

The Unifying Power of Our Identity in Christ

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Part 3

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1. The title of the message this morning is "The Unifying Power of our Identity in Christ." The unifying power of our identity in Christ. We've seen that, Peter, not only the great theme of his letter is the identity of the believer. He wants us to know who we truly are in Christ. We mentioned that he's writing to Christian churches in Asia Minor, which is now modern-day Turkey, actually, the western half of modern-day Turkey. He's writing to believers that are experiencing increasing cultural hostility, escalating social animosity from those around them. The storm clouds of persecution are forming. Peter writes in 63 AD. By the end of 64 AD, a full-blown persecution will erupt out of the very center of the Empire of Rome itself brought about by the intentionality of the emperor Nero. And so, in the providence of God, though Peter doesn't know the future in and of himself, the Spirit of God leads him to write this letter to prepare believers for what will become perilous and difficult times. They will experience antipathy and opposition and spiritual warfare in ways that they had not imagined, and the question is how do you bear up during times of persecution? How do you deal with intense spiritual opposition, growing antipathy? And we see that his great concern is to show them their identity in Christ.

We've looked at this the last two Sundays. We talked about the fundamental importance of our identity in Christ which he begins the letter with and continues throughout. We saw the idea in the words "elect" and "alien." You need to know who you are if you're going to bear up under persecution. You must know, be grounded in who you truly are in Christ. As the Scripture makes clear, the believer is chosen. He belongs to God and because he belongs to God, he's a stranger in the world. He is an exile, an alien. You belong to God. You don't belong here and this has come about by the work of the Triune God. This is what we've talked about the last two Sundays. And what I want to do this morning is call your attention to another reality that is somewhat in the background, but it is something that we need to look at more clearly and appreciate more fully, and that is to whom Peter is writing precisely and understanding that, the implications of that in our lives today. And essentially what I'm going to, I mentioned this before, but I want to posit to you this morning is that Peter is writing to a largely Gentile audience. He knows that the majority of the people to whom he writes are Gentiles. It's a mixed audience. Sure, there are Jews in the churches, but as time goes on, as decade passes and a new decade comes, each decade brings a greater percentage of Gentile believers and a diminishing

percentage of Jewish believers. It becomes so pronounced as the century unfolds that Paul even in Romans 9 to 11, his letter, which he writes to the church at Rome, he feels compelled to spend three chapters, listen to this, he feels compelled to spend three chapters explaining why the Jews have rejected Christ. Romans 9 to 11. He's making this point, what has happened in the eternal providence of God in the hardening of the Jews and the bringing in of Gentiles.

And so Peter, though he had been as Paul says in Galatians 2:7-8, Peter was the apostle to the circumcision, that is to Jews, and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. But here Peter is writing to mostly Gentiles and what is surprising is the way that Peter speaks of this mostly Gentile audience, the way he sees them. He doesn't see them as a group of proselytes to Christianity as he would have with the old covenant understanding, because there were proselytes that came to the Jewish faith from all over; they would convert to Judaism and they were seen as proselytes, but they were, in a sense, second-class citizens. Peter sees all of those to whom he writes as full participants in the people of God, in the family of God, and this has implications for us because if we're going to bear up under suffering, you need to know who you are in Christ, and listen, you need to know who your brother and sister is in Christ, and you need to see yourself the way God sees you and you need to see your brother and your sister the way God sees them.

We need to be one as God intends for us to be in Christ and we see the evolution of Peter's understanding of this as we consider his life and I want us to look at that today, we're going to look at how he grows in his understanding of this mystery, what Scripture calls a mystery. In a number of places Paul speaks of this in Colossians and Ephesians, the mystery. He uses the word "mystery," biblically the word means something which was hidden beforehand or not fully known and has now been made clear. It was that which was not fully visible but has now been made apparent and obvious and clear. It's also that which we can't understand apart from the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. And the mystery which Paul speaks about is that Jew and Gentile would be one in Christ. In Colossians 1:27, he says, Christ and he's speaking to Gentiles, he says, "This was the mystery hidden from former ages, which is Christ in you Gentiles, the hope of glory." Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 3. This mystery, which he's a steward of, which is that the Gentiles are fellow citizens of God's household with Jews, fellow partakers of the promises with the Jews, not second-class citizens, completely equal before God and that equality has come about because both Jew and Gentile to be accepted by God must go to the same mediator, the same Savior. You must go to Jesus Christ himself and that's the basis of our unity. In Christ, if you're a Christian, if you have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, the most common way the New Testament speaks of you is not the label Christian, is not the label disciple, is not the label believer, the most common way the New Testament speaks of you is you are in Christ. You have been united to Christ. You are in him. He's in you and you are in him. This is over and over and over that's the refrain in the New Testament epistles.

Now this is relevant because it's always relevant but especially relevant today because we live in a day of identity politics. We're constantly talking about identity. But identity politics is the idea that your identity is based on the group that you belong to, your

ethnicity, or the special interest that you have, maybe as, you know, because of your sexual preference or because of your, you know, that's why I'm speaking in cultural language here. Of course, that's not the biblical terminology. Those things are perversions of God's design. But people are seen as a part of a group and your identity is who you are and what group you are. That's how it is in the present day. What's most relevant about you is the color of your skin or the place that you come from. There's much talk about unity, there's the talk about the need to unify and yet all that happens in the culture, this kind of approach does nothing but divide and the reality is, it's the gospel alone that unifies. And we have to understand that because we live in the world, we're to not be of the world but it takes great effort to not let the world shape us into its image. And the world wants you to think about yourself according to your ethnicity or according to your cultural background, according to your political affiliation, but God wants you to think about yourself based on your identity in Christ, and to see yourself that way and also your brother and sister.

I was reading a commentary by Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Ephesians this week and he commented on the fact, he's writing in the 1960's and he says one of the great tragedies, this is his word he uses, one of the great tragedies of the present day, this is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a British pastor, wonderful expositor of Scripture in London, Westminster Chapel in London, he says one of the great tragedies of the present day, the 1960's for him, was that too many preachers are preaching about unity but they're not preaching the gospel that alone produces unity. They're talking about all of the differences and the need that we have to unify, but they're neglecting the only thing that does unify, the message of Jesus Christ. For only as you come to Christ and I come to Christ do we meet each other truly in our hearts and become one. God must reconcile us to himself, and he reconciles us to each other as a necessary result because when you call on the same Father that I call on, we must be brothers and sisters and the differences that we have today that are becoming increasingly magnified in our culture, can make us feel discouraged and lose hope at really having unity, but we must not do that. We must realize that the power of the gospel is greater than any dividing power in the world. It is the power of God unto salvation, that's the gospel. And as we look at Peter and we follow the evolution of his own understanding, you're going to see what a profound difference the gospel makes in how we see one another.

Let's read verses 1 to 5 of 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in

heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to Your word always aware of our need of grace for the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they're spiritually discerned, and so we need Your Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts. Even as believers, we continue to ask You for the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit to make clear to us what You would have us see and to let these truths come not just into our minds, but may they transform our affections and our will and may You unite our hearts to fear Your name and to walk in Your ways. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the unifying power of our identity in Christ. The unifying power of our identity in Christ. I want to, first of all, point out to whom Peter is writing. He mentions five geographical locations: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia Asia and Bithynia. These are five geographical regions in Western Turkey, what's normally called Asia Minor. It's interesting that I mentioned it's a mixed audience. One of the things that you see as you read in Acts 2, Peter's first great sermon now with the Holy Spirit being poured out at Pentecost he preaches and 3,000 people are saved, remember? We're told in Acts 2:9 that there are believers there from three of these regions; Pontus, Cappadocia and Asia are mentioned in Acts 2:9. That is, when Peter's preaching remember when these people all hear the gospel in their own tongue, the Spirit of God comes upon the apostles and they're preaching, the people are hearing the gospel in whatever language they came, and so Luke, as he's recording the events of Acts 2, mentions that there were Parthians and Medes, and there were people from three of these five areas he mentions by name. There were Jews who had come from where they lived far away in Western Turkey and they have come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and some of them were saved. And if they stay for a period of time, that's what you see in the first six chapters, 6-7 chapters of Acts is the early church, the Jewish believers who had been saved who were residents of the area are there, but then also many of those people who had come and gotten saved stayed for longer than they intended. That's why they run out of money and the widows need to be cared for because they're short on supplies.

And so these Jewish believers now that have come to full faith in Christ, now go back home and so they're, in a sense, the first missionaries. And then 15-16 years later, Paul takes his first missionary journey and he goes up into Galatia and he ministers there. In his second and third missionary journeys he's in Asia, Ephesus, Colossae, these other cities. I mean, Paul doesn't go to Colossae, but he's in Ephesus and he's in other cities in Asia. So he's planting churches, and when he goes there, he's finding some who are believers already, many are being saved, and he goes first to his methodology when he goes to these various cities. Paul, even though he's an apostle to the Gentiles, where does he always go first when he goes into a city? He goes to the Jewish synagogue because the gospel was meant to go to the Jew first and after that the Greek. God in his economy of salvation had brought a people to himself, the Jewish people to reveal the gospel to the world through this people, and so now that Jesus has come, he sends the apostles out and

the apostles go first to the Jews but then they're taking the gospel to the Gentiles. And what you see as you read through Acts is that in each missionary journey Paul has an encounter with opposition and the opposition is always Jewish opposition. I mean, it's not always Jewish opposition, but the theme that happens over and over again is he's opposed mostly by Jews. Gentiles too, but the Jews are the ones who stir up the crowds. Acts 13 in Iconium and he says to them, "Since you have rejected the gospel, now we go to the Gentiles." And then in Acts 18 he's in Corinth now, that's in Europe, in Greece, on his second missionary journey. He's preaching in the synagogue, and again the Jews stir up opposition against him, and so he leaves and he goes and rents another building and he ministers to the Gentiles. And the same thing happens in Acts 19 in Ephesus.

And so what you see is over time, the Jews increasingly rejecting, the Gentiles increasingly becoming the main makeup of the church and, of course, by and large, almost all people are rejecting the gospel. The gospel is going out and just a few are being saved. But what's astounding, though, is the distance when you understand that the difference between Jew and Gentile, it makes all of our differences ethnically and culturally pale in comparison and the first point this morning is the great gulf dividing Jew and Gentile. The great gulf dividing Jew and Gentile. We're talking about the unifying power of our identity in Christ. I would have said the unifying power of the gospel but I want to make sure it would equally be a valid title but sometimes the word "gospel" is thrown around in such a way that this is a gospel issue, that's a gospel issue, we need to know what the gospel is. The gospel is Jesus Christ, and so the unifying power of our union with Christ, we're saved through union with him, that's the gospel. You must be united to Jesus through faith.

So the unifying power of our identity in Christ in the first point then the great gulf dividing Jew and Gentile, the attitudes of first century Christians or first century Jews toward Gentiles. In custom, belief, and habit, created this great separation and it made it really tough for the Jewish believers to embrace now that God is saving the Gentiles. When you think about this, you see it in a number of ways. Let me just point out a few passages too. You can write them down. John 4:9. This is how Jewish people would have thought about Gentiles. Now Jews are those who have descended from Abraham, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob becomes Israel, 12 tribes. Those 12 tribes become the ethnic people of Israel and they are God's people separated unto himself. Everyone else is the Gentiles. The whole rest of humanity. This tiny group of people are Jews and everybody else is Gentiles. And you see it in the New Testament this abiding influence of this separation. As mentioned, John 4:9 when Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman, he asked her for a drink of water and she says to him, "What are you doing asking me for a drink of water? Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans. They won't even talk to us. Why are You talking to me? I'm shocked!" Because it was a common practice of Jews in the first century not to speak to them.

In John 18:28, you remember when the Jews are trying to get Pilate to crucify Jesus and they're trying to make their case against him and Pilate has to come outside to meet with them? John 18:28 says because for them to have gone into the Praetorium would have defiled them at Passover, and they couldn't do that. You see, a Jew can't go into a

Gentile's house or abode or building in the first century. In fact, in Acts 11:2-3, when Peter is used by God to preach to the first Gentile converts, Cornelius and the folks gathered at his place, when he gets back to Jerusalem the Jews are appalled that he went into a Gentile's house and ate with them, okay? Now think about that, the difference, the ethnic distance, the great gulf between Jew and Gentile there in the first century, and the reality is that that great gulf is rooted in biblical truth. Now it's not that there's a perversion of it, there's a misreading of the Bible that's led into that but there is a seed of actual biblical truth that led to this distinction between Jew and Gentile and it was rooted in God's revealed will.

And let's look at that. I want you to see that. Turn with me in your Old Testament to Deuteronomy 7. This is why the Jews were to think of themselves as separate and distinct. They were to be holy, a holy people. Deuteronomy 7:1 says, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land," this is after the exodus, after the 40 years in the wilderness, they're about to go into Canaan and now Moses preaching to the people that are about to go into Canaan to take possession of the land says this, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them." Do you see that, that's strong language, isn't it? "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you." So the reason they must, part of the reason they are commanded by God to destroy these nations is because God is judging these nations for their wickedness, I'm going to show you in a moment, but also they are to protect themselves from any relationship with these people. They're not to make a covenant with them. They're not to enter into marriage with them. They are to keep themselves separate so that their devotion to God will be protected.

Now these things are troubling when you first read them. If this is new to you, this may be troubling to you and this is where you have to learn if you want to hear from God, you have to be willing to stay in the word and try to understand what he's saying. Listen to him. Don't come judging him by your standards. We all have a tendency to want to do that in our pride. We have to come and submit ourselves to the word, and when the word challenges you and unsettles you, don't ignore it. No, you don't ignore it. You deal with it, but you deal with it in a sense on your knees in prayer, and you say, "God, help me understand." Well, let's see how God helps us to understand in this very issue, why were they commanded to kill these people.

Look back, turn back a couple of books toward the front of your Bible past Numbers is Leviticus and look with me at Leviticus 18. Look at verse 1. Leviticus 18:1, "Then the LORD spoke," this is right before the, you know, this is basically within a year, a few years of what Moses writes in Deuteronomy. This is early on in that 40 year period and

that's later, so within decades. Moses says in Leviticus 18, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God.'" Now what he does in verses 6 and following is he starts outlining all of the wicked practices of the people in the land of Canaan, and what he basically shows us is how incredibly perverted these people are.

You see this come to a head, in a sense, or I think it helps you to see some of the ugliness of this, skip on down to verse 21. This is what the people in the land of Canaan were doing. This is 18:21, "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion. Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled)." Now he's saying, "Listen, things are so wicked in Canaan it is like Sodom and Gomorrah." It has gotten so bad that God's judgment needs to come upon these people. They have gone past any hope of repentance and they must be judged, and so that's why they are to be treated the way they are by the people of Israel. God is sending them in as an act of judgment.

It's interesting to just compare this also. In Genesis 15, God tells Abraham something really interesting. He says, "I'm going to give you the land of Canaan," Genesis 15, latter part of the chapter. He says, "but your servants are going to go and spend time in a distant land and be slaves in a distant land because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete." He says, "It's going to be 400 years they're going to be enslaved before I give them the land because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete." Amorite is a general name for a Canaanite. All of those seven nations in Deuteronomy 7 that we're talking about here in Leviticus 18, the wickedness of the Amorite was not yet complete. God is speaking to Abraham around 2000 BC. He sends judgment 1400 BC upon this, 600 years later. He holds off his wrath for 600 years in his mercy giving these people time to repent and then he sends in the nation of Israel.

So now think about this though, so that's understanding what God is doing but think about, then, how the Jews then view the nations. They know that they are to be very careful about engagement with the nations. These are people that have given themselves over to evil. It you turn over in Leviticus 20:22, he says, "You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have

abhorred them. Hence I have said to you, 'You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples." Verse 26, "Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." So he's saying, "Listen, their identity is they are to be separate and distinct. They're not to be like the world. They are to draw this distinction." And here before the Spirit has been given, before Christ has come, they are to make this kind of firm boundary.

So this is part of what is in their minds and in their history as they go through the Old Testament. Now listen, God is making clear, let me make this real clear: God is making clear in a way all throughout the pages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation that he always intended to save all people who would ever repent and believe on his Son. He makes this abundantly clear in the New Testament and it's clear enough in the Old Testament as I'm going to show you shortly. His purpose was always what he had in view in Revelation 7:9 where we see a multitude from every tribe and tongue and kindred around the throne of God in heaven worshipping the Lamb of God. This was always his plan because in Genesis 12:3 the beginning of his covenant with Abraham, the very first time he speaks to Abraham about the covenant he says, "Through your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed." That's the promise. Not just the Jews, all the families of the earth will be blessed through your seed, through Christ. So now this was there running through the Old Testament but they had this emphasis upon be separate, be holy.

You may remember when we were looking at Nehemiah, remember Nehemiah 13 if you were here a year or so ago when we were looking at that, do you remember where Nehemiah has to, he gets really bent out of shape because they're intermarrying again. Remember he pulls out the hair of some of their beards? I mean, he gets violent with them and he's a man of God. We talked about that at the time. Go back and listen to that message because I explain why Nehemiah was really doing what he needed to do, even though it's not the kind of thing that you normally would do today, at least I hope not. But it shows the heart of God. There's something, it is deadly, it is deadly to allow yourself to be exposed to the values of the world and to be around them and surrounded by them so that you become controlled by them because it leads people to eternal destruction.

Now all of this is in their minds in the first century. Nehemiah is one of the last books of the Old Testament written and so when they get saved and now the second point is the great gulf dividing Jew and Gentile, this gulf dividing Jew and Gentile makes every other gulf that we experience seem very small in relation. If God can bridge the gap between Jew and Gentile, God can bridge the gap between Black and White, Asian, Hispanic. He can bridge any gap. Second point, that was the great gulf dividing Jew and Gentile. The second point, the unifying power of the gospel. The unifying power of the gospel and the first subpoint here A, 2A is in Peter's life. In Peter's life.

What you see as you look at Peter's own life and ministry and I'm going to summarize things and I'm going to tell you where they are so you can look at them but for the sake of time we can't go to each passage. Peter is a Jew. He's called as a disciple and apostle of

Jesus Christ. One of 12, all 12 are Jews. And they're told right after they're chosen, Matthew 10 speaks of the choosing of the disciples and that Jesus sends them out on a preaching mission, and he tells them in Matthew 10:2-6, go to the lost sheep of Israel. You're to go to the lost sheep of Israel, Matthew 10. Then in Matthew 15 you have the story of the Syrophenician woman. Now think about this as Peter is a disciple of Jesus, he knows that he's the Messiah, he's coming to understand this. He has all this background of Jew, Gentile and he is with Jesus now. When they venture out, surprisingly they go into the region of Tyre and Sidon. Why are they out there? Well, maybe there's some Jews out here, I'm sure the apostles are thinking, the disciples are thinking. And there were but do you remember the Syrophenician woman, the woman of the region of Tyre and Sidon who comes to Jesus, her daughter's in distress and she starts crying out, "Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus ignores her. The text is really emphatic. He heard her but he ignored her. She keeps on crying out. The disciples finally are getting so embarrassed that she's crying out and they're like, "Lord, You gotta tell her to stop crying out. She's making a scene here." Jesus says, "I've only come to the lost sheep of Israel." He speaks to the disciples, doesn't speak to her. He speaks to them. He hears her, he does not speak to her. She comes up, throws herself on the ground before him and says, "Have mercy on me, Lord!" She presses past his ignoring her, she presses past his second time he pushes her away apparently, apparently pushes her away when he says to the disciples, "I'm only sent to the lost sheep of Israel." She falls on the ground at his feet and says, "Have mercy on me, son of David!" And then he says a third, he gives a third kind of a stiff arm to her and he says this, "Shall I take the bread that belongs to the children and give it to the dogs?" This is acknowledging the gap between Gentile and Jew. It's unsettling. I'm a Gentile. Most of you are Gentiles. He's saying in a sense, we relatively speaking at that moment in history we're dogs compared to the Jews. They had the covenants. They had the law. They had the prophets. We were in utter darkness, living lives of misery and ungodly wretchedness. He says to her, though, "Shall take the bread and give it to the dogs?" And she says to him, "O Lord, even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the table." And what does Jesus say? "Woman, your faith is great." What had been happening is he was not pushing her away, he was drawing her faith out.

Richard Sibbes, a great Puritan speaks of this, and he says with each time he apparently rebuffed her, she pressed on past it believing that he had come to bless her because she kept thinking, "If You're saying You're not here for the Gentiles, what are You doing in our land? Why have you left Israel and come here?" And she believed that he would save and he did save her. He gave her a blessing. He saved her soul. And think about that for Peter now. So Peter hears that and he would have been thinking right along the way, but then when he hears Jesus not only save her but commend her faith, "Woman, your faith is great," it resonates with something that he had heard a little while before in Matthew 8 when the centurion is saved. A Roman centurion, another Gentile sends word to Jesus that he has a servant who's ill and needs to be healed and Jesus prepares to come and the centurion meets him on the way and says, "Lord, You don't need to trouble yourself to come to my house. I, too, a man under authority. I know that You just need to say the word because I say the word and someone goes and they go, and I say come and they come, and You can say the word and this healing will be granted." And Jesus says this

about the Gentile centurion, "I have not seen such great faith in all of Israel." And then he says, "I tell you that many from Abraham's table will be shut out, and many from the farthest distances will be brought in to eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." What's happening is God is showing there's a baton being passed. The plan of God that had been centered on one people because of the need to reveal salvation to this glorious salvation progressively so we could understand it, that is now changing because Christ has come.

So Peter's experienced these things. He preaches in Acts 2. Jews get saved. He's there in Jerusalem. Persecution breaks out. Then he moves down to Joppa or to, anyway, he moves down to another place. Joppa is one either where Cornelius was or where Peter was, I forget. In Acts 10, in fact, let's just turn there and we'll find out ourselves. Acts 10. "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion," another centurion, "of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." He has a vision in which an angel speaks to him and tells him to send to Joppa for a man named Peter who is staying by the sea. And so he sends the man, he has this vision, an angel speaks to him and he does what the angel said but he is a Gentile. He's a Roman, he's an Italian. He sends to the town of Joppa. In the meantime, God is working on Peter. Look at verse 9, "On the next day," as those people, those men are "approaching the city," Peter doesn't know it, "Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray." It's lunchtime. It's 12 o'clock, that's the sixth hour in Jewish rendering. It's noon. "But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!'" Now Peter is a faithful Jew and he knows that the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 were given by God to help his people be holy. They were to only eat certain types of animals. They were not to eat unclean animals. There were many animals, many more animals were unclean than were clean and he's just been told in a commanding, authoritative voice, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." He knows who's talking to him because he says in verse 14, "By no means, Lord." He knows the Lord is telling him to get up and kill and eat and he thinks he's being tested, like you're trying to trick me, though the Lord would never tempt you to do evil, so he should know better than that. "By no means, Lord." Essentially, "No, Lord." Those are two words that do not belong together, do they? "No Lord, for I've never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times. He has the same command, the same vision, the sheet comes down again, the Lord says, "Take, kill and eat. What God has cleansed no longer consider unholy." It happens a third time in verse 16, "immediately the object was taken up into the sky. Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate." At the exact time, here they show up knocking at the gate. Peter's just had this vision. They say, "We're from a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He was told in a vision to come get you." Peter knows, "Certainly I'm supposed to go." He goes. He shows up there and he tells him, the first thing he says, "Listen, you guys know it's not lawful for me to come into your house but

God has shown me that I'm no longer to regard any man as unclean in himself like that." There's a new day. A new day has dawned and he preaches the gospel to them, the Holy Spirit falls upon them, and he knows that they've been received by Christ the same way he was received by Christ. Then chapter 11, I mentioned earlier, is where he goes back to Jerusalem and they're saying, "What are you doing eating with," or he goes back to where the Jews were, "What are you doing eating with Gentiles?" And he says, he tells, recounts the story. And you have a repetition of the story again in chapter 11.

Now think about the impact that had on his life. He knows that, "Wait a minute, God is receiving Gentiles into His kingdom with the same blessing that we have." It's interesting he doesn't, he struggles with this and the implication is this is such a massive transformation the way he's supposed to see Gentiles. Paul, interesting in Galatians 2, read this this week, Galatians 2:11 and following. The Apostle Paul, if you've read Galatians you'll remember this, rebukes Peter to his face publicly. Remember what happened? Peter had been eating with the Gentile believers. They're having fellowship meals, these Christians together. Peter had been sitting at the table with the Gentiles, but when some Jewish believers from James, that is from Jerusalem, come up there, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and he's only eating with the Jews now. Paul, seeing that the gospel is being attacked does not privately go and talk to Peter. "Hey Peter, you really shouldn't be doing this." There's a place for public confrontation, and there's a place for private. Because the gospel's at stake Paul says, "I stood up before everyone and said, 'Peter, why are you living like we used to live under the old covenant,' essentially. "You know that we, Jew and Gentile both come to faith in Christ. We come to be accepted by God in Christ. Why are you treating Gentiles differently?"

Peter was humbled. We're not told his response, but surely he repented. 1 Peter is a pretty good indication of that because he's writing to a mostly Jewish audience. When you look at chapter 1, verse 14 of 1 Peter, he seems to be assuming that they were the audience was formerly, this is 1 Peter 1, "as obedient children not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance." Chapter 2 verse 10 and he says, "Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God." He would not have said that about the Jews. They were the people but they weren't truly spiritually the people, but he's saying this about Gentiles. And then chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, when he's exhorting them to no longer "live the rest of their time in the flesh or the lusts of men but for the will of God, For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles having pursued sensuality." He's speaking to a mostly Gentile audience and he's applying the rich blessings of the Jews to them.

Now I said this had always been true in the Bible, it really had. Genesis 12:3, the beginning of the covenant God says, "Abraham, I'm going to bless the whole world. All the families of the earth will be blessed through your seed." That is Christ. In Exodus 12:38 we're told that when the Israelites went out from Egypt, there's these little like threads that run through the Old Testament, sometimes it gets kind of thick and sometimes it's really small. Here's one of the small ones in Exodus 12:38 it says when they went out from Egypt they went out a mixed multitude. When the Egyptians saw

what happened, they saw the blessing of God, there were many of them who repented and said, "We're with you now. We will serve your God." The mixed multitude went out.

The Jews were told in Exodus 19:3-6 that they were to be a kingdom of priests. Peter takes that language and applies it to Jew and Gentile together in 1 Peter 2, Ted read it earlier. But a kingdom of priests. What is a priest? A priest is one who worships God and who mediates God presence to others. The Jews were called to be a people who would mediate the blessings of God and share them with the nations. That was their intention. Now they were to be separate at the same time, they were to keep this tension. You can't be like the nations, you can't be like the world, but you're in the world to be a light to the world. And you have some incredible examples in the rest of Scripture. You remember the book of Ruth that we preached on some years ago? Think about that, a whole book about a woman who was a Moabite, not supposed to enter the temple to the 10th generation if you're a Moabite, but here is God saving a Moabite and she's the hero of the book. And she is, remember the wonderful climax of that book. Remember, she marries Boaz and she is the great grandmother of David. Awesome. A whole book.

How about Jonah? Does God care about the Gentiles? Jonah wishes he didn't. Remember, he's told to go to Nineveh to this incredibly wicked place, a place that deserved to be destroyed just like Canaan did, but here in the amazing infinite mercy of God, God says, "Go preach to those Ninevites." And Jonah doesn't want to go, do you know why he doesn't want to go? Because he knows that, "If I go preach, they'll get saved because if God tells me to go do it, it's going to happen and I don't want those guys to get saved. I hate them." And so he goes the opposite direction, gets on a boat, ends up in a whale's belly, and then finally gets vomited up on the seashore and this time he decides, "I guess I'd better go." And he goes and preaches and what happens? His message is basically 40 days and Nineveh is no more. Doesn't have three points in a poem. He just says 40 days and Nineveh is no more. I think he tried to bare-bones it down hoping it's not going to have impact. But the king of Nineveh and the people repent in sackcloth and ashes and God brings about a revival and it makes Jonah mad and he sits outside the city and broods. And the message of the book of Jonah is to the Jewish people at large, "Will you fulfill your calling to be a kingdom of priests or not? You must reach out to the Gentiles."

Daniel 4. Really cool how I preached all these Old Testament books that have these examples. These are the best examples in the Old Testament. Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar gets saved. You have this man who's wicked and ungodly now speaking the truth of God, praising the King of heaven, acknowledging his rule. In fact, Daniel, remember chapters 2 to 7, it has 12 chapters, 2 to 7 are written in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonians. What's God doing speaking in their language? He is reaching out to the lost to be saved. The Jews had all of this testimony, so in the first century, yeah, they had those things about being separate and all of that, but they should have seen be holy but be evangelistic. It's not either/or, it's both/and.

And so Peter comes to see this and he's like, "Yeah, this is the way it's always been." And he goes through all that he experienced. He has Paul rebuke him. He's continuing to think through things, and by the time he writes this letter, he's willing to confer upon Jew and

Gentile the same status. "You Gentile believer, you Jewish believer, you are now the people of God. You are the royal priesthood. You are the holy nation. You are the temple that has been created to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. You are the ones who have the same birth," like we just read a minute ago in verse 3, "you were born again. You have the same Father I have," Peter says. "You are my brothers. You are my sisters. You have the same identity and we can stand against all that's happening in the world. If the world hates us, what does it matter? God has overcome the world. We are in this together. You are fully everything that I've come to see that I am," Peter says, "as one in Christ you are." Now, if you believe that about your brothers and sisters, what difference does so many of the things that the society let's divide us make? God has brought us from such a long distance away and he's brought us into his very throne room. If he can do that, how can we possibly be divided or separated?

This is why the gospel is that which unifies. The gospel breaks down the dividing wall of hostility because it makes us know we're nothing. Hey, we are nothing in ourselves but look what we are in Christ. In Christ we are everything that we could have ever imagined. In Christ not in us, in Christ. And that's true of you if you're in Christ. And listen, I want you to hear this: if you're not in Christ, no matter how you may feel very far away from what it means to be a Christian, you may feel so far away and so lost in sin and wrapped up in all of the wickedness and how it tends to just grip your soul, you may feel like there's no hope for you, but I'm telling you if you come to Jesus there is every bit of hope for you. He will break the cords of your sin, and though you are as far away as you can imagine, he will bring you near into God's throne room because Christ can do that. So don't listen to the lies of your own heart or to the enemy of our souls who's trying to deceive you saying you're too far lost. No, no one is too far lost for Jesus. You keep pressing on saying, "Jesus, I'm looking to You. I'm trusting in You. I'm believing in You." And you will find that he brings you all the way into his throne room and, listen, that means that we need to see the evangelism around us, the people who seem the farthest away, the most hopeless, the most destroyed by the world, they're not beyond hope.

God delights to take those who are the farthest away and bring them nearest to the throne. Look at the Apostle Paul. Look at Mary Magdalene. God has a special place in his heart for those who are far away, so keep preaching the gospel, keep loving the lost and keep treasuring your brothers and sisters. We're in this together until Jesus comes back. A glorious gospel like this needs to be shared, it needs to be treasured, and we need to worship God.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for so great a salvation. We stand in awe, Lord, of You and Your ways and Your word. We confess the coldness of our affections, the hardness of our hearts, the foolishness of our thinking. We allow things to divide us that in this world are big things, but when You bring them to the cross, they are nothing. Increase our faith. Make us people who so treasure the gospel that our lives are just shining examples of what reconciliation with God and reconciliation with others looks like. And Lord, give

us in that in the shared joy of being the people of God, give us this assurance of our identity in Christ, make us strong and faithful followers no matter what comes in days ahead. Whether it's increasing cultural opposition or it's just adversity, difficulty, make us faithful. You are worthy, Lord Jesus. Be exalted in Your people. We pray for those that are here who need to repent and believe today, Lord, let them fly to Your cross, run to You. You said that You will by no means cast out the one who hopes in You. You always say, "Come, come to the waters. Come drink freely of the water of life." We praise Your holy name. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.