**Forgiveness of sins through his name**

Acts 9:32-10:48

 Key Verses 43 “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Today's passage records a monumental moment in church history.

Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to ignite His Church. Now God removed the laws that required separation from Gentiles. God prepared Cornelius and Peter to become partners to confirm the truth that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. Now starts a new era among Gentiles. Let us think about God’s mercy and grace and power of Jesus’ name through this time.

**Part I. Two Miraculous healings (9:32-43)**

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. Lydda was a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, 25 miles northwest from Jerusalem. He was introduced to a paralyzed man named Aeneas. In a simple command and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter’s words healed the man. He said, ***“Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.”*** Immediately Aeneas cured and got up.

 This event resembled one of Jesus’ miracles when He healed the paralyzed man (Luke 5:24, John5:8). Jesus said, ***“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”***

Soon afterward, news from Joppa came to Peter that a faithful disciple named Tabitha died from illness. Joppa is the present day Tel Aviv-Yafo. It is one of the most ancient seaports in the world. This is where Jonah came down and fled from God rather than deliver God’s warnings to Nineveh.

Peter sent the crying widows out of the room and said ***“Tabitha, get up.”*** Tabitha story is also similar to Jesus healing of Jairus’ daughter. (Mark 5:35-43). Jesus put mourners all out of the room and said ***“Talitha koum!”*** which means ***“Little girl, I say to you, get up!”***

We can see Jesus’ image through Peter. It is not just in speech but also character. I believe the person who preaches Jesus must be like Jesus in character.

And also these two incidents remind us of Jesus’ promise that “***Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father* ( John 14:12)*.”***

**Part II.God prepared Cornelius and Peter (10:1-23a)**

Let’s read verses 1-2. ***“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”***

Today, Cornelius would be a captain of the army. He was an influential man in his society, but he was also a righteous man. He sought the truth and prayed to God regularly and was respected by the Jews (22). He expressed love for God as he took care of the poor with generous gifts. His family members were also devout and God-fearing. He was a blessing to the people around him.

By this time, the Roman Empire had made Caesarea a key city of the Roman government in Judea. Caesarea was a strategic, cosmopolitan center perfectly positioned to introduce Christianity to the Gentile world.

Cornelius received an angelic vision with God’s orders. God told Cornelius that Peter held the key to his quest. God revealed that Peter was staying with a tanner in Joppa.

A tanner is someone whose job is making leather from animal skins. The Romans were suspicious of Jewish Christians such as Peter. They despised the poor and lowly such as the tanner. Yet Cornelius immediately obeyed. His faithful actions showed he sought to learn from anyone who had the truth of God. No cultural barriers kept Cornelius from boldly obeying God. So he sent three men to Joppa to invite Peter.

 As God prepared Cornelius for Peter (1-8), He also prepared Peter for Cornelius (9-23). As the messengers of Cornelius were approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray (9). He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance and saw God’s vision (10).

It was a huge blanket coming down from heaven. Its four corners that pointed four directions of the earth signified the whole world. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. The unclean animals in Peter’s vision were those God had forbidden Jews from eating while they waited for the Messiah (Lev 11). Unclean animals also represented Gentiles. Then a voice told him, ***“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”***

Peter had grown up under strict regulations, so he said, ***"Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."***

The Jews in Israel regarded the Gentiles as unclean and untouchable. Many of them openly called them “Gentile dogs.”

What was the Lord’s answer? Look at verse 15 ***“The voice spoke to him a second time,*** ***“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.””***

 God told Peter that the restrictions were no longer necessary. Jesus broke the barrier between God and His people – now Jew and Gentile – who would come to faith through Him. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, cleanses all who believe in him and are sprinkled by his blood. Through his blood, God is raising new heirs of God among all peoples of the world, both Jews and Gentiles.

This vision occurred three times, and the sheet was taken back to heaven. Peter strongly refused three times, and God emphasized three times and demanded obedience.

The impure and unclean animal’s let down to earth and taken back to heaven was beyond their understanding because Jews regarded heaven as a holy place. This vison symbolizes that impure and unclean things can be clean and holy. Therefore, after Jesus came into this world, there was no distinction between clean and unclean, and the distinction between chosen and Gentile was also destroyed.

In Peter’s day, God’s written revelation was incomplete. Many times God revealed His will through dreams or visions, especially when people had no access to a Bible. Words received from God were confirmed by practical circumstances. The Spirit predicted details and directed Peter and Cornelius to obey.

Peter faced a choice between his fears and God’s will. By associating with these Gentiles, he risked his reputation. Others approved of him as a godly Jew who faithfully observed the Jewish law. Gentiles ate “unclean” foods. They worshipped idols. Jewish Christians would criticize him for such a radical departure from tradition. But Peter recognized his circumstances aligned with God’s will. By the help of Holy Spirit, Peter invited the Gentiles into the house to be his guests, which was unlawful to the Jews. Peter’s obedience to the Holy Spirit opened a new era in his life as well as in the history of the church.

Before God’s grace and mercy reached the Gentiles, there was Peter's obedience to the will of God beyond tradition and customs.

Are there any Korean or UBF traditions or fixed ideas preventing gospel of Jesus? Are there any American etiquette, manners and cultures that we need to learn? I pray that God’s kingdom may extend through obeying God's will beyond our limitations.

Now that we have New Testament, we can hear God’s complete will through Bible reading, memorization, meditation, and Bible study. Even God speaks in many ways: by enlightenment, circumstances, dreams, other’s advice, prayer, and so on. But there are three voices we can hear: the voice from God, voice from my own and voice from Satan. So we need insight and discernment to discern the voices. Many people mistake their own voice as God’s voice because of assurance in heart. But in many cases, it creates conflict with others.

Then what is God’s voice? God’s voice always leads us close to Him. It makes us think of “me” less and more of others. It allows us to make peace with others. It makes us grow and mature. But the voice of Satan breaks our relationship with God and leads us farther away from Him. So run away. Don’t make deals and conversations like Eve.

Even if we know God’s will, sometimes we cannot follow and obey because of our powerlessness or fixed idea or our sinful desire. So we need prayer to gain strength and power to obey and overcome our sinful nature. We pray so that we pay attention to God and His will. I pray that we all may follow God’s will and be fruitful and increase in number inwardly and outwardly.

**Part III. The Gentile Pentecost (23b-48)**

The next day, Peter wisely took six Jewish Christians with him(11:12). Jewish law required two or three witnesses to establish truth. Peter knew many witnesses would help others believe God’s unfolding plan for the Church.

Look at verse 24, When Peter and his company arrived at Caesarea, Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.There was a large gathering of people inside the house. Cornelius showed reverence to Peter but Peter humbled himself and treat him as an equal. Peter shared his vision and questioned “May I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius explained to Peter how an angel of God had appeared to him and told him to invite Peter. And he said, “***Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us (33)."*** The invited people were all prepared to receive the word of God and were ready for spiritual harvest.

Let’s read verse 34, 35 altogether. ***“Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”***

This realization of Peter was a great turning point in church history because the door of the gospel was open to the Gentile world.

Then Peter delivered his main message. What were the contents of his message? It was Jesus’ life (38), Jesus’ death (39), Jesus’ resurrection, witnessed by many (40, 41), Jesus’ exaltation as judge of the living and the dead (42) and the forgiveness of sins for anyone who repents and believes in him (43).

While Peter was still speaking these words, The Holy Spirit came upon the listening Gentiles.

Let’s read verses 44-46 like Holy Spirit fall down upon us.

***“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”***

They displayed outward signs, such as speaking in other languages. These signs formed a necessary confirmation for the Christian Jews. The Christian Jews would know their unique presence was truly from God. The same thing happened here when the Jews believed at the Pentecost, so Peter could believe that there was no boundary between Jews and the Gentiles. What Peter learned from the Gentile Pentecost was that the salvation of the New Testament was not based on nation by the law but rather on God’s grace to each individual through believing in Jesus Christ.

The Gentiles heard the Good News and believed. God’s love, joy and peace filled them. All were aware God had adopted them as His own children. The public ceremony of baptism showed their inner experience of cleansing from sin and new birth by the Holy Spirit.

Now God removed His laws that required separation from Gentiles. Jesus Christ united Jews and Gentiles into one body, the Church.

These chapters report God’s turning point toward the majority of the world’s population - Gentiles. The gospel was first preached to Jews. Then, the gospel spread to Gentiles in God’s grace to save all who repent and believe. God gave Peter the gospel key to swing open the door of His kingdom. Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit bring new life and fill Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles in the same way. No human method, expectation, tradition or practice hinders God’s way of reconciling with His people. It is Jesus Christ who saves. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor 5:17)

I pray that only the name of Jesus will be exalted and spread powerfully. Let’s read verse 43 altogether ***“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”***  Let’s pray…