



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

The Good News of Jesus

Acts 10:34-43

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Introduction

1. Think with me about the challenge of presenting Jesus to a culture like the following:
 - a. It is ruled by the most powerful government the world has ever known, one that has enhanced conditions of relative peace and stability and has facilitated ease of travel so that people can visit and be visited by people of other lands and cultures.
 - b. It is comprised of people on the go, people who are doers, pragmatic, active.
 - c. It is a melting pot, a mix of people from all over the world.
 - d. It is characterized by pluralism, since all of the different groups have brought their customs, philosophies, and religions and introduced them into the mix.
 - e. It is therefore made up of many people who are sifting through the mix for something that will, if not ease, at least give hope to lives filled with drudgery, crisis, and misery.
 - f. It is a culture where, even where the government is capable of enforcing laws and making life relatively safe, is filled with all manner of moral views and behaviors.
 - g. Finally, it is a culture that will need even the basics of the religion of the Bible explained to them as a necessary backdrop for the message.
 - h. As previously noted, there are no formal arguments for God's existence in the Bible. But there are clues that point us to how to make the case. Ronald Nash calls attention to one that is often overlooked: if the only rational explanation for Jesus is that he was God in the flesh, God must exist.¹
2. If you were to develop a strategy to reach that world, how would you approach it? You want to tell them about Jesus, but how would you tell his story? What would you include? What would you postpone until later so that you could achieve maximum effect for the message? How would you present the challenge of his message in a way that would most likely be inviting to the cosmopolitan culture you were trying to reach?
3. We need to ask those questions because the culture described looks like the one we inhabit. But we have less to do in devising a strategy than we might think. Since the culture I've described is not the modern West, but the ancient Greco-Roman world, we have a plan available to study.

¹ See Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, 154. I included the quotation from which this idea comes in the previous sermon in this series, "God Is: The Greatest Clue of All."

- a. We can look specifically at Mark, the writing that scholars from the earliest times after the New Testament think was written with the Roman Gentile culture primarily in mind.
 - b. It is a writing filled with vignettes, episodes that show various facets of Jesus and emphasize that he is inviting people to a disciple-teacher relationship with him.
 - c. Mark keeps his story moving, including vivid details and verbs that portray action in process. He anticipates questions his readers might have by including responses to what he did and said from people who were his contemporaries.
 - d. He chose to tell events that were representative of Jesus' life and stressed his uniqueness.
 - e. So let's review the basics and renew our appreciation for the astounding story of Jesus.
4. But, have you ever wondered what prompted Mark's approach? Here, we are left to not so much project an answer based on the content we have as to rely on early church testimony.
 - a. In the early 4th century, Eusebius's *Church History* included testimony from an early leader named Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis, ca. AD 120). Papias claimed to have gotten his information from John the elder and apostle.
 - b. Regarding Mark, he relates that:
 - i. "He was the writer for Peter;
 - ii. "He wrote down accurately as much as he could remember of Peter's words, which the latter had adapted to the needs of the moment;
 - iii. "He was not an eyewitness of Jesus, nor a disciple; . . . and
 - iv. "It was his desire not to omit or misrepresent anything.
 - c. "Papias concluded that the Gospel of Mark gains its apostolic and reliable character from its Petrine origin."²
 5. Other ancient sources make the same connection (see Bayer), and it is of interest that a study of Peter's speeches in Acts, especially the one to the Roman centurion Cornelius in Acts 10, follows essentially the same outline we find in Mark. Here was the man to whom Jesus gave "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 16:19) opening the door to a Roman Gentile.
 6. Using the sermon in Acts as our guide, fleshing it out in a few instances from Mark's gospel, let us recall the story of Jesus and how we might present it to people we meet.

Body

- I. The Reason It's Good News (Acts 10:36).
 - A. Peter would have had no problem seeing Jesus' story as "good news," for he saw Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who had finally come after hundreds of years of waiting (Mark 8:27-30).
 - B. But for a God-fearer like Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 22), his story would have also been "good news," for finally he would be allowed full fellowship with the God whom he had admired and worshiped (see Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6-9).
 - C. But, then as now, others also promised relief, good news. How was Jesus different?
- II. The Content of the Good News (10:37-42).
 - A. Peter (and Mark) started their account with the arrival of John the Baptizer to prepare the way (Acts 10:37; Mark 1:1-8).

² Hans F. Bayer, "Introduction to Mark," in the *ESV Study Bible*, 1889. Bayer presents these statements as a summary of the testimony in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.15.1-2; 3.39.14-16.

- B. He next turned to Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38; Mark 1:9-11).
- C. Then, he let Cornelius know that Jesus' concern was to show people what God was like, referring to the marvelous things he and his associates had seen with their own eyes (Acts 10:38; cf. Mark 1:21-45 for one example of how this story was fleshed out).
 - 1. "He went about doing good. . ." (Mark 1:21-22, 28-34, 38-39, 40-44).
 - 2. ". . . and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. . ." (Mark 1:23-27).
 - 3. ". . . for God was with him" (Mark 1:24, 35).
- D. Then, he turned to the crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus, the events that provide the best parts of the good news (Acts 10:39-41).
 - 1. "They [the Jews] put him to death by hanging him on a tree" (v. 39; Mark 15:1-5, 10-15).
 - 2. ". . . but God raised him on the third day. . ." (v. 40; Mark 16:1-6).
 - 3. ". . . and made him to appear, not 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" (vv. 40-41; Mark 16:7).
- E. Peter then said that they were to tell this story to as many people as possible (Acts 10:42).

III. The Application of the Good News (10:34-35, 43).

- A. Peter's next statement spells out the ultimate reason for telling the story, not merely soothing from guilt, but the permanent forgiveness that gives real peace (Acts 10:43).
- B. But the greatest news in this respect is found in Peter's preface to his teaching (Acts 10:34-35).
- C. Unlike what people then (and probably now, too) had come to expect, God was not interested in limited forgiveness, forgiveness "with respect to the face" (the literal meaning of "partiality"; *προσωπολήμπτως*, *prosōpolēptēs*; v. 34; cf. Jas 2:1, 9; Rom 2:11).
- D. Rather, anyone who fears and follows the will of God is acceptable to him (Acts 10:35).

Conclusion

- 1. Acts 10:44-48 show that Cornelius responded favorably to Peter's sermon and was forgiven, Peter having commanded baptism in response to the sign of the Spirit given by God.
- 2. This text is different from other conversion texts in Acts. To authenticate Peter's mission (something 11:1-18 shows was important), God sent his Spirit in a miraculous way that corresponded to what the apostles had experienced in Acts 2. Thus, there is no recitation of what Cornelius and his household were to do in response to the message of good news.
- 3. But Peter's first sermon—when he first used the kingdom's keys—certainly gives us insight. He presented Jesus as Lord and Christ to an audience who, having heard the message, indicated their belief in him by their plaintive question ("what shall we do?"), repented in the name of Jesus, were immersed in his name, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-38).
- 4. Have you responded in this way to the good news of Jesus?

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