

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 10:34-48 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 10:34-48 ESV

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." 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.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Peter preaches the gospel to Gentiles (10:34-43)**
 - a. God impartially judges not just Jews but every nation (10:34-35)
 - b. God sent His word to Israel through the messianic ministry of Jesus (10:36-39a)
 - c. God raised Jesus from the dead after Israel killed him (10:39b-40)
 - d. God chose the apostles to bear witness of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, judgment, and salvation (10:41-43)
- II. **Jesus baptizes the Gentiles in the Holy Spirit (10:44-46)**
 - a. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles while Peter preaches (10:44)
 - b. The Jewish believers are shocked by the evidence of the Spirit's outpouring—tongues and praise (10:44-45)
- III. **Peter's team baptizes the Gentiles in water (10:47-48)**
 - a. Peter commands that they are baptized promptly (10:47-48a)
 - b. Peter sticks around to disciple them (10:48b)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

After breaking down Peter's cultural biases, God finally brings His very Jewish apostle to the home of a very Gentile centurion. Luke has been working toward this moment ever since quoting Jesus in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In Acts 2, Jesus begins fulfilling this promise, baptizing the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8, Jesus baptizes the Samaritans in the Holy Spirit. Now, at last, He baptizes Gentiles in the Spirit. This is a Gentile Pentecost.

Cornelius and his Gentile household welcome Peter, having been told by an angel that "he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (11:14). Despite their religiosity, before this moment, they do not know Jesus. They knew about Jesus (10:37a), but they lacked knowledge of His resurrection (10:39-41), His judgment (10:42), and His salvation (10:43). Lacking these essential elements, they had not yet

trusted in Christ to receive forgiveness. The story of Cornelius reminds us that no amount of religious devotion can save. We need the gospel.

While no amount of religious devotion can save, God observes the devotion of those who don't know Him. The opening verses speak of God's favorable evaluation of Gentile religiosity. This does not mean that non-Christian religious people are saved, for Cornelius must hear and respond to Peter's message (11:14, 18). Instead—what it means for Cornelius—is that God has observed his groping in the dark for truth and responded by mercifully sending him a messenger of truth. This should encourage us that He will do the same today. God hears the prayers of pagans; He sees the alms they give; He watches them worship. I believe this is why so many Muslims are coming to Christ through dreams (I have read anywhere from 25-40% of them). Even when they receive a dream or vision, like Cornelius, they need a human messenger to explain it. But I believe one reason for this phenomenon is that God sees them groping for truth and throws them a lifeline. When we struggle to think about those growing up in gospel-dry countries, we should take heart. God's heart is bigger than ours. He knows they need the gospel. He sends messengers to sincere seekers.

When Cornelius and his family receive the gospel, they simultaneously receive the Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion; it is our initiation into discipleship and incorporation into the body of Christ (see below). Luke closely links baptism in the Spirit with baptism in water because the latter signifies the former. Water baptism provides a picture of what happens by the Spirit at conversion. We are immersed in the Spirit by Jesus, who does the baptizing (cf. Acts 1:5). The baptism in the Spirit unites us with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) so that we can be empowered with gifts that edify the church (12:14-31) and with boldness to testify before a spiritually lost world (Acts 1:8; cf. 4:31).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

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."

—"Truly I understand": the NASB says, "I most certainly understand now"—with "now" italicized since it is not in the original text. Other versions read, "I now realize" (NIV), "Now I truly understand" (CSB), and "I now truly understand" (NET). Others, like the ESV, do not include "now" (NKJV, NLT). Since the word is not present in the text, it seems that translators are trying to make sense of why Peter says "Truly." A sensible explanation is that Peter has recently ("now") come to this conclusion since the context portrays his recent epiphany (10:28).

—Peter likely knew already that "God shows no partiality," for the Old Testament frequently emphasizes this divine truth (Deut. 10:17: *"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe."*). However, the sentence continues, "but in every nation.... [etc.]." Therefore, Peter is explaining that God's impartiality extends beyond Israel to all nations. This would have undoubtedly been new for Peter. Israel knew of God's impartiality—toward Israel. But the nation assumed He was partial toward them. In their minds, God elected Israel as a way of playing favorites. Divine election is not about favoritism, however. The patriarchs (and matriarchs) got in big trouble for that, with Isaac preferring Esau, Rebekah preferring Jacob, and Jacob preferring Joseph. Favoritism is showing partiality, and God condemns it in the first book of the Bible—the very book where He elects Abraham's descendants. God's election is not about favoritism but divine favor. God favored Israel, not because of something inherently better (the opposite is often emphasized) but to ultimately show favor toward all nations. He blessed Israel not because she was the best but so that she might extend His favor toward all.

—God's choice of Abraham came in the aftermath of three strikes for humanity. First in the garden, then in the flood, and finally at Babel, God's blessing on mankind ended in a curse. Right after Babel, God plucked Abraham from the wreckage to begin anew. Instead of blessing all humanity, God chose Abraham and his descendants, through whom He would bless all humanity. Of course, Israel failed to bless the nations. But one of her descendants prevailed: Jesus.

—"in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him":

- Some would argue that this means people can be saved if they are sincere in their religion, even if they don't yet know Christ. However, we know Cornelius was not saved until after receiving the gospel for the following reasons:
 - God would have never sent Peter to proclaim the good news if Cornelius was already saved without it. As Paul would later say, "If righteousness could be gained by the law (being a good person), Christ died for nothing." Cornelius, like all of us, needed atonement for sin, which leads to the next point.
 - Peter says that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). This comes right after Peter proclaims judgment (10:42). Peter stated these facts because judgment rested on the head of Cornelius and his household despite the sincerity of their uninformed religion (cf. 10:2, 25-26). The only people who make it to heaven are forgiven people. We can only be forgiven if we trust in Jesus, whom Cornelius did not yet know.
 - Cornelius and his family are baptized in water and the Spirit—marks of conversion—upon believing in Peter's words. If Peter thought they were already saved, he could have skipped the salvation message and baptized them.
 - The angel told Cornelius that he must send for Peter, who "will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (11:14). Before Peter came, they were not saved; after Peter preached, they were saved.
 - After hearing of the Cornelius episode, the apostles conclude that "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (11:18). Before this moment they had not yet repented or found life in Jesus. They were dead in their sins, unforgiven, and condemned.
- Therefore, Peter must not suggest by these words that Cornelius is already saved. He must mean something different. What does he mean? A hint arises in 10:2, where we learn that Cornelius "*a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.*" The angel affirms this as a reason for the gospel coming to Cornelius in 10:4: "*Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.*"
 - Schreiner: This is "OT sacrificial language and means God has heard and taken note of his good works and requests (Lev. 2:2; Ps. 66:19-20; Phil. 4:18) and also juxtaposes Cornelius with the Israelites' cry in Egyptian slavery (Ex. 2:23)."
 - Schreiner (quoting Keener): "The alms of this Gentile were accepted by God in lieu of the sacrifices Jews offered at the temple. 'In other words, God had acted to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile by treating the prayers and alms of a Gentile as equivalent of the sacrifice of a Jew.'"
 - The "acceptable" nature of Cornelius's prayers and sacrifices does not mean that he was saved before Peter preached the gospel to him. It means that God observed his earnest seeking and sent him a witness. Like heartfelt Jewish sacrifices sent a "pleasing aroma" into the "nostrils" of Yahweh (they pleased God), Cornelius's religious sincerity pleased God. To be clear, they did not please God in the sense that they atoned for his sin; instead, they pleased God in the sense that He prefers earnest seeking and generous giving—even from pagans—over self-seeking Hedonism. God accepts the devotion of Cornelius not by forgiving his unrepentant sin but by mercifully stooping to send him the gospel.
- This story should both break our hearts and inspire them.
 - It should break our hearts because no amount of religious devotion can save without reception of the gospel. The myriads of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus who eclipse many Christians with their religious devotion cannot be saved by it. Like the pagan sailors who prayed to their gods while Jonah rebelled, many pagans put us Christians to shame. Nevertheless, for all their sacrifices, their prayers, their generosity, their kindness, their sincerity, and their worship, they face a Christless eternity if nobody shares the good news with them. God sent Peter to Cornelius in part to cement this message: without the good news, we cannot enjoy the good news. We must receive Jesus to enjoy forgiveness. Millions upon millions have still never heard—and this should break our hearts.

- A creeping trend among evangelicals has been so-called “hopeful universalism.” These people claim ignorance about what happens to those outside of Christ, but they hope God will be merciful and allow everyone into heaven. For more reasons than I can explain here, universalism is heresy. Hopeful universalism is hoping heresy is true.
- Others believe that God will judge people who openly reject the gospel but that He will save those who never heard. However, Acts 10-11 emphasizes the necessity of hearing the good news. Paul elaborates on this point with a clarion call in Romans 10:11-15: *“For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”*
- Personally, I struggle with this because of the sheer numbers. Operation World suggests that 24-27% of earth’s population has not heard the gospel. That’s about 2 billion people.
- A few mitigating factors help us think about this:
 - Hell is not the same for Adolf Hitler and a kind Buddhist. Hell will be bad for everyone, but degrees of punishment vary (Matt. 11:22, 24; Luke 12:47-48)
 - Because God is perfectly just, nobody will go to hell with a legitimate claim of unfair treatment. The Scripture says that every mouth will be silenced.
 - Adam sinned in the garden as humanity’s representative. When “sin entered the world through one man... all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). When Adam sinned, we all sinned, for we were “in Adam” by birth before we were ever “in Christ” by second birth. Who of us can claim that Adam inaccurately represented us? Have we not validated his decision with our own sins? Adam’s choice to rebel against God’s lone commandment in a garden paradise represented precisely what we all would have done. When we say it’s not fair for God to send someone to hell who hasn’t heard the good news, we must ask why it is unfair. Our natural response is, “Because they haven’t had a chance to receive or reject the gospel.” But they have. In Adam, they—we—sinned. We all rejected the tree of life for the tree that brought death, and we have all validated that decision with continued sin. To argue that one must be presented the gospel for hell to be fair assumes that Adam did not represent them accurately. It assumes they would have done better. It assumes Adam was not the head of humanity but just another dude. But Adam was the head of humanity. He did represent us accurately. In him, we did have a clear choice—and we made the wrong one.
 - To argue that one must be presented the gospel for hell to be fair also assumes that God’s justice demands that we hear the gospel. However, God’s justice neither demands the gospel nor that we hear it. Mercy drove Jesus to the Cross, and mercy sends the gospel to the nations. Mercy is God’s free choice. To say otherwise is to turn the gospel into a divine obligation, not a free act of love. God is obligated to no one. We are obligated to Him.
 - Romans 1 teaches that everyone has sufficient evidence to believe God exists and worship Him. Those that don’t are handed over to their hardened heart. In contrast, I believe that if someone responds appropriately—like Cornelius—God will respond to them. This leads to the “inspiring” point of the story.

- This story should inspire us because it shows the way God responds to the sincere devotion of the spiritually ignorant by sending them messengers. If someone has never heard of Jesus yet earnestly seeks to worship God and do good, I believe God will send that person a messenger. Isaiah 46:11 is a verse I memorized long ago, which I believe speaks to this: *"From the east, I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do"* (NIV).
- Before Christ, Israel received most of the gospel light. God testified of His goodness through creation (Ps. 19:1-2; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:18ff) and through Israel (Namaan, Rahab, Ruth, Sheba, the Ninevites, etc.), but after Christ, everything changed. Jesus took possession of the nations as the God-appointed King, and He steers His messengers out to proclaim Him.

36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

—Having just spoken of God's relationship to the world, Peter shifts toward His special relationship with Israel. The "word that he sent to Israel" is the "good news of peace through Jesus Christ" who is "Lord of all."

—Michael Bird: "Nero did not throw Christians to the lions because they confessed that 'Jesus is Lord of my heart.' It was rather because they confessed that 'Jesus is Lord of all,' meaning that Jesus was Lord even over the realm Caesar claimed as his domain of absolute authority."

—In a sense, Israel possessed the gospel even before Jesus came (Heb. 4:2, 6), but it came only in shadows. In Jesus, the light of the world has shone brightly, beginning with the descendants of Abraham. God "sent" His word to Israel in Jesus.

—Both the specific (Jewish) and universal (Gentile) aspects of the gospel are on display. The gospel came to Israel through Jesus, who hailed from Israel and ministered there (vv. 37-38). The message did not stop there, however, for the "Christ"—the Davidic king—reigns "over all."

—We don't always have time for a robust gospel presentation. Sometimes, we only have thirty seconds on an elevator or at the conclusion of an Uber ride. However, if given the opportunity, it is crucial that we can convey the gospel from the whole Bible, not just Romans. Paul taught the Old-Testament-ignorant Gentiles of Corinth that the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection was "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). In other words, Paul preached Jesus as the mankind-saving, promise-fulfilling, Messianic Lord *from the Old Testament*.

—McKnight: "One reason why so many Christians today don't know the Old Testament is because their 'gospel' doesn't even need it!"

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.

—"you yourselves know what happened...": Cornelius knew about Jesus. His household heard of His reputation for healing and casting out demons. However, verses 40-41 show how they lacked knowledge of the resurrection. Only the carefully selected "witnesses" observed this. Like courtroom witnesses, God commissioned them to share the story of their experience.

—By itself, knowing facts about Jesus does not save anyone. First, we must have the facts straight. We must believe He lived, died, and rose from the dead. Second, we must place our faith in Him and repent of sins (cf. 11:18).

—The apostles in Acts never just jumped to Christ's substitutionary atonement—His payment for sin—and avoided the rest of the Jesus story. They told the story of the Bible and how the gospel fits into that, including the whole Jesus story but emphasizing His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand as King and Lord of all.

—Peter's testimony emphasizes the Jewish roots of Jesus. The gospel is for Gentiles, but Jesus was a Jew who served Israel first. This followed the pattern laid out in God's covenant with Abraham, which Jesus fulfilled. God would bless Israel to bless nations.

—"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit":

- Jesus lived in a real place called Nazareth. He did not come as a divine being with a thin veneer of human skin. He was not 99% God and 1% human but fully God and man.
- God anointed Jesus with the Spirit at baptism, after which His ministry of miracles and preaching began.
- Kings in Israel were called “the Lord’s anointed” because God anointed/empowered them by the Spirit to govern. Jesus is the Christ—the “anointed one”—and God anointed/empowered Him as King of Israel and the world. But how did Jesus exert His kingship? By “doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” Earthly tyrants served themselves, but Jesus served others. He served not just with love, either, but power. He kicked out the tyrant behind every earthly tyrant—the devil—performing exorcisms and healings, which displayed His reign over Satan and sickness.
- Having already stated that Jesus is “Lord of all,” Peter emphasizes Jesus’ kingship.
- Schreiner: “As Jesus’s ministry began with baptism and the reception of the Spirit, so too will Peter’s Gentile hearers shortly receive the Spirit and be baptized (10:44, 48).
- Stott (quoting Stanton): “some kind of an account of the life and character of Jesus formed an integral part of the early church’s preaching, especially its initial evangelism.”

—“oppressed by the devil”: Stott, quoting Lenski: this could be rendered “tyrannized” by the devil. Thayer’s Lexicon: “to exercise harsh control over one, to use one’s power against one.” Jesus is the King of Kings, but the devil is a behind-the-scenes tyrant who uses his power to oppress. When King Jesus manifests His reign, the devil’s tyranny ceases. As Jesus says in Matthew 12:28, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” In other words, Jesus exerts God’s reign over demons by the power of the Spirit, expressed in exorcism.

—“for God was with him”: Jesus is God in the flesh, but He performed His miracles in tandem with “the Holy Spirit” and “God”—the Father. Everything God does, He does in unity with the Trinity. Doctrinally, we label this, “Inseparable operations of the Trinity.” In all things, the Father, Son, and Spirit work as one. This does not mean they are all the same. The Father did not die for our sins, nor did the Spirit send the Father. But each Person of the Godhead operates in tandem, even if His work is appropriated on one specific Person.

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.

—“witnesses”: reminds us of Acts 1:8, where the Spirit empowers witnesses to bear testimony about what they have seen and heard. The word “witness” emphasizes the difference between Christianity and other religions. Other religions are philosophy. They promote a worldview and a pattern of behaviors that align with it. Christianity is a philosophy, but it is also history. Every history book ever recorded bases its timelines on witnesses. How do we really know there was a Civil War? Or a Boston Tea Party? Or a Protestant Reformation? Or a Julius Caesar? Because witnesses recorded these things. Christianity provides a philosophy—a way of thinking about life’s big questions—but unlike other religions, it is based not just on revelations given to some prophet or sage. It is based on witnesses. People who ate and drank with a formerly dead man told us stories. If we are going to base our philosophy on anything, it makes the most sense to base it on witnesses. History grounds our philosophy. Actual events anchor our heavenly gaze.

—This makes me think, for instance, about Mormonism. Joseph Smith founded the religion, claiming that God revealed it to him. There were no witnesses, of course, so we must take him at his word. Conveniently, one revelation he received pertained to polygamy. God told him he could have multiple wives. For some reason, his wife Emma did not love this “revelation.” But Joseph had the trump card: more revelation. In the Doctrine and Covenants (companion volume to the Book of Mormon, along with The Pearl of Great Price and the Bible), we read, “And I command mine handmaid, Emma Smith, to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else. But if she will not abide this commandment she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord...” (132:54). In other words, “Joseph gets a harem, but Emma has to shut up and deal with it—says the Lord.” This is the way of world religions: dude gets a revelation; everyone else must obey. Not so with Christianity. Yes, we have had prophets, and we have the Bible. But at a very real moment in history, we had

Jesus of Nazareth, who “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” and who was “put to death” at a fixed time and place, and whom God “raised” and “made him to appear” to “chosen... witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” When Christianity provides a philosophy—answers to life’s big questions and a lifestyle to complement it—it roots that philosophy in history. We don’t have to take Joseph Smith or Muhammed or Confucious or Oprah at their word. We can take God at His word because Jesus is the Word of God who became flesh and gave His flesh up for the world.

—“they put him to death, but God raised him up”:

- When speaking to Jews, Peter had said “you” crucified Him. Speaking to Gentiles, Peter says “they”—the Jews—crucified Him.
- The wording of this emphasizes God’s vindication of Jesus. Despite what “they” did, “God” was in no way hindered. Rather, He “raised” Jesus up in victory and vindication.

—Luke loves to focus on meals. Jesus ate with people throughout His earthly ministry. The early church ate together a lot. Jesus even ate with His apostles after the resurrection. Meals connote deep intimacy. Jesus wants a friendship with each of us. That’s what life is really about: friendship with Jesus and each other. Together, as friends on a mission, we extend those two friendships to the world.

—We sometimes ask, “What would Jesus do?” when considering ethical questions. But Jesus was more than an ethicist. He is our friend. What would Jesus do? He would sit down over a meal with His friends. If I want to be like Jesus, I will often share meals with His people. Sadly, our modern culture is too busy to live the Jesus life.

—The emphasis on eating and drinking with Him after He rose from the dead shows that this was not just a hallucination or a ghost. This was a formerly dead man, now alive, doing normal human things like eating and drinking.

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.”

—“he commanded us”: Jesus commanded His people to proclaim the gospel. Evangelism can’t be delegated to gifted evangelists. Evangelists will bear much fruit in this area, but we all bear the burden of proclaiming the good news to a lost and dying world.

—“preach... testify”:

- Preaching can be more doctrinal, but testifying is experiential. In this sermon, Peter teaches the doctrine of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, His future judgment, and the forgiveness He offers. But He connects this doctrine to His own experience of Christ.
- The word “testify” (Gk. *diamartyromaî*) contains the word for “witness” (Gk. *martyr*), so the two are connected. However, “testify” carries with it a connotation of solemnity. The NASB usually renders the word, “solemnly testify” and sometimes, “warn.”
- When we share the gospel, people should feel a certain heaviness about this decision. They should feel warned. The gospel is not an optional add-on for those who are naturally more spiritual. The gospel is the good news of Christ’s saving Lordship. Since Christ is “Lord of all” (10:36), He demands that His enemies surrender or die. Everyone who is not for Him is against Him (Luke 11:23). When Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount, He contrasts the narrow gate that leads to life with the wide path that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14); He contrasts true and false prophets (7:15-20); He contrasts true and false disciples (7:21-23); He contrasts the wise and the foolish (7:24-27). Jesus was intense. Preaching the gospel is intense. We are not offering people a formula for achieving their dreams. We are shattering their dreams of self-sufficiency, self-gratification, and self-aggrandizement (and a thousand other self-sins), bidding people to find the Christ-life by dying to self.
- I am reminded of the words of Jim Elliot: “*Father, make of me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.*”

—“that He is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead”:

- We can't preach the good news without preaching the bad news for unrepentant sinners. Christ is the judge.
- As Judge, Christ performs a divine function. He is God. However, He is distinct from the Father, who "appointed" Him to judge.
- "the living and the dead":
 - Judgment Day does not occur when we die but at a fixed moment, at the end of the age, when Christ returns. When unbelievers die, their spirit travels to Hades, which is much like a holding facility—a precursor to Hell—where they await trial (Luke 16:23). When believers die, our spirit immediately travels to paradise (Luke 16:22; 23:43), where we await resurrection and our eternal home on earth. Everyone who dies before the final judgment is in a temporary location: either Hades or heaven. The eternal home of the damned will be hell. The eternal home of the saved will be the new heavens and new earth—where heaven and earth become one. When Christ returns, Hades will give up the dead who are in it (Rev. 20:13), and unbelievers will be thrown in the lake of fire (20:15). When Christ returns, God's people will meet Jesus in the clouds, escorting Him back to earth as the King of God's new creation, cleansed of all evil.
 - Because Judgment Day is fixed, some folks will be dead when it occurs, and Jesus will return to judge them—sending them to eternal bliss or damnation.
 - Because Judgment Day is fixed, some folks will be alive when it occurs, and Jesus will return to judge them—sending them to eternal bliss or damnation.
 - Whether we are alive or dead when it happens, Jesus will judge the world.
 - Some verses about final judgment occurring at the end of the age (when Christ returns):
 - Matt. 13:40-43: Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.
 - Matt. 13:47-50: Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - Rev. 11:15-18: Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

—"to him, all the prophets bear witness": not just some of the prophets but all of them. The whole Old Testament testifies to Christ. Cornelius believed Judaism to be true. Peter informed him that Christ was not the inventor of a new religion but the fulfillment of an old one.

—"that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins in his name":

- Specifically, the prophets testified about a coming Messiah who would atone for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles. Peter began with God's universal impartiality. Then he centered his preaching on Israel's Jewish Messiah. Now he concludes by returning to Christ's universal judgment and offer of salvation to all who believe.
- Peter has preached about Jesus delivering people from the devil. Now he talks about Jesus delivering people from their sins.

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.

—These verses teach us about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe the baptism of the Spirit occurs sometime—often years—subsequent to conversion. They typically base this on the experience of Jews and Samaritans in Acts 2 and 8, who received the Spirit sometime after conversion. Other evangelicals (and some charismatics) view the baptism of the Spirit as simultaneous with conversion. They typically base this on Acts 10-11, where Cornelius and his family receive the Spirit—not after a long period of seeking or through the laying on of hands or even water baptism—but “while Peter was still saying these things.” In other words, they received the Spirit and believed the gospel at the same time. Defenders of this view will also point to 1 Corinthians 12:13, which says, “we were all baptized in one Spirit into one body.” In other words, the baptism of the Spirit joins us to the body of Christ at the moment of conversion, thus empowering us to serve Christ.

—I explored this issue in great detail on October 2, 2022 in the sermon and Study Guide titled “The Baptism vs. Filling of the Holy Spirit.”

—In short, I believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit is simultaneous with conversion. The examples of subsequence in Acts relate to Jews and Samaritans, both of whom lived in a salvation-historical “time warp,” if you will. The one hundred and twenty in the upper room received the Spirit after conversion because Spirit-baptism was not available until then (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Jhn 7:39; 16:13-14; etc.). The Samaritans in Acts 8 provide a “special case” (see Study Guide quoted above) which explains why Spirit-baptism was withheld until the apostles from Jerusalem laid hands on them.

—In contrast to the “special cases” of already-saved Jews in the upper room and recently-saved Samaritans, the Gentiles did not descend from Abraham and had no special history with Yahweh. When Jesus baptized Cornelius and his household in the Spirit at conversion, He presents this case as normative. This explains why Paul will later ask, “Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2)—as if that’s the normative expectation. It also coheres with Paul’s clear teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:13, as we’ve observed.

—If you experienced the Spirit powerfully some years after conversion, I affirm your experience! And I honestly wouldn’t split hairs about it, except perhaps in a Study Guide where the text forces me to! If you did have this experience, I personally wouldn’t call it the baptism of the Spirit but rather the filling of the Spirit, which is different. Again, see my Study Guide on October 2 of last year. Here is how I differentiated between the baptism and filling of the Spirit there:

- **Filling of the Holy Spirit:** the temporary, repeatable, empowerment of the Holy Spirit for testifying to Jesus.
- **Baptism of the Spirit:** The promise of the Father, by the work of the Son, to immerse new believers in the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of incorporating them into Christ’s body—the church.

—“for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God”:

- They knew Cornelius and his crew had been baptized in the Spirit because of the initial physical evidence. They spoke in tongues and praised God. Does this mean that every time someone is baptized in the Spirit they will speak in tongues? Here is how I answered that question in my Study Guide on the Baptism vs. Filling of the Holy Spirit on October 2, 2022:
 - Throughout Acts, we have many instances in which this is the case, but we also have cases in which people are baptized in the Spirit without mention of tongues.
 - It is possible that the three thousand converts (2:41) spoke in tongues and we were not told about it; it’s also possible that they never spoke in tongues. We cannot discern conclusively from Acts whether tongues is always “the initial physical evidence” of Spirit-baptism.
 - We can cross-reference, however, and reasonably conclude that not every believer is intended by God to speak in tongues:
 - [1Co 12:28-31 ESV] *28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping,*

*administering, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? **Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?** 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

- Paul's implied answer to each of these questions is 'no.' Not everyone will receive the gift of tongues. Since, however, the baptism of the Spirit is for every believer, we must conclude that tongues is not necessarily the initial physical evidence of being baptized in the Spirit.
- Some have suggested that 1 Corinthians 12 is talking about the public gift of tongues (which only some have), in contrast to a private gift of tongues (which everyone can have). But Paul uses the same word to describe tongues in every context, with no apparent distinction.
- It should be noted that all the spiritual gifts can be practiced by anyone, on any occasion. All can encourage, but some have the spiritual gift of encouraging others; all can give money, but some have the spiritual gift of giving; all (Christians) have faith, but some have the gift of faith. Likewise, all can speak in tongues on any occasion, but those gifted in tongues can do so regularly, like the Apostle Paul ("I'm glad I speak in tongues more than all of you!")
- Practically, if you really want the gift of tongues, you should pray for it. We can have just about anything we're willing to labor in prayer for.
- At the same time, you should not feel discouraged if you have prayed many times for tongues and never received it.

—Schreiner: "While Peter was speaking the Holy Spirit 'came down' and was 'poured out' on all who heard the message. The two verbs link this event to the 'pouring out' at Pentecost (2:17, 33) and the 'falling' of the Spirit upon the Samaritans (8:16). Now Gentiles also have a place in God's people."

—Schreiner: "it almost seems as if the Spirit interrupts Peter's speech. God takes charge of the situation to prove his point; Gentiles are welcomed."

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.

—As is typical in Acts, the first step of obedience after coming to faith is baptism. Baptism in water is a sacrament of conversion.

—Baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit closely relate both in timing (at conversion) and terminology (both use the word "baptism"). This should cause us to inquire about the relationship between these two baptisms.

—Baptism in water and in the Spirit point to our incorporation into Christ's new temple—His church.

- BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT INCORPORATES US INTO THE CHURCH. When Jesus baptizes the 120 in the Spirit on Pentecost, each of the four signs—wind in the house (2:2), fiery tongues (2:3), Spirit-filled believers (2:4), new languages (2:4)—signifies the formation of God's new temple, which is the church. (See sermon on 10/9/22.) Furthermore, Paul explains baptism in the Spirit as the act by which Jesus unites us to His body (which occurs at conversion): "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).
- BAPTISM IN WATER SIGNIFIES OUR INCORPORATION INTO THE CHURCH. In the book of Acts, every story of water baptism closely relates to Spirit baptism. Since Spirit-baptism incorporates us into the church, water baptism points to this reality. Acts 2 confirms this. Consider the flow of Acts 2:41 ("those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls") into 2:42 ("And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"). Baptized people are "added" to the church, where they devote themselves to Jesus and each other. Luke thus leverages this prototype in Jerusalem to teach us how baptism in water signifies incorporation into the church.
- We should not receive water baptism if we plan to avoid joining a local church. This would violate the meaning of baptism.
- Schreiner: "The Gentiles need to be ritually welcomed into the church."

—Stott: "How could the sign be denied to those who had already received the reality to which it pointed? Chrysostom developed this logic. By giving the Spirit to Cornelius and his household before their baptism, God gave Peter an *apologia megale* (a mighty reason or justification) for giving them water-baptism. Yet in a sense their baptism 'was completed already', for God had done it. Peter was clear that 'in no one point was he the author, but in every point God.' It was as if Peter said: 'God baptized them, not I.'"