

Everyone Who Believes

Acts 10:34-43

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Good morning church! Well, this is it. This is my last sermon at First Free...for a while at least. Michelle and I are leaving Wichita this week, and we leave the US later this month, to begin our ministry in Abu Dhabi.

Next week you'll be back in Luke with Pastor Josh.

I could easily take forty minutes this morning and make this like a speech at the Oscars, thanking everyone for everything. So many of you have had such an impact on my life for these last 5½ years. There's no way I could thank all of you, and I don't have adequate words to express how deeply thankful I am. It has been a wonderful season of ministry for Michelle and me. I'm often amazed at how God uses unlikely connections for his kingdom, so we look forward to seeing how God uses our ongoing relationship with you. Also, there's a good chance we'll be back here for a visit next summer.

It was about thirteen years ago that I stood up here as a 20-year-old. Pastor Dick actually let me and my friend Britt have the sermon time to share about our time in Peru and how that trip changed my life. I stood here and said that I wanted to devote my life to getting the gospel to people who had never heard it. I meant it. The last five years at First Free have been very strategic for that goal. First Free is sending so many wonderful people to work with those who have never heard. That includes overseas missions, and it includes a lot of work here in Wichita as well.

In my time here at First Free, I've really learned how much I value the local church, and how much the Bible talks about the local church. I've also become passionate about preaching the Bible. So, a heart for the gospel getting to the unreached, a heart for the church, and a heart for preaching—this position in Abu Dhabi is the perfect fit for us. To be the Senior Associate Pastor of a healthy church with over sixty nationalities in it, where I can preach and be engaged in getting the gospel from there to all over the world...wow! We can only thank God for this amazing opportunity.

I really agonized over what to preach in this last sermon. As always, I really just want to preach God's Word. I want to pick a passage and be faithful to what the Spirit intended with it. At the same time, I also want to leave you with a piece of my heart, sharing how God has worked in my heart these past few years. So before we get into our text for this morning, I want to review a few ways that God has worked in my heart through getting to learn and preach some texts here. So these are my top three from the past five years.

First, God worked through the Habakkuk series I got to preach. Back in November of 2015, for the first time, Josh gave me the chance to do three sermons in a row. I chose the book of Habakkuk, and the series was called "Trusting God in Troubling Times." When I chose that, I had no idea that Michelle and I would walk through a miscarriage the month before preaching it. God used Habakkuk to help me trust him, even when things didn't make sense. I hope he did the same for you.

Second, I have thoroughly enjoyed preaching in the gospels of Mark and Luke. One of my favorite texts to preach was the transfiguration in Mark 9. Seeing Christ's divinity so clearly there, especially

with the links to the Old Testament, was so encouraging. And then seeing this divine God-man—who was literally glowing on that mountain—spend so much time with lost sinners in Luke...how convicting! Jesus loved lost sinners and spent time with them. That sermon, “Loving the Lost,” really hit me. I hope it impacted you too.

Third, when preaching in 1 and 2 Corinthians, I felt compelled to give some warnings about some other ministries. I won't hash all of that out this morning. But I continue to see how much in the New Testament we are warned about false teachers. It's all over the place! And I've seen how in Wichita, and in the US, there are some dangerous doctrines floating around. Church, I don't want you to be the heresy police, constantly looking for every wrong detail in someone else's doctrine. But I do hope that you will be wise and cautious, as the New Testament commands. There is a lot of garbage out there. There are a lot of people who claim to serve Jesus, who really want to deceive you for their own power, authority, money, or other sinful desires. Be smart, church! Especially young people...listen to me on this. A lot of pastors and leaders sound really great. They have a lot of energy and zeal, and they are good at getting you excited to follow them. Know the Word of God and don't be fooled by the garbage. Don't follow the flashy pastor; follow the faithful pastor. Flashiness will fade away. Faithfulness endures to the end, because the Word of God will never fade away.

For today's sermon, I want to go to another passage in the book of Acts. Acts is the book right after the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It starts with Jesus going up to heaven, and tells us about the birth of the church. How did Christianity go from one Jewish rabbi in Israel to a worldwide religion? Acts tells the stories of the first followers of Jesus and how his gospel spread.

Acts 10:34-43 is one of Peter's sermons in the book of Acts. Peter has seen some incredible things happen to lead up to this sermon. Earlier in the chapter Peter has a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven, full of food that he was not supposed to eat, according to Old Testament law. And a voice comes and tells him to eat the food. Then he is told to go and visit a Gentile man named Cornelius. He obeys and goes, and when he meets Cornelius, he finds that God is working in Cornelius' heart and he is ready for the gospel. Peter then is amazed that the gospel is going to the Gentiles, and he follows with the sermon in our text. So let's read Peter's words together. Would you please stand for the reading of God's word? Acts 10:34-43

Acts 10:34-43¹

³⁴So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how 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. ³⁹And 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, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not 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. ⁴²And 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. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

PETER SHOWS HOW THE GOSPEL STARTED IN JERUSALEM.

Peter is learning some powerful lessons here. In fact, one of the core themes of the whole Bible is coming together in this passage. Peter was just a little slow to understand it, but this is his breakthrough. Let's see what he learned.

Peter shows how the gospel started in Jerusalem. This is in the center of his sermon, in verses 36-41. He talks about how Jesus came to the Jews in Judea, Galilee, and Jerusalem. Verse 39 says it very clearly, that Peter and the apostles were witnesses of Jesus' ministry in the country of the Jews *and* in Jerusalem. The promised Savior, the Rescuer for the world, came to Israel and started among the Jews. This is in fulfillment of previous prophecies. In fact, this is really in fulfillment of the whole Old Testament. Let's go back and look at it for a few minutes.

In the Old Testament, most of you know that Israel was the chosen people of God. They are often even called the "elect." God makes it very clear, all over the Old Testament, that a big part of why he elected Israel was to bless the nations *and* to send the Christ to Israel, who was also for all the nations. If you've heard me teach much at all, you know I love to go back to Genesis 11 and 12. The story of the Tower of Babel was one of the first sermons I preached here! At the Tower of Babel, we see God scatter all the people of the world and confuse their languages. So originally, the different languages were a punishment from God. But then, in the next chapter God says that through Abraham and his chosen people he would bless all the families of the earth. So he scatters them and then elects a special people through whom the blessing would come for the very people who were scattered.

We often get confused thinking that the Old Testament is only about Israel. But there are so many examples of the blessing of Israel extending to other nations, even in the Old Testament. I've even gotten to preach on some of those. Remember Joshua chapter 9? In it we saw that strange story of the Gentile Gibeonites sneakily joining God's people. The Gibeonites tricked Israel with their story about moldy bread, and Israel made a covenant with them. So the Gibeonites got in! The blessing of Abraham extended to the Gibeonites.

Then, in our Judges series that we just finished, we saw God using Gentiles to deliver Israel. Remember back at the beginning of the book when I talked about Othniel and Shamgar? Shamgar was definitely a Gentile, and Othniel, who was the model judge in the whole book of Judges, was not ethnically a Jew either. Remember that?

Just back in May I preached on the book of Ruth. That's another example of God bringing a Gentile into the blessing of the elect. Ruth was a Gentile Moabite, and she got to join the covenant people. And not only that, she became an ancestor to Jesus himself!

Clearly God has a lot of compassion on the non-elect Gentiles, even in the Old Testament. Other examples include Jonah preaching to Gentile Ninevah, the healing of Naaman the Syrian, and in Daniel, God speaking to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

But the ultimate fulfillment of God using Israel to bless the nations is through Jesus. He is not just Israel's Messiah; he is the Messiah for the whole world! But he started in Israel.

Back, now, to Acts. In chapter 10, in verse 36 Peter talks about the good news of peace through Jesus coming to Israel. In verse 39, he says they are witnesses of all that Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. He started with the Jews. He came to Israel.

So we see how the gospel started in Jerusalem. Jesus was a Jew. He came to, and lived in, Israel. And that's because Israel was God's elected nation, through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Peter rightly shows how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies by coming to Israel.

PETER LEARNS THAT THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.

Up to this point, Peter still seems confused that the gospel could possibly reach Gentiles. Even though we've seen God show compassion to Gentiles in the Old Testament. Even though we've seen Jesus do a lot of ministry to Gentiles. Peter is still surprised. In fact in chapter 11 some Jewish believers were mad that Peter even went to a Gentile house! They still don't get it!

But Peter beautifully proclaims the truth here. God is not a racist. God doesn't play favorites. Look again at verse 34, the very beginning of his message...he says, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality..." then verse 35, "but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." And then he closes his sermon in verse 43 with the same point: "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." The forgiveness of Jesus isn't limited to a certain type of people. It certainly wasn't just for the Jews. So we know God's election of Israel in the Old Testament wasn't showing partiality. And the blood that Jesus shed wasn't just for one nation. It was for everyone who believes in Jesus, from every nation.

Then for the rest of Acts, we start to see the gospel go to the ends of the earth. The apostle Paul gets all the way to Rome in Acts, and he longs to go to Spain. In Romans 15, he tells the Roman church that he wants to go where Christ has not yet been named. He's ready to go to the next frontier, to the people group that doesn't have a witness yet. That's why at First Free, we focus our missions budget on unreached people groups. We're following what Paul did. We're following what Jesus said; to "go and make disciples of all nations." The gospel must reach all the people groups, all the languages, all the tribes on earth—Jesus said so. Paul followed it. So must we. So we try to focus our missions energy on sending people to the least Christian places on earth, where there is no indigenous Christian witness at all. Why? Because God doesn't show partiality; so we shouldn't either with the gospel. It must go to all the peoples. This means that instead of bickering over the dozens of solid Bible translations we have in America, we can work to see the first Bible translation in another language. This means instead of bickering over the style of music we like in church, we can work to see a new style of music worshipping Jesus in another culture.

I've had the joy of seeing this happen the last few years as the Missions Pastor here. People have received forgiveness of sins all over the world through Jesus. I've seen some amazing churches over the years. One of my favorites was in a tiny village in India back in 2014. Our missions partner there was driving us to their evening service and we took so many twists and turns. We eventually parked on grass, with no church in sight. I thought, "I've been dragged to the middle of nowhere in India to die. This is it." But no, we walked a few minutes further and came upon a beautiful little church. The walls were made of rice sacks. The worship team had one instrument. And they worship the same Jesus we do. I've seen the same thing in tiny rural churches in Moldova and Albania, and in some bigger house churches I attended in China. The same Jesus, the same forgiveness of sins, all over the world.

Acts 10 is a good reminder for us, church, that no one is too far gone. As long as a person is alive they have hope. Think of the person in your life who seems farthest from God. The person who you think has no chance of coming to Christ. Or it could be a group of people, or a type of people,

who you think are too far gone. I'll admit there are certain types of people that are hard for me to love. I won't tell you who they are, but there are some groups of people I'd just assume avoid, in my flesh. But God is not like that. Any sinner, any type of person, from any nation, can repent of their sin and trust Jesus. Here in the text, it says that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins. It's not too late. So, church, keep investing in that person you thought of earlier. Keep praying for that person. Spend time with that group of people, and be ready for God to work.

BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

My third and final point this morning is really more of an application point out of the text. And it's what I want to leave you with: believe in the power of the gospel.

In the sermon, Peter tells us what the gospel is. Church, you know it! We are a gospel-centered church. Peter tells us in verses 39-41, that the gospel is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In his life, Jesus went about "doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil." He says that they, as apostles, were witnesses of all that he did, and then he talks about his death on a tree (meaning the cross). This is referring back to the Old Testament passage of Deuteronomy 21, where it says cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. So Jesus was cursed, but not for his own sin. He didn't have any! He was cursed for our sin. And then, God raised him up on the third day, and he appeared to many witnesses. Finally, Peter closes his gospel message in verse 43 by saying that people get forgiveness of sins through his name. The gospel first and foremost is about us getting forgiveness of sins in Jesus.

If you're new here today, I don't know what you've heard. But a lot of people will tell you all kinds of other things about the gospel and Christianity. They'll say it can make you rich and prosperous. They'll say it can make you healthy and strong. They'll say it can make you powerful and victorious in this life. They'll say it's for one political party and not the other. But Peter is clear: it gives us forgiveness of sins. If you're looking for health, wealth and power in this life, you're in the wrong religion and the wrong church. But if you know you're a sinner, and you need forgiveness, then Jesus is your answer. The other thing he says the gospel gives us is back up in verse 36, where he says the good news of peace through Jesus Christ was preached. If you need peace with God, because your soul is in turmoil, then Jesus is your answer, because Jesus came for you and me—the sinners. He came for people that would stand before him and say, "I am messed up, and I need help." If you think you're going to stand before Jesus and say, "I'm a good person and got it all figured out," Lord, have mercy! You're gonna stand before Jesus with pride? Please don't do that. But if you come to him broken, as a sinner, no matter what your background, your color, your salary, and even your sin is, if you come to him for forgiveness, he'll give it to you. That's why he died. That's why he shed his blood; so that all of God's punishment for sin would go on him instead of you.

Maybe you're the person that you think is too far gone. Maybe you think your sin is too serious for God, that God would never forgive you. The Bible doesn't say that. God doesn't think so. God is in the redeeming business. God is in the transforming business. He makes beauty out of ashes.

Is today the day that you deal with your sin and give your life to Jesus? It can be. If you'd like to give your life to Jesus today, then here's what you can do. The Bible says that it is by faith alone that you are saved. You put your faith in Jesus. You trust him completely to forgive your sin. A common way to show your trust in Jesus is to pray. So if you believe this, and if Jesus is working on your heart, then would you pray with me? Would you repeat in your heart what I'm about to pray? Here goes:

“Dear God, I come before you now, as a broken sinner. I need help. And so today, I am turning from my sin, and trusting Jesus. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and rose from the dead, so that I can be forgiven. I give you my life; please help me to follow you. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

If today is the first day you’ve dealt with your sin and gave it to Jesus, would you do me a favor? Would you tell someone? Come tell me, or tell the person next to you. Tell someone so that we can be excited with you!

Church, I’ll close with this. Peter says in verse 41, that he and the apostles were chosen by God as witnesses. It was up to them to go and “preach to people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.” They did it until the day they died. But now the church is the witness. You are the witnesses, to testify that you believe this sermon of Peter. You believe what Luke wrote here in Acts. If the witness of the apostles has convinced you, has given you forgiveness of sins and peace with God, then please go tell others. Let’s see First Free grow in the years to come with new believers. I want to see more people come into this building who have never gone to church before. But in order for that to happen, you need to go out and testify, and find those people who are ready for the gospel. And then we need to welcome them in, no matter what they look like, what kind of music they like, or what sin they have committed. They are welcome here, because God forgives everyone who believes in Jesus. So church, it’s go time. Go and make disciples of all nations.