, and were by that Spirit part of the same body. Therefore, there was no possible reason to not baptise them with water, in recognition of what God had already done (v47-8).

This is the third occurrence of tongues in the book of Acts. It is clear from what Peter says in 11:15 that these were rare and important events. They happened when the Spirit first came to the church; when the church expanded to take in Samaritans; and now again when the first Gentiles were brought in. As such, there are no grounds for saying that such events were common, or to be expected to be continually repeated in the church's history.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Every person who trusts in Jesus Christ is given the Holy Spirit and belongs to the church and is entitled to all of its privileges. There are no distinctions of race, class, rank or of any other kind from the world that are valid in the church.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do you think often about your unity in Christ with other believers – every one on equal terms? What difference does this teaching make? How should it affect how you treat other people in the church? Are there particular people for whom your behaviour towards them is denying this truth? What steps can you take to put this right? How can you best represent this truth as you go forward?

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 8 (Chapter 9:32-10:48)

Grace Church Belper

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<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Day 1 : Acts 9:32-35 – Aeneas Healed

Prayerfully read (above and): Acts 3 (Peter's healing of the temple cripple)

Understanding

Luke's attention now moves from Saul back to Peter. For whilst Saul will be at the centre of the gospel's advance to the nations, in fact Peter will be the pioneer. We are now about to (when we get to chapter 10) learn how the church stopped being exclusively Jewish.

As a prelude to the account of the first Gentile convert, who sent for Peter from Joppa (on the west coast), Luke tells us how Peter got to be in that place to begin with. Verse 32 tells us that Peter was making a tour, and in particular came down to the “saints” at Lydda – ten miles from Joppa.

At Joppa, there was a paralyzed man, called Aeneas. This man is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. It is not clear that he was a believer beforehand – he is not called a “disciple” (like Tabitha, verse 36), but only “a certain man”.

Just as with the temple cripple, Peter performs a healing which is immediate and miraculous, upon one who was in a hopeless state (v34) – and he performs it in the name of Jesus, the Christ. As with the temple miracle, great numbers who saw it were converted. Together with the many conversions in the next verses, this is the likely explanation for why Peter remained in the area for “many days” (v43).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- New Testament miracles were instant, complete, and performed on the most “impossible” cases. They were also performed by apostles, and their purposes was to draw attention to the preaching of the gospel that souls might be saved. We need to understand this so that we will not be taken in by contemporary claims to miracles – which generally require time, are partial, or are performed only on injuries which cannot be seen (e.g. back pain, or headaches).
- New Testament miracles are pictures of salvation – they illustrated the great saving power of Jesus, the Christ.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Are you saved? Jesus has power to save in an instant – have you experienced it? Have you seen Jesus' power in others which has changed them; and has that turned you to him also?
- Pray for the saving of particular people who seem “impossible” cases.

Day 6 : Acts 10:34-43 – Peter Preaches

Prayerfully read: Acts 3:11-26

Understanding

Peter shows that he has fully understood the meaning of his vision – it is not merely animals who have been cleansed, but the Gentile peoples. Verse 35 does not mean that Cornelius was saved by his works – that would contradict what Peter then goes on to explain, that believing in Jesus is how we receive “remission of sins” (v43).

Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius. As Cornelius was not a Jew, Peter took care to explain more fully the life and career of Jesus. Some details about Jesus were already known to Cornelius (v37), but Peter explains and interprets those details, underlining God's saving purposes which were being accomplished through his life, death and resurrection.

It is important to notice that Peter preaches the same gospel to Cornelius as he has previously preached to his fellow-Jews: He insists on the historical facts concerning Jesus, particularly his death and resurrection, the coming judgment and the promise of forgiveness for all those who trust in him.

We are now seeing the next stage promised by Jesus to the apostles unfolding: Peter is now being a witness to Christ to one from another nation. (Acts 1:8).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- There is only one gospel, and it is for all people everywhere. There are not different gospels for different kinds of people, even though in different situations it is appropriate to explain it in a different way. Every person, whatever their background or position, needs to hear about how the death and resurrection of Jesus has opened up the way of salvation to us, and that the free gift of forgiveness is available if they will believe in him.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Do you know how to explain the gospel? Can you explain what are the essentials of it? Could you explain it to another person? If you have never done this, then take the time to think about it. Look carefully at the examples of gospel preaching in Acts, and take note of what is said each time.

Day 5 : Acts 10:17-33 – Peter Meets Cornelius

Prayerfully read: Jonah 1-2 (Jonah, preaching to Gentiles, Joppa)

Understanding

In these verses, Peter travels to Caesarea and meets Cornelius. Luke makes it clear that it was God, not man, who was organising this event – the Holy Spirit assured Peter that this was his will (v19-20). Six believers from Joppa went with him (v23, 11:12). When they meet, Cornelius tells him his own story, which further confirms to Peter that God was driving what was happening.

Cornelius had some knowledge of and feared the God of Israel (v22), but he had not become a Jew (v28). Peter, though, had deduced from the vision he had had of the animals (v28), that God was now making clear that such distinctions had been removed. That is, Peter understood that the vision spoke about far more things than just food – but about the whole set of dividing lines between Jew and Gentile. It is hard for us to imagine this, but for Peter this meant the changing of an entire lifetime's worth of behaviour (v14, 28).

Verse 31 is not telling us that Cornelius was already saved. He did not earn something from God by his good deeds; but God did, in his great mercy and grace, condescend to notice his seeking, and respond by bringing the gospel to him.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God is sovereign in the advance of the gospel. Men may plan and purpose, but God is the one who determines the outcome.
- It was always God's plan to unite Jew and Gentile within a single church (Eph. 2:11-22). How this plan would be accomplished was kept hidden for many generations (Eph. 3:5-6) before the coming of Christ – it is our privilege and joy to be able to understand fully God's plan to unite believers of all nations together in Christ.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- If you are converted, then take a moment to think about how you were converted. Can you trace God's sovereign hand in the circumstances and events that went before? What is there to give him the praise for?
- Do you look at God's plan as a whole? It is much bigger than just you or other individuals – it takes in the whole world: all peoples, nationalities and cultures. How much do you know about the worldwide church?

Day 2 : Acts 9:36-43 – Dorcas Raised

Prayerfully read: Mark 5:35-43, John 11

Understanding

Joppa was a sea-port (2 Chronicles 2:16, Ezra 3:7) on the west coast – about 35 miles from Jerusalem. It is the same place as the Old Testament prophet Jonah found a ship at when he fled from the Lord (Jonah 1:3).

Tabitha is a Hebrew name; Dorcas is its Greek equivalent. She was well-known for her practical works of love (v36). She had been a particular help to many widows (v39).

When she died, the disciples in Joppa sent for Peter, who was ten miles away in Lydda. They knew that Peter was nearby, and trusted that if it was the Lord's will, a great miracle might be performed. And so it was – and this event led to many in the town being converted (v42).

After the miracle, Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner. Tanners regularly handled ceremonially unclean animal skins, and it would be very unusual for a Jew to stay with one. Luke may mention this to indicate that Peter already understood to some extent that some of the law of Moses no longer applied.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- When we are saved, God does not take us to heaven immediately. One reason for this is because he has prepared good works for us to do. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10). We are *not* saved by good works, but we *are* saved so that we should perform good works (Eph. 2:8-9). We do not earn anything by our good works, but they are a necessary proof and inevitable result if we love the Lord. The Lord looks at his church as the owner of a vineyard looks at his plants – wanting to find fruit from his labours. We should not think of certain ministries (e.g. public preaching) as being for superior Christians as compared to other ministries; the church, like any other body, needs all of its members (1 Cor 12:7-31).

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Are you “careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8)? Is there proof of your gratitude to the Lord for dying for your sins? The key thing is not that your works are noticed, or impress others – but that they exist, and are good, not evil! The Lord noticed Dorcas' good works, and sent his apostle – and gave her a permanent place in Scripture. How about you?

Day 3 : Acts 10:1-8 – Cornelius' Vision

Prayerfully read: Isaiah 42

Understanding

Caesarea, where Cornelius lived, was about thirty miles up the coast from Joppa, where Peter was staying. It was the Roman capital of Judea, and the residence of the Roman procurator. Cornelius was a military man, captain over a cohort – ten cohorts made up a legion.

Cornelius was a partial proselyte, called a “God-fearer” by the Jews (v2); he believed in the God of the Jews, gave to the needy, and observed the Jewish hours of prayer (the ninth hour here (v3) is 3 p.m.); however, he was not a full proselyte, as he had not submitted to the step which signified full conversion to Judaism - circumcision (11:3).

The conversion of Cornelius and his acceptance in the church is clearly a major event in Acts – all of chapter 10, and repeated in chapter 11. At this point, the church is well established in Jerusalem, and spreading to the boundaries of Judea. Now, an important issue is to be faced: can a Gentile become a Christian without first becoming a Jew? The way in which God brought the first uncircumcised Gentile into the church gives a clear answer to this question: God requires nothing of us, except faith in Jesus.

It is important to understand that Cornelius, though a generous, prayerful, God-fearing man, is not yet converted. If he was, there would be no need for him to send for Peter so that he might hear the gospel.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God's plan and intention from the very beginning was to save a people from all backgrounds all over the world. This was his promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3), and this was what he spoke of through the prophets (Isaiah 11:10, 42:1, 6). It is a great proof of the truth of the Bible that thousands of years later we can easily see that God's word has come to pass.
- Being well-intentioned, kind, generous, prayerful and God-fearing are not the same as being converted and saved. To be saved we must hear of and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one with power to save us.

Applying

- Am I converted, or am I still a stranger to Jesus Christ?
- Do you understand the big “plan” of the Bible? To do so will bring you tremendous encouragement and help in reading it and benefiting from it.

Day 4 : Acts 10:9-16 – Peter's Vision

Prayerfully read: Deuteronomy 14

Understanding

Luke now tells us what was happening to Peter in the time before the visitors from Joppa arrived. At about mid-day (v9), he went onto his house-top to pray, and there fell into a trance.

In the trance, he saw the same vision three times (v16). In the vision, all kinds of animals were set before him, and a voice told him to “kill and eat”. Peter protested that he had never eaten a ceremonially unclean animal (those animals forbidden to Jews by the law of Moses); and the voice each time corrected him, telling him that he ought not to call a thing common when God had cleansed it.

On the face of it, the vision was just telling Peter that no food was unclean any longer. But it is clear that there was a deeper meaning. Peter was being shown that *all* distinctions between Jews and Gentiles were being done away with. There would be no reason for him not to eat with the Gentiles who were now approaching his door (v17); and there would be no reason for him to refuse admission to the church for uncircumcised Cornelius (v44-48).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Under the Old Covenant, God intended to keep his people as a visibly distinct and separated people. For this purpose, many laws were given to them to keep up this separation, and to remind them continually of their specialness. However, this was not because God intended this to be a permanent state of affairs. The Jews were to be kept pure in preparation for the time when the Christ would come – that he might come amongst a God-fearing and prepared people. They were to be kept pure that their strict separation might be a permanently-useful illustration to Christians of the lives of separation from sin, ungodliness and worldliness that we ought to live. True holiness does not consist in not eating certain foods or not wearing certain clothes – but in living a life of love and purity to God's glory.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- There is a careful balance a Christian needs to keep. On the one hand, he must understand that holiness is not a matter of external rules, but of loving God's law from the heart. On the other hand, he must understand that he must keep a very strict and careful watch over that heart. How are you doing in different areas of your life? How is your heart?