

You Asked For It
Racism
Acts 10 & 11

Today I will be addressing the topic of racism. I wish I could say that racism was confined to the world's practices and has never raised its ugly head in the church before but that would be a lie. We live in a fallen world with fallen views and lived out through fallen humanity. This of course is no excuse but is the root of racism itself.

Our culture is increasingly polarized by race, political views, and everything else you can imagine. Our society has become very Tribalistic and I am afraid, if we're not careful, Christians can fall into the same trap.

In August 2016 there was a three-day riot in Milwaukee Wisconsin. It started over the shooting of a 23-year-old black man by a black police officer. After the riot was over and peace restored a newspaper article asked the question "Does the city of Milwaukee have a race problem?" What do you think the percentage was of the people who said "yes" was? 98%

The follow up question to that was really interesting. The question was asked, "Are you a racist?" What percent do you think said "yes"? 2%

Do you want to know what the real answer to that question is? The real answer is 100%! It's like asking who among you are liars? The true answer is 100% because we are all liars. We are born with an urge to evade responsibility. Excepting responsibility is a learned behavior And the quickest way to evade responsibility is to lie. We are all natural born blamers who want to push responsibility on to someone else.

The same is true for race. It's easy to see what you don't like in society and point the blame at a certain group of people Instead of looking in the mirror and saying I'm a part of it. God gave us diversity to make our lives better and more interesting. I say this is a Segway into the story of Peter in Cornelius. Turn with me to the Acts 10.

In this chapter we are introduced to a man named Cornelius. This was no ordinary man. Cornelius was a Roman centurion in charge of 100 men and of noble dissent.

Furthermore, he was a gentile. The word “**gentile**” means “**nations**”. It’s a term the Israelites used to describe all foreign people. In short, it’s a nice way of saying you are a heathen. But in this story God is about to make good on his promise to Abraham when he told him he would be a father of many nations. At this point the Israelites are God’s chosen people but this story is about to take a turn that will globally diversify grace to not only the Israelites but to all nations and all people groups. ***“For anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”***

Follow along with me as I read from **Acts 10:1-23**

Take a look at **verse 14** ***“Surely not, Lord! Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything in pure or unclean.” So deeply ingrained in Peter was the law that for bid the eating of unclean things that he, at first refused to obey the Lord. Look at verse 15 “The voice spoke to him a second time, do not call anything in pure that God has made clean.”***

Racism is a learned and ingrained behavior. We are not born racists. Peter was taught the law and it was ingrained into his thinking to the point that even the voice of the Lord could not penetrate at first. Even though Peter was a believer, he still was allowing the culture of his upbringing to determine his values and that’s a dangerous place to be as a believer!

Our culture and its values are changing so fast. Who would’ve thought that five years ago we would have to actually define marriage to be between a man and a woman? Or see the legalization of homosexual marriage or that we would be seeing an uprising of race issues again in this country when we have come so far?

One of the saddest characteristics of life on the planet in the 21st-century is that we have all gotten more tribal and if you don’t fit into that tribe you are hated and despised. The black lives matter movement cannot imagine why anyone could Disagree with them or oppose them. And those who advocate all lives matter or blue lives matter see their position as more universally moral. Neither side has much empathy for the other, and so the shouting goes on.

What the Lord was trying to teach Peter has a far more significant meaning than clean and unclean food. The Lord is changing the game entirely. Look at **verse 23** ***“Then Peter invited the men into the house as his guests.”***

I don't want you to miss the significance of this invitation! You see, no self-respecting Israelite would invite a gentile into his home because it was against their law. Remember gentile means "Heathen." It was an invitation that clashed against his culture and against the law. But Peter was already taking the first step toward excepting Gentiles by inviting them into his home as his guests!

Church we need to show the world how to love, respect, and appreciate people not like us! For the sake of Jesus' message. Let's continue the second part of verse 23 through verse 29.

Peter had just recognized that his dream had deeper meaning than declaring the distinction between clean and unclean meat, he saw that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles had been removed entirely! We see that even further when we read on in **versus 30-35 and 44-48 of Acts 10.**

Look again in **verse 34. "Then Peter began to speak, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but excepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."**

Peter, in this one statement obliterated generations of elitism and separation in this one statement, **"I now realize."** God does not favor individuals because of their station in life, their nationality, or their material possessions. He does however respect their character and will judge their works.

Dr. Martin Luther King Junior echoes this statement when he said, **"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."**

While Peter was preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his house **verse 44-46 tells us "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speak in tongue's and praising God." Then in verse 47 Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."**

The acts of this encounter will forever change the landscape of the churches history. No longer is the gospel just for the Jews but it's for the Gentiles, every nation, and every tribe! Hallelujah!

Afterwards Peter went to Jerusalem and told the Jewish brothers there what God had done through Cornelius and his dream. That Cornelius's house received Christ. But that testimony was met with criticism when they said to Peter, ***"You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."*** And I love Peter's response when he says, ***"If God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who am I to think that I could oppose God?"***

Racial reconciliation doesn't start in Washington; it starts in our hearts. It starts in the way we treat others and learn to see humanity, race, and color, the way our heavenly father sees it. May the hearts of this nation be turn to God once again!