



## Day 5: One Lord of All

**Bible Passage:** Acts 10:24-43

**Central Bible Truth:** The one true God is the Lord of all who leads us to value all people as He does.

**Teaching Aim:** To lead adults to follow God and be impartial in their treatment of all people

Jack remarked to his wife as they sat in an airport waiting to board a flight, "Look at all the different types of people." He casually watched people who walked through the concourse. "Folks come in different sizes, colors, and styles," he added. "But one thing about people is the same. God loves them all." Jack learned that truth from Scripture. Our God is Lord of all, including all people. He values us all. This session can help adults observe how God treats people and learn the importance of their being impartial toward all people.

### Worship Only God *(Acts 10:24-26)*

God worked miraculously to bring together an unlikely pair of men—Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10:1-23). Cornelius was a God-fearing Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea. He received a vision in which an angel reported that God had noticed Cornelius' prayer life and gifts to the poor. The angel ordered Cornelius to send for Peter at Joppa. Cornelius dispatched three men to carry out this command.

At the same time these representatives traveled to Joppa, Peter fell into a trance. Three times he saw a large sheet that contained a mixture of animals, reptiles, and birds. Each time a voice ordered Peter to kill and eat. He argued with the voice, adamantly refusing to eat anything impure or unclean. The voice insisted God could make anything clean. As Peter grappled with the meaning of the vision, the men from Cornelius arrived and asked Peter to come with them. The next day they all set out for Caesarea.

Peter took with him six friends (11:12), perhaps to have some potential witnesses on his behalf. Peter entered Gentile territory with some uncertainty. If anyone accused Peter of inappropriate activity, the six could provide supportive testimony.

The paths of Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter, a Jew, probably never would have crossed without divine intervention. God used their meeting to help open the door to a new era in the extension of the gospel. As a God-fearer (10:2)—though not yet a full convert to Judaism—Cornelius demonstrated a spiritual sensitivity to God. From his previous vision the centurion knew God planned a special outcome from Peter's visit. He gathered relatives and close friends, and they were open and ready for whatever God had in mind.

Cornelius greeted Peter in an unexpected way. The centurion fell at Peter's feet and worshiped him. Gentiles might fall down to worship a divine being or to show respect for another person. But for Cornelius, a Roman centurion, to bow down to an ordinary Jew like Peter seems out of the ordinary.

Peter responded quickly, urging Cornelius to stand. Peter had been taught a person bowed down in reverence only to God. The Jews considered worship of a human to be blasphemy. Peter insisted he was simply a man like Cornelius. Peter claimed no divine authority for himself. Instead he pointed Cornelius to the one true God.

## Follow as God Leads *(Acts 10:27-33)*

After this initial exchange, Cornelius and Peter moved to the room where a large gathering of people waited. Peter's first remarks included a disclaimer. Jews saw such a meeting in a Gentile home as against their law. Here law refers to interpretations of the Old Testament law made by various rabbis. These detailed regulations did not specifically forbid Jews from being in a Gentile household. But they did warn against eating meat previously sacrificed to idols or other food prepared in an unclean way. Acceptance of hospitality from a Gentile thus set the stage for contact with something unclean.

Why did Peter begin with this statement? Possibly he was preparing for the rest of the conversation. Or maybe the Jewish men who accompanied Peter needed some explanation. At any rate, Peter's emphasis on the division between Jews and Gentiles helped everyone there know this was a unique encounter. God had brought these people together.

Peter referred to the lesson he learned in his vision at Joppa. No person is impure in God's eyes. God accepts and loves all people regardless of their racial heritage. Even though Jewish regulations disallowed this meeting, God approved. Peter chose to follow God's perspective. Peter broke an old teaching, but he complied with the new word he heard from God. One group of people may judge others to be second class. God, however, makes no such distinctions. Peter came to Caesarea without objection because God led him there. God valued these people, and Peter did also.

The specific purpose of his trip to Caesarea eluded Peter. He knew God wanted him there. Peter also knew God accepted association with the Gentiles. But what did God want Peter to do? When Peter asked about this, Cornelius explained with details about his vision. A man in shining clothes appeared. (Acts 10:3 identified him as an angel of God.) The angel conveyed a message of God's approval of Cornelius. The order for Cornelius to send for Peter at Joppa required faith. Cornelius did not know Peter and didn't know how Peter could help him.

The angel informed Cornelius to send for Peter at the home of Simon the tanner. Cornelius noted that when he summoned Peter, the apostle came. The centurion added that he had done the right thing to come. This statement amounted to a thank you. Since God facilitated this meeting, Cornelius and Peter acknowledged that they were in God's presence. They met for a divine appointment. Cornelius and his assemblage waited to hear everything God had commanded Peter to tell them. What an open, eager audience! Then Peter comprehended his purpose—to preach the gospel to people waiting to hear it. Peter then knew that even Gentiles needed and could respond to the message of salvation.

## **Accept God's Value of Other People** *(Acts 10:34-35)*

Peter then spoke to Cornelius and the others present. He told them that he now understood that God does not show favoritism. Favoritism literally meant “to lift the face.” When you lift your face, you look at others and acknowledge them. If you look away, you ignore them. By accepting some people and rejecting others, you show favoritism. God plays no favorites. He judges people impartially, not on face value. He accepts no person to the exclusion of another. God regards all people equally.

This statement of non-favoritism represented a radical view for a Jew such as Peter. As God's chosen people, Jews thought they were more important to God than anyone else. This engendered their intolerant attitude toward Gentiles. The Jews erroneously believed on the basis of God's covenant that they were better than other people.

Peter realized he had learned a new truth. God makes no distinctions among folks based on race, gender, age, finances, or any other human test of a person's worth. God accepts people from every nation.

God views people by a different standard than one set by humans. What standard does God use? He accepts anyone who fears him and does what is right. People who revere God are welcomed into a personal relationship with Him. How can an individual do what is right? This does not imply salvation comes by doing good. Instead, Peter referred to the right relationship that arises when a person acknowledges sin and calls on God through Christ. We cannot be right with God on the basis of one or even many good deeds. Peter pointed to a way of life that stems from dependence on Christ. This changed life manifests itself as we treat people with the same kind of impartiality God practices.

## Share God's Message *(Acts 10:36-43)*

Peter launched into His message. It differs from some of Peter's other sermons in Acts. This sermon traces the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. It avoids an emphasis on the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. Since Jesus was not a Gentile, these Gentiles did not reject Him in the same manner as His own people had done. Additionally, those in Cornelius' house were less familiar with Jesus' earthly ministry. So Peter accentuated that aspect of the gospel.

As one who feared God, Cornelius may have known some of the facts Peter presented about Jesus. Originally the gospel message came to the people of Israel. The purpose of the message was to tell the good news of peace through Jesus. Peace carries the idea of a sense of harmony with God and the positive blessing that results from it. This peace comes through salvation in Jesus Christ. So even though Cornelius was a good man who feared God, he still needed Jesus.

Peter identified this Jesus as being "Lord of all." This terminology carries the idea of "over all." In this sense Jesus exerted authority as Lord of all. This statement reiterated the truth that God reigns over all people. He excludes none.

Peter called attention to the happenings around Judea. This geographical term referred to the southern part of the promised land or the land of the Jews in general. Jesus' ministry happened in Judea. It had begun in Galilee with His baptism, which signified the start-up of His public ministry. God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power. Peter accentuated the truth that God authorized Jesus' ministry and was at work in it.

Peter made an important point about the relationship of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit here, mentioning all three in verse 38. We speak of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means God is One but is known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God acts in distinctive ways, but He remains one God.

Peter summarized Jesus' ministry saying that He went about doing good. Jesus had the power to touch people in positive ways. Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, calmed the storms, and more. He performed compassionate acts that revealed Him to be God in human form. Specifically, Jesus healed those who were under the devil's control. These acts demonstrated the presence of God in Jesus' life and His authority over evil. Jesus opposed evil. As God, Jesus acted to reveal God's rule over evil forces.

Peter moved to the crux of his message. The people who killed Jesus did it by hanging Him on a cross. All the good things Jesus did had afforded Him no protection from abusive treatment. Remember, Peter was presenting this information to a Roman soldier. Possibly as a servant of the state Cornelius had carried out a crucifixion order. He knew the cruelty of a Roman cross. Through Jesus' death on this instrument, Peter would offer Cornelius a new kind of life.

Peter then presented the best news of all. Though humans had killed Jesus, God negated their action. He raised Jesus from the dead three days later. The resurrection is the highlight of the Christian faith. It sets Christianity apart from other religions.

Many were witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Although everyone did not see Him, selected individuals encountered Him after His resurrection. Why did Jesus appear to only a few? He remained on earth only a short time. No opportunity existed for every person to see Him. Instead, Jesus appeared to those who personally had known Him before. They provided a credible witness to Jesus' resurrection. God chose them especially for this purpose. For Cornelius, eyewitness evidence might have carried some weight since resurrection was an alien idea to the Romans. Peter then added a significant detail—Jesus ate and drank with these witnesses (Luke 24:42-43). This verified He was alive. The resurrected Jesus was a real, living person.

Jesus left His disciples with work to do. He ordered them "to preach to the people." Remember that preach means "to announce, herald." The disciples were to proclaim Jesus as the One appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. Every one of us ultimately will answer to God for the sin in our lives. Peter provided this information to lead Cornelius and his group to a decision. Would they live with Christ or die without Him?

As a God-fearer, Cornelius probably knew the Old Testament. Peter noted the additional testimony of the

prophets to the Messiah. They declared the invitation of God is to all—regardless of their race. God forgives those who believe in Jesus. He forgives them through the name of Jesus. Name symbolized Jesus' saving work in His death and resurrection.

Peter learned to value all people. He proved it as he shared God's saving message with the Gentiles. We can always identify our differences with other people. We show that we value people as God does when, regardless of differences, we tell them about what Jesus can do to forgive them and provide eternal life.

# Day 5: Discussion Points

1. Cornelius was obedient to the message he received from God in a vision. What preparations for Peter's visit showed that Cornelius was expecting something special? How often do we expect great outcomes from divine appointments?
2. What did Peter learn from his vision at Joppa?
3. What old teaching did Peter "break" to follow the new word he heard from God?
4. At first Peter did not know the purpose of his trip to Caesarea. After he arrived at the home of Cornelius, what did Peter discern his purpose to be?
5. Why was the view that God does not show favoritism a radical one for Jews?
6. For God to accept a person "who does right" does not refer to salvation by doing good works. What does it mean?
7. During His ministry, in what positive ways did Jesus oppose evil and show His authority over it?
8. What sets Christianity apart from other religions? Why was it important for people who knew Jesus to see Him and to eat with Him following His resurrection?
9. God desires that Christians be impartial in their treatment of all people. In what ways can you demonstrate that you value all people as God does?
10. What specific things do you personally and your church congregation do to spread God's Word to all people despite their differences?

# Day 5: Case Study

## Two-Way Color Blindness

Valerie thought she was finally getting her life back together as a single mom. Her data entry job didn't pay a lot, but being able to support herself and her children had boosted Valerie's sense of self-worth. Being a single mom in her mid-twenties, trying to juggle work and home, finding affordable child care for two young children, and making ends meet financially are not easy tasks.

After several months, Valerie felt as if she had her life, including her finances, under control. However, life suddenly became more challenging. Two-year-old Seth experienced an upper respiratory infection with complications that required a three-day hospital stay and a two-week recovery at home. Medical expenses began to overwhelm Valerie. And because she had to miss so many days to care for Seth, she lost her job.

With no family living nearby, Valerie didn't know where to turn for help until a neighbor told her about a local agency that was created to help people with just such needs as hers. Valerie swallowed her pride, went to the office, and asked to speak with a counselor. Robert Moore greeted her with a warm smile. Valerie felt herself begin to relax. She explained her situation and said, "I need food and a job." In her uncertainty, she was comforted as the counselor began to guide her through the application process.

Robert Moore sent Valerie home with two bags of groceries from the agency's food pantry. But Valerie left with more than food. The counselor asked about her job experience. Two days later when Valerie returned, Robert gave her names of four companies with job openings that matched her skills.

In her excitement about the possibility of a new job, Valerie said, "God must be watching out for me. I guess He knows how badly I need a job."

Her counselor was also a part-time pastor of a Baptist church, and he assured her that indeed God does know what she needs. He encouraged her to find a church and to become involved in its ministries. And he invited her to his church nearby.

The next Sunday, Valerie was a bit nervous when she walked to Rev. Moore's church for the first time. Because Rev. Moore was African-American, Valerie expected a large number of the congregation to be African American as well and wondered if the people would accept her. As she stepped inside and looked around, she realized that she and her children were the only white persons present. But members greeted her and soon helped her feel welcome and comfortable. The worship service fed her heart. She realized it had been a long time since she had thought seriously about God. She began to thank God and to praise Him through the songs, prayers, and sermon.

Valerie's children were fidgety at times during the service. After all, they were not used to being in church. Valerie was relieved when no one commented afterward about her children's behavior. Instead, everyone was loving and kind and invited Valerie and her children to come back again.

Valerie soon found a job and made arrangements to pay a small amount each month on the medical bills. What surprised her even more was that she became a regular attendee at Rev. Moore's church. Both she and her children began to form strong friendships with other church members. As Valerie became acquainted with several of the younger women, she sensed they had a deep joy and contentment that did not depend on their circumstances. She watched them closely to see if their joy was real—if it really lasted through difficult events in their daily lives.

After several months, Valerie understood the reason she was experiencing the emptiness in her life—sin was separating her from God. She decided she wanted a personal relationship with Jesus. After talking with Rev. Moore, Valerie trusted Jesus as her Savior and her Lord. The next Sunday she presented herself to the church as a new Christian, asking to be baptized and to become a member of the church.

That afternoon, Valerie reflected on the miracle in her life—that she had become a follower of Jesus. She thought to herself, The first time I walked into my church, I was so aware of our different colors of skin. Now I don't even notice it. The church people are my extended family—my brothers and sisters in Christ. God has shown me that color blindness needs to be two-way. Jesus really is the Lord of all.