

Adult Teaching Resources

March 31, 2024



Season of Lent

March 3, 2024—"Can I Be Good?"—Psalm 19

March 10, 2024—"Can I Be Grateful?"—Psalm 107 (RCL:1-3, 17-22)

March 17, 2024—"Can I Be Whole-Hearted?"—Psalm 119:9-16

March 24, 2024—"Can I Be Safe?"—Psalm 31 (RCL 31:9-16)

Season of Easter

March 31, 2024—"Good News for Everyone"—Acts 10:34-43

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Good News for Everyone

Acts 10:34-43

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Acts 10:34b-35)

Opening

Remain in the large group after everyone arrives.

Ask everyone to consider the opening question posed by our Lesson Writer:

“Have you ever changed your mind about a social custom or belief that you once held dear?”

What was the social custom or belief?

Where did you learn that social custom or belief?

How did following that social custom or belief affect the way you lived?

What/Who influenced you to change your mind about that social custom or belief?

How did you change your mind?

How did changing your mind about that social custom or belief affect the way you lived?

Spend time in large group conversation before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What does Peter say about God? (God shows no partiality)

Who, according to Peter, are acceptable to God? (anyone who fears him and practices righteousness)

What was the message sent to the people of Israel? (Jesus Christ is Lord of all)

Where did the message spread? (It spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee)

What happened after Jesus was baptized by John? (God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him)

What was Peter (and others) witness to? (They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What did Jesus command? (He commanded them to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead)

What do those who believe in him receive? (forgiveness of sins through his name)

Making Connections

When have you found yourself in a situation that was uncomfortable, or even one that you knew would be frowned upon, but when asked to share something about God or do something in the name of God, you knew you were in the right place at the right time?

In talking about God showing no partiality, our Lesson Writer says, “Overcoming partiality would be an ongoing challenge, not just between Jews and Gentiles, but between classes, genders, and other ethnicities, as well.” Where do we still struggle with overcoming partiality today? What do you think would help those situations?

We are urged and taught to treat all people as equal in God’s sight. Why do you think we have difficulty living out that lesson? What needs to change so that we can live out that lesson?

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “Peter, like other Hebrews, had grown up believing that while God was Lord of all nations or ethnic groups, Israel was chosen to be a special people, to live in a unique and potentially rewarding relationship with God.” Do you think God has a special people? If so, who are they? What do you think that says about God? What do you think that says about humanity? If not, what do you think that says about God? What do you think that says about humanity?

Peter said that God Peter had “anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, which Jesus demonstrated by traveling about, doing good deeds and healing people, proving that God was with him and that he had power over evil.” If someone asked you about Jesus, what would you tell them?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Peter had already come to believe that Jesus’ death was a necessary part of his message and work in the world.” What do you believe about Jesus’ death? Why do you say that? How does your understanding affect the way you live?

Have you ever visited a place that where Christianity was a minority religion or not even recognized? What can you say about that place? How do you think you would do as a missionary, or messenger of God’s word, in that place?

Peter recalled how Jesus had “commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead (v. 42). What “command” do you think Peter had in mind?

Our Lesson Writer explains Peter’s revelation, “the gospel really was for all people, and Jesus’ disciples were to proclaim it in all places.” What does that mean to you? How far, literally and figuratively, are you willing to take the gospel?

So What?

Remain in the large group and share this statement from our Lesson Writer: “The evidence was clear to see: the gospel truly was—and is—for *all* people. Peter was just beginning to accept the radically inclusive nature of God’s grace.”

Ask your group to think of segments of society that have been denied the gospel.

Who denied it?

What was their rationale?

Has that attitude changed?

If so, how? If not, why not?

Spend some time discussing the different groups. Then, move to these questions for conversation and discussion.

What does it mean to you that the gospel is for all people?

How do you live that inclusivity out in your life?

As folks share, affirm their answers and encourage those who struggle to open up and let God work through them, regardless of their audience, like God worked through Peter.

The Challenge

This week, try to close your eyes to race, gender, class, and social status as you interact with others. Treat all others with the gospel attitude that Christ is for all.

Prayer

Loving God, we confess that we all have our biases and prejudices. Soften our hearts and open our minds like you did with Peter so that we might do more to share the gospel with everyone. We know the gospel is not a gift reserved for the select few, but is for the world. Help us to do our part to share it with everyone we meet. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Perspective—While racial attitudes provide the most obvious example, traditional attitudes also have been challenged by growing acceptance in culture—and in many churches—of persons who have been divorced and remarried, or who don’t match up to default notions of gender and relationships. These issues often hit home when a family member is affected, and we begin to take a closer look at assumptions or viewpoints we had not previously examined. Even where full acceptance remains elusive, few of us could say that our perspectives on these matters have not shifted during the past 30-40 years.

Cornelius—A centurion was a Roman military officer who commanded 100 men. The Latin *centum*, meaning “hundred,” also gave rise to our word “century” and “cent.” Six units of 100 men comprised a “cohort,” and ten cohorts formed a “legion.” It is not surprising that a sizable contingent of Roman soldiers would be stationed in Caesarea because it, not Jerusalem, was the official seat of the Roman government for Palestine.

The cosmic Christ—J. Bradley Chance describes the importance of the core gospel in this way: “The proclamation of the gospel message is the means whereby the church fulfills its calling as ‘witnesses’ (cf. 10:41). That gospel, even in its abbreviated form as presented here by Peter, culminates in the proclamation that Jesus has been ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead (10:42). This clear affirmation of the cosmic lordship of Christ is *the* essence of the gospel message. The miraculous deeds, the agonizing death, the triumph of resurrection, and the glory of ascension all bear witness to the central confession that ‘Jesus is Lord.’ Appropriately, therefore, Peter *begins* his witness with the central confession (10:36) and ends with an affirmation of that same confession as he acknowledges Jesus as the judge of both the living and the dead (10:42), which encompasses that which was, is, and will be” (*Acts*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2007], 177).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Did they know?

Careful readers may note a curious thing about how Peter's speech begins. Cornelius, a Gentile, had invited Peter to come and speak because he and others wanted to learn more about the new faith that had come about through Jesus.

We learn about the invitation in the words of the messengers who came to Peter in Joppa: "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say" (v. 22).

After Peter arrived, Cornelius was confused enough to bow at Peter's feet and had to be assured that Peter was a mortal like him (vv. 25-26). When Peter saw the large number of relatives and friends that Cornelius had gathered, he noted the awkwardness of the setting and asked why they had sent for him (vv. 27-29)

Cornelius recounted his vision from three days earlier, indicating that he and his companions had called Peter and gathered to hear him so they could "listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say" (v. 33).

This implies that Cornelius lacked information about Christ, but Peter began his summary of the gospel with "*You know* the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ ..." (v. 36).

Did Peter assume that Cornelius and company were already acquainted with the gospel message?

In considering the question, we should remember that Luke is reporting the speech at least second-hand, and long after the actual encounter, so we can't expect it to be a verbatim account.

As Luke constructed Peter's speech for his book, the audience he had in mind was his own potential readers, not just Cornelius and his friends. They would know—or should know—the heart of the gospel already. Luke's interest was to remind them that Christ's mission was for all people. Since Luke himself was a Gentile and wrote with Gentiles in mind, this message would hold special interest.

Cornelius and company may not have known the gospel message that was for all peoples when Peter arrived, but Luke's readers would have known it.

From another angle, we may want to ask deeper questions about how Peter came to break through his own prejudice and understand that the gospel was for all people. J. Bradley Chance suggests that Luke's account of Peter's growing appreciation for Gentile believers

The Hardest Question *continued*

can be visualized as a play in two acts, with Act One consisting of two scenes in which Peter works miracles and evangelizes Jews as he makes his way toward Joppa, where he had been instructed to visit a man named Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:32-43). Peter's willingness to visit a tanner (whose smelly work rendered him ritually unclean) suggests a growing willingness to step outside the exclusivist box of his Jewish background.

Act Two (10:1-11:18) moves into the Gentile world and plays out in seven scenes. In *Scene One* (10:1-8) Luke leaves Peter in Joppa while taking the reader north to Caesarea, where a Roman centurion named Cornelius was granted a vision from God during his afternoon prayers.

Scene Two brings us back to Joppa on the following day (10:9-16), where Peter was praying alone on the flat roof of his host's home. Peter also saw a vision, one that challenged him to recognize "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (10:15). The vision was repeated three times, apparently to make sure Peter got the point.

Three messengers from Cornelius showed up in *Scene Three* (10:17-23a), and the Spirit instructed Peter to accompany them without hesitation. Employing a lesson learned from the vision, Peter invited the men to come in and rest overnight, something that strictly observant Jews would not have done.

Scene Four (10:23b-33) relates Peter's arrival and opening conversation with Cornelius and others who were gathered with him. Recognizing the odd nature of his visit in a Gentile's home, and accompanied by other Jewish Christians, Peter explained that God had taught him not to call anyone profane or unclean (10:28). Cornelius then described his own vision and asked Peter to proclaim whatever God laid on his heart (10:33).

Peter's sermon (10:34-43, the text for today) comprises *Scene Five*. In it, he proclaimed the basics of the gospel message, the death and resurrection of Christ, and the command to proclaim the good news to all, calling for repentance and promising the forgiveness of sins.

Peter's sermon was quickly interrupted by *Scene Six* (10:44-48) in which the Spirit of God was poured out on all who were gathered. The Gentile believers spoke in tongues and praised God, demonstrating the same evidence of the Spirit's blessing that Jewish believers had experienced in Acts 2.

The *last scene* in the lengthy story (11:1-18) finds Peter back in Jerusalem, recounting his experience to other church leaders. Some criticized him for having lodged and presumably eaten with the Gentiles, but Peter insisted that if God wanted to bless the Gentiles with the Spirit, it was hardly his place to interfere (11:17).