

“OUTREACH TO THE GENTILES CONTINUES”  
Zechariah 2:10-13, I Peter 1:3-9, Acts 10:23b-48  
October 5 & 6, 2025

As we have worked our way through the book of Acts, we’ve seen some amazing things that took place in order for the new church to begin. A small group of followers of Jesus became bold and courageous to the point of convincing many people that Jesus is the promised Messiah of God and the Savior of the world. They backed up these statements with great signs and wonders, doing healings, making people brand new, giving insight to the ignorant, and even raising the dead. Though they had endured horrendous persecution, great things happened in order to continue to grow the church and help others come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

But they were not able to do this all on their own, by their own power or their own wisdom. These people were empowered by a much greater source, a much higher power - the Holy Spirit of God. They are the living embodiment of Zechariah 2:10-13 that we heard earlier; *“Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. ‘Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become My people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent Me to you’* (Zech. 2:10-11).

The apostles and the other followers of Jesus had stilled themselves before the Lord in much prayer, and they were confident that God had *“roused Himself from His holy dwelling”* (Zech. 2:13). God had left His heavenly realm to abide here on the earth as one of us, so that all who put their trust and faith in Him might find new and eternal life.

The followers of Jesus had learned who Jesus is, by watching Him, listening to Him, eating with Him, and traveling with Him. They followed Him so that they could know all that He had come to the earth to do for all people as God’s promised Messiah. They continued to

pray more and more and had given themselves to Jesus as His servants, and Jesus gave them the power they needed to finish His work of salvation for the world through the Holy Spirit so that all people could hear and believe that Jesus is the Lord of all.

These men stepped out in faith to keep working for Jesus, regardless of what they faced. They listened to the Holy Spirit so that they could reach the people of Israel with the message of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

Last week we heard about how God's Holy Spirit directed Peter to look beyond just his own people, to begin reaching out with the message of Salvation to the whole world. While staying in the home of Simon the tanner, Peter was called to go the house of Cornelius, a centurion in Caesarea. Though Cornelius was a Gentile, outside of the people of the Jews, God gave Peter a sign that enabled him to move beyond all restraint, to preach the Good News of Jesus to the family of Cornelius. Here is the next part of this marvelous account of God reaching out to the Gentiles. This is Acts 10:23b-48. (READ Acts 10:23b-48)

Peter obeyed the direction of the Holy Spirit and went to Caesarea. And what he found was astounding to him. Cornelius' whole family and many of Caesarea were there in his house eagerly waiting to hear the message that God wanted them to hear through Peter. Despite his reservation, Peter preached to them the message of Salvation in Jesus Christ and an amazing thing happened - "*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message*" (Acts 10:44).

How could that be? How could God move into the likes of a group of Gentiles through His Spirit? Well, these Gentiles were already "*devout and God-fearing*" people (Acts 10:2). They had come to believe in God and were diligently seeking to follow Him, and that was evident upon their generosity and meeting the needs of those in need, their regular prayer, and

their openness to hear the Good News of Jesus. So when Peter reminded them about the great work of Salvation that Jesus accomplished as the Messiah, the Christ (10:36-38), he invited them to believe in Jesus' resurrection as the Victorious Savior who had paid the price for the sins of all those who believe in Him (10:43).

At that very point, all the folks in the house of Cornelius believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world. They claimed Jesus' forgiveness of their sins, and they boldly claimed Jesus to be the Lord of their lives. That is the first and most important thing we have to do in order to become open to receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ has to become Savior AND Lord of our lives before God can begin to empower us.

So that means we need to confess our sins to the Lord, come to grips that we cannot save ourselves from our sins, and humble ourselves to letting Jesus have complete authority over every part of our lives. At that point, we are ready to let the Holy Spirit move into us, in order that we might be used by God to do His work in our world around us.

You see, the Holy Spirit is NOT at our beckon call, to command Him to empower us to do our own selfish desires. If our lives are focused on the things of this world, He can still work through us, but He will not come to live in us. We have to surrender every room in our heart to the Lord Jesus, letting Him empty us of all wickedness and evil, so that we might become clean and completely forgiven. Only then will the Holy Spirit move into us.

By the Holy Spirit moving into us, He gives us gifts and abilities that often compliment the gifts and abilities we already have. But He also provides for us a new power source that enables us to do many more things that we could never do before. And as we've seen throughout the book of Acts so far, the most evident power is to speak in languages we do not know so that we might reach those around us with the message of Salvation. Speaking in tongues is not to

make us look better than anyone else. It's not to lift us up to a higher level of Christianity. It's not to give us everything that we desire. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the purpose of building the Church, and building up one another for the sake of the Gospel message.

The most common misconception for Christians today is that our faith is only for us, to save us from our sins so that we can live like we want and do what we want, knowing that we have a place in heaven when this life ends. NO!!

When we become followers of Jesus Christ, when we claim Him as our Savior and then make Him Lord of our lives, we are no longer our own; we become His servants to do what He wants us to do. It's not all about us, but it is about us serving the Lord, going where He wants us to go, doing what He wants us to do, and saying what He wants us to say. We are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He can use us AS HE WANTS.

But the choice is ours. We have the ability to say "no" to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Peter didn't have to receive the servants of Cornelius, or to even go with them to Caesarea. It was his choice to let the Holy Spirit work through him to fulfill the Salvation of the Lord. But he had learned the value of having Christ Jesus as Lord of his life, and he became willing to be used by God to go even to those that the Jews thought were off limits or beyond help.

And Peter didn't control the Holy Spirit to do the work of reaching out to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit works through us AS HE DEEMS FIT to do. It is up to us to open up our lives to allow Him to work through us, but we have no power to command the Holy Spirit to work for us. It is as we let the Holy Spirit work in and through us that we are able to present ourselves as living witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Peter went with the simple message of Jesus Christ to the people in Cornelius' house. At first, Cornelius tried to worship Peter as someone deserving praise and glory, but "*Peter made*

*him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself' (Acts 10:26). Having the Holy Spirit working through us does not make us gods to be worshiped, or even anyone special to be venerated. We are only servants of Jesus Christ, and as we are open to the filling of the Holy Spirit, He uses us to complete the task given to us by Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] has commanded us...” (Matthew 28:19-20).*

You see, it's not about making new members of this congregation that is absolutely important. Even if this congregation were to dwindle and fade, the utmost task of the follower of Jesus is to tell others about Jesus so that they might put their faith and trust in Him as Savior and Lord of their own lives. The pastor can't do it all, so everyone needs to use their gifts given by the Holy Spirit to build the Church together. The purpose of this congregation is to equip believers in Jesus Christ to go and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Peter modeled that as he listened to the guiding of the Holy Spirit and then obeyed that guiding to reach out to a group of God-fearing people, to give them the chance to claim Jesus as their own Savior and continue the work of spreading the Gospel. And as a result, the Church of Jesus Christ grew even beyond the comprehension of the circumcised believers who had gone with Peter to Cornelius' house. It's not about us growing this particular church, but rather growing the Church of Jesus Christ that we are called to. God will grow this church if He wants to, but His greatest desire is that everyone here be willing to humble themselves before the Lord Jesus, claim Him as their own Savior, and then to work for Him taking the message of Salvation through Jesus Christ to the whole world, starting right where we are. And that starts as we humble ourselves to become servants for Jesus Christ, touching those around us for His glory.

But our text lists a very strange thing. The folks in Cornelius' house received the Holy

Spirit BEFORE they were baptized. Baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ, or in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is USUALLY the precursor to the filling of the Holy Spirit. When we confess our sins and claim Jesus and are baptized as a sign of being united with Christ Jesus, this prepares our hearts for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

But here in Acts 10 (44-46), the Holy Spirit fills the folks in the house, and THEN they are baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ. You see, repentance came as they heard the message of Jesus given by Peter, and their hearts were opened for the Holy Spirit to fill them. The baptism of the people in Cornelius' house was the incorporation of these new believers into the Christian community. This was important particularly because they were Gentiles, not Jews. This baptism now associated them with being followers of Jesus Christ, not through the Jewish rite of circumcision, but through the baptism of water in the Name of Jesus. This meant that the divisions between Jew and Gentile were no longer relevant, and they were now incorporated into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

It was also the sign that these new believers "put on" Jesus Christ. Again, the divisions that separated them from others, such as race, class or sex, were no longer applicable (Galatians 3:26-29). These were now brothers and sisters in Christ right along with Peter and those who had joined him from Joppa. They were now a part of a much bigger family.

Most importantly, the baptism of these new believers AFTER they received the Holy Spirit, signified that they were now dead to sin and alive in Christ. Their baptism signified that they were now baptized into Christ's death, and through His resurrection were now alive through Him to be His witnesses for Him (Romans 6:1-4).

It was very appropriate then that these new believers in the house of Cornelius be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ so that there was nothing that separated them with the other

believers in Jesus Christ. This baptism was equivalent to the ritual of circumcision in the Jewish tradition, and their bodies were now the temple of the Holy Spirit who was already in them (Colossians 2:9-13). They were put to death in the flesh, and made alive in the Holy Spirit. They were now brand new creatures in Christ because of their baptism in Him.

This unique incident in the New Testament helps us to see that the Lord works in His way and in His time to bring about the faithful conversion of people into the life of Christ. All of Cornelius' family and friends gathered in his house were ready to outwardly profess that they were followers of Jesus. They openly confessed their sins and welcomed the Holy Spirit in their lives. And just like other accounts of new believers, I am sure that they began telling those around them what they had done and who now had their full allegiance.

Cornelius became very much like Naaman in 2 Kings 5, who after his own conversion to become a believer in the God of Israel, asked Elisha, *“But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this”* (2 Kings 5:18-19). Elisha had said to him, *“Go in peace.”*

As a centurion in the Roman army, Cornelius would have been expected to bow before the Roman gods, especially in the presence of his military leaders, if not the Emperor. His new faith in Jesus Christ would have made him stand out among all the other officers. History shows that many in the Roman army stood strong in their faith in Jesus Christ, even at the point of death because they did not bow or sacrifice to the Roman gods after their conversion to Christianity. We're not told how Cornelius's situation ended, but there is hope that he remained strong, even in the face of difficult decisions that could have affected his life. He now had eternal life to look

forward to because of his faith in Jesus, so whatever he had to face in this life would have been easier to bear. But His witness as a believer in Jesus may have helped other soldiers come to see the value of having Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, too. The Holy Spirit would have given him a huge venue to live his faith and help others find faith. He would also have provided Cornelius with gifts to let him live that faith boldly among those in his command.

That is the value of having the Holy Spirit living and working in us as we let Him use us for the glory of God in Jesus Christ. We, like Peter can trust that the guiding of the Holy Spirit will always bring about exciting results, even if it means we have to go beyond our own man-made limitations. The Holy Spirit will never lead us astray, and He'll always allow us to see the greatness of the Lord Jesus as we continue to trust in Him and follow Him.

We are faced with so many people who need to hear about the Lord Jesus. Will you *“trust in the Lord with all your heart and not lean on your own understanding, but in all your ways submit to Him, so that He may direct your paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-6)? Will you open your hearts and lives to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that He may use you to bring about the glory of God? I pray that you do.

Father, thank You for the work of Jesus providing us with salvation from sin and death. Thank You for Jesus forgiving us and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. As we remember His Sacrifice for us today in the communion service, may we once again give ourselves into Your service for the work You have given to us. Guide us and direct us through Your Holy Spirit, so that we might obey His call and bring salvation to those around us, as we live for Jesus. Empower us, Holy Spirit with what we need in order to accomplish the salvation of the world, beginning right here in Sheboygan. Help us to listen carefully to Your voice so that we might find those You want us to reach out to. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.