

The Pattern

Upside Down

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Acts 10:1-4; Acts 10:41-45

Preached On: Sunday, July 11, 2021

Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 10, and if you're a guest or a first time visitor with us, as we turn to Acts 10, I want to welcome you to a journey through the book of Acts in this season of our church's life as we walk very systematically through the chronology of those early days not only of the church but of the early believers. Kind of one of the, I guess the places that we're kind of circling the proverbial wagons around is in chapter 17, verse 6. There's this incredible statement. Here we are just a few years after the discovery of the empty tomb, that early church that began with just a little over 100 people has now multiplied to several thousands. It says there in chapter 17 that these are they who have turned the world upside down. And as we've been walking through the book of Acts, one of the things that we're addressing is how can we emulate those early believers? How can our lives mirror their affection for the things of the Lord and him in particular?

Today as we come to Acts 10, this is one of those watershed passages in the Bible, not just in the book of Acts but in the entirety of scripture because as the early church has been established, chapter 2, we saw that the Jewish individuals from all nations were gathered, Pentecost, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and in Acts 8 we have the Samaritans with Simon the sorcerer, we have Philip, that individual going down, and we see the gospel penetrating that culture as well. But beginning in Acts 10, it is a watershed passage because from this point forward, not just through the book of Acts but up until this present day, the overwhelming majority of those who would hear, believe and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ would be those of a biblical definition of a Gentile background. The gospel is literally beginning in chapter 10, going to the uttermost, to the furthest places of the world, and because the majority of us have this same background, we can identify with these in chapter 10. I'm desiring that this will hopefully establish a pattern in our lives. In other words, I want us to see how is it that these Gentile people in Acts 10, how do we respond to the living Lord.

Now when I say a pattern, before we read in Acts 10, allow me to address two extremes that occur when I say a pattern. There are some of you that when you hear, well, there's a pattern of how God moves, you tend to fall off one side of the proverbial cliff and go, "Well, God can do whatever he wants to do, anytime he wants to do it. He doesn't need me to be a part of it." There's also another side of the extreme that says, "Well, if I do A,

B, C, then that mandates that God must do D." Well, what we're going to see in Acts 10, that the answer is not either/or but both/and. We see at the end of chapter 10 that God is going to reveal himself, he is going to move as he so desires, but we're about to see a man by the name of Cornelius who an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "The Lord has heard your prayers and is now going to act and move."

So beginning in verse 1 of chapter 10, it says,

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Now we're actually going to fast forward into verse 30 of this passage because in between is this famous event where Peter is on the top of a roof and he sees the Lord descend in a sheet three times saying, "Do not call unclean that which is clean." Not just a lesson on Levitical dietary laws but more importantly that those that were seen as unclean, the Gentiles, would now be saved through the person of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in verse 30,

30 And Cornelius said [that's unto Peter], Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. 34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they

slew and hanged on a tree: 40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Again, this is the beginning of to the uttermost. This is that initiation of the gospel to the Gentile people that, as I said earlier, will be the primary means, mechanism and vessel by which the gospel will go forth even unto this present day.

So what is taking place to set the scene? What is the pattern in Cornelius' life? If you think about it just from a sociological perspective, he's kind of our great great great great grandfather when it comes to culture. What was it that was a part of his life? What was important in his life because as we'll see, that if these are a part of our lives, then we allow ourselves to be a part of what God is doing and how he is moving. There are four very simple things. They may sound somewhat elementary as far as the communication thereof, but we're going to see today with the implementation, not so much.

The first thing we see is that he was a man of prayer. Notice it says in verse 4, it says that, "your prayers have been heard." Isn't that interesting? The first thing that the Lord says unto him or through this angelic being is that your prayers have been heard, and you expect to hear that from me, you expect to hear that in a dialog in your Sunday school class. Of course, we should be people of prayer, we understand that in principle but can I ask you a very difficult question? In your times of prayer no matter how brief or extended, in your prayer life how much of your prayer is more for the provision of God than the presence of God? Think about it. Most of our communication with the Lord is that which will help us, assist us, relieve us, come beside us, but what does the angel say? The angel says, "Your prayers are answered."

That's interesting because when Peter shows up and the Lord speaks through him, what is the message given to him? Did he respond about a health condition that needed attention? No. Did he respond about a financial situation that somehow needed rectified? No. What did he communicate? The gospel of Jesus Christ, that this man Cornelius could have a vibrant, walking, real relationships with the God of the universe. And if you and I desire for the world to be turned upside down, maybe just maybe we should pray more for God

to be present however he so chooses than God to provide that which we think is necessary or important.

You know, throughout time but in particular the last couple of hundred years, there are certain names or individuals that just are somewhat identified with the movements of God, the awakenings and the revivals and such. One such man in the middle of the 1900s was named Finney. Finney was an ardent preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in fact, he preached so much, so often, to so many people, particularly in the New England area, that in the upper part or upper state New York, they actually still to this day in some circles refer to it as the burned out district. Now you know that you've preached a lot when they identify the area as we are burned out of here in the preaching. That's how much he preached.

So you hear of the impact of the gospel in some of these areas, and don't get me wrong, we could study the means and the methods thereof of Charles Finney, but most importantly was a man by the name of Nash. He's kind of the figure that doesn't get a whole lot of attention when you look at that time period of awakenings and revival. This man took it upon himself that wherever Finney was going to be preaching, a couple of three weeks in advance, he would go into that community with just some peers of himself, he would find a home of a believer that would be receptive, he would ask, "Could I stay with you for a few weeks before Finney arrives and just use your house as a house of prayer?" Everywhere he would go, Nash would go before him. One such time, Finney rolled into town. He knew where they were going to be staying. When he knocked upon the door, the lady of the home came very concerned. She said, "Oh, Mr. Finney, I'm so glad you're here. I think something's wrong with Mr. Nash." He said, "What do you mean?" She said, "He hasn't eaten in a week. I haven't seen him in days and all I hear from the basement are groans, growls and noises. I think something's wrong with Mr. Nash." He said, "Ma'am, don't worry. There's nothing wrong with Mr. Nash. He is just begging the presence of God for your community." How often do we ask for the provision of God when what we should be calling is, "God, may your presence be here no matter what that looks like and how it changes the provisions we so desire."

The second thing we see in this passage in verse 4 and 5, and I'm going to use a phrase that's a little more, I guess, collective than it is individual, is that the "plates filled up." Notice what it says here in verse 4, "your prayers and your alms have come up before God." It's interesting this man Cornelius was such of an understanding of the power of the authority of who God was that he was giving, he was financially giving of his own, shall we say, resources to help the ministries thereof and the movements of. You know, it's at this point where most of us typically default to, "Well, absolutely. We know that we should be giving. We know we should be generous. We know that we should trust the Lord with all of our financial resources." But it's interesting that the very first time that you see somebody in the Bible actually physically worship the Lord by giving of a financial means, not just a sacrifice, is in Genesis 14. We have a man by the name of Abram, soon to become Abraham when Isaac will be born, the child of promise. He wins this great battle. He is met by a guy who's one of the most fascinating characters of all the Bible, a guy by the name of Melchizedek. He's the king and the prince of Salem. He's a

priest as well. He meets him along the way and Abram just – listen to this – not just naturally but supernaturally says, "Do you know what? I'm going to honor the Lord with a tenth of all the spoils." Now before some of you say, "You know, when you start using that term 'tenth,' it just, it's legalistic." Well, it can't be legalistic if the law hasn't been written yet. The law that came through Moses had not even been given by God yet. In other words, there's just something inside of us that says that we should be as God for he gave in John 3:16, did he not? "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son"?

You know, Matthew 6, Jesus is preaching what we refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. Multitudes of issues but there he spends a little time on the finances of life. Can we just confess that these are oftentimes a distraction, even a deterrent. We get consumed with them at times. Jesus makes a statement in Matthew 6:21 that I believe could be one of the most misquoted verses in all of the Bible. Now I didn't mean taken out of context. Misquoted. We often say it backwards. Here is what Jesus said, he said, "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." What we commonly say is, "Well, where my heart is, that's where my treasure will be." We know that's not true because how many times have our loved ones or a situation come into our lives that our heart just breaks for but there's no means to assist? If it's where our heart was, then obviously the treasures would rightfully follow. But here's what Jesus has said: if that's where your treasure is, where you put that which you earned, your heart will naturally follow.

Now I've teased for years that when my children began to go and experience the college experience, that no matter where they went that I would always wear the shirt or the hat of the university that I attended just to remind them of what's actually behind the scenes contributing to the tuition bill. But do you know what I've discovered? I haven't done it one time. Do you know why? Because my treasure is down the road so my heart's there too. I mean, come on. I mean, we've got to. I haven't worn a Baylor hat there yet because where your treasure is, that's where your heart's going to follow.

You know, it's interesting we've done all the studies, we've done all the math, and as much as we champion and we aim in that, do you know that today even though coming out of a global pandemic we've known that the believers in Jesus Christ, the church of Jesus Christ has been just unbelievable in faithfulness and giving. I mean, absolutely unbelievable. But you know, the studies show that the average person who claims to be a believer in Jesus Christ, the average person who says that their local fellowship of faith is critical and important to their lives, when you start fleshing out the numbers, the average individual, average family gives about 2.5%. Now there's a lot of ways we could address that but can I just give you a comparison today? During the Great Depression, during the time period in our culture where financial strain was worse than any other time, where food was scarce and shelter was difficult to obtain, did you know that the average percentage of giving by believers then was 3.3%. You know, we can argue about net and gross and 10% and legalism, can we just put that on the side for a moment and say I think it speaks very loudly to us that we actually trust the Lord with our finances less today than we did during the Great Depression.

What happens here? There's a prayer of presence over provision. There's a willingness to be sacrificial and to be giving without any strings attached. And then in verse 5, the third thing takes place. Notice what he says, "now send men to Joppa." He's telling Cornelius, this is the angel that's speaking, "I need you to grab some of your guys, go to Joppa and grab Simon Peter." Now fast forward to verse 33. Notice when Cornelius recounts the event. He says, "Immediately therefore I sent to thee." And there are these men that show up, for lack of better terms, to bridge or to broker this arrangement. Why is this important? Because when we look at the life of Cornelius, when you look at Acts 10, it just wasn't the prayers of presence, it wasn't just the "plates filling up" and giving sacrificially, what we might call the positions filled up. You notice in this story that these men who had to take a journey, these men who had to sacrifice their time, there's no arguing, there's no disputing, there's no complaining, there is just a simple willingness to do whatever it takes to facilitate whatever God is doing.

Now it's at this point that most of you expect me again to kind of default to some of the standard metrics that we have in the local churches in our culture and community. It's been said by many that 20% of the people typically do 80% of the service. I might argue after three decades of ministry it might be 90/10, if you know what I mean. It might be 10% that are serving in 90% of the capacities, and yet we can talk about that and dialog but you and I saw this or are seeing this right now in our culture. I would daresay that every single one of you has experienced what I'm about to share with you. In recent months maybe you've gone to a restaurant, maybe you've gone to a retail store, maybe some place of business, and when you entered there was a sign that was on the door. It said, "Please be respectful. Please be patient with our staff. Because of a lack of personnel, we don't have enough folks to take care of this. Just be patient with us." I've had endless conversations of how many of you, myself included, are so frustrated. This place of business, this restaurant cannot function as it's intended to because there's not enough people behind the scenes.

I want you to think about that illustration. I want you to imagine hypothetically that you were establishing a business in this community, you were establishing a restaurant, you're the one who's going to put it all on the line. Could you ever imagine this mentality, we're going to open the doors, see how many people come to eat, then we'll train our staff. You would never do that, right, because you'd be out of business. How many times have you said in your heart and mind, "Well, if God brings the people, then I'll teach. If God fills the parking lot, then I'll go help." You see, we've got it backwards once again. If you were establishing a business, if you were establishing a restaurant, what would you do? You would train dozens of people in advance not knowing who would walk in the door.

I know it's a rhetorical question but can you imagine if Acts 2 happened in our community? Imagine next Sunday when you show up there are an additional 3,000 people than we were expecting. You say, "What would we do?" It would be an issue, wouldn't it? What if you opened a restaurant with not a single employee, just seeing how many people were interested in that food item before you trained them? You know, maybe just maybe our willingness to do, our willingness to serve in advance is the pattern that God wants to utilize to ministry, reach and turn this world upside down. Can you

imagine we would never do it in a business, why would we do it in our family of faith? Why would we say, "Well, if they come I'll help"? We would always be ready to assist believing that God would bring those who are coming.

Speaking of coming, verse 33 of this story I believe is one of the most unique, most powerful statements in the entirety of the book of Acts. We talk about the world turning upside down, we talk about the gospel going forth to the Gentiles, notice what it says in verse 33. "Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come." Listen to this next statement, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things." I want you to notice those four words: we are all here. I mean, that is more powerful today than it may have ever been in my existence. You and I whether here in person or online, we're coming out of the backside of a global pandemic. We walked through a time where no matter how bad we wanted to "be a part of a worship service," it was deemed not wise. You know, it's interesting when you're told you can't, you want to do more, do you not? And as we're walking out of this pandemic, one of the things that we've discovered is that in our culture we've missed being with other people. We've missed being in a place where you could feel the energy of other people. And can I just allow this one very specific and very close to the heart of most of us in this community illustration, what we know as an athletic event does not have near the presence when it's 20% at capacity. In fact, I know that many folks were not offered the opportunity this last year to attend a variety of sporting events in our area. I will say that I was privileged to do so on a few occasions and it's not the same. It's not the same when you get up to cheer and you can't hear anybody else cheer because there's nobody within 20 feet of you. There is something about the synergy when people come together. You know that's why we call it home field advantage, right? Why? Because we're going to give the visiting team a small little sliver of this section so that we can drown you out with the noise, the cheers, whatever it may be. In fact, oftentimes let me just go to the sport of football, we consider it a personal goal to get so loud together that the other team cannot hear themselves call their own plays.

You know, this past season it didn't matter how loud we got with the capacity we had, the quarterback could hear everything that was going on, communicate it. We've see it in all areas, right? Can we apply it to our lives of faith? Now hear me clearly, I'm not trying to guilt anybody who may be on the other side of the camera for health reasons, whatever, is not with us today, but First Baptist, Opelika, and if you're a guest or visitor, forgive me for going here but I have to use it as an illustration: why is Christmas Eve so special here? Can I answer it? Because we're all here. Everybody talks about Christmas Eve. Everybody talks about how incredible that service is. We're having to put chairs out, we're having to wait for the second service. It is phenomenal because we're all here. Can you imagine if we had Christmas Eve every Sunday? Imagine if we were all here every Sunday, the energy, the synergy, the celebration.

You know, we look at Acts 10 and let's be honest, it's kind of this big picture of the gospel, this large picture of it going forth to the Gentiles, but allow me to use an illustration more of specific. You know, 30+ years of ministry, for a period of that time I had the privilege of being in what we call vocational evangelism where I traveled literally

the world preaching here and there, all types of, kind of the best way I can illustrate it particularly today, you know, the students that are at camp this week, I was the pastor at camp. That's what I did primarily during the summers. People have asked me throughout the years, did you ever see God move in such a way that you just couldn't explain it? Did you ever see God pour out in a community, in a church where you just left almost as if you were walking in the book of Acts? I'm sad to report that that experience was less than a handful but can I share with you one?

I was in a small community. It was a rural community. They had called me there to lead what we would call a protracted meeting or a revival service. It started as you would expect, you know, kind of the momentum, it's kind of slow building and such, and don't get me wrong, it kind of felt like other weeks. But you just sensed there was something different. There was one night during that series of worship services that it just poured out. There was one night where, I mean, it was unmistakable that God just showed up in a way that we couldn't explain. His presence was so far beyond our provision.

Can I share with you what happened before that service began? Everybody was crowding into that little rural church. Space was at a premium. Because of the heat the windows were open. It's almost like the books you've read, kind of picturesque, so to speak. I was standing at the front door just watching, just praying, just mesmerized by what I was seeing. This little church that was half-full on a normal Sunday was for the first time in years having to go get out some chairs and people standing outside. A man approached me. He had a look of concern but excitement on his face. He was flush in the face. There were tears in his eyes. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know who this man was. I had no idea. I didn't know what was taking place. I didn't know what had happened. I just didn't know. He came and he literally just fell upon my shoulder just weeping and weeping. I said, "Friend, is everything okay?" He said, "Oh my, Jeff. Oh my." I said, "What's going on?" He said and he introduced, he was the superintendent of the school district. I didn't know that. He said, "Jeff, I've been standing in the back of the church. Every kid we have between 1st and 12th grade is here tonight." Every single one of them and now you wonder why that night was the watershed event. Now you know why is it that the Lord said, "Here we go. Get ready. My presence is going to be like you've never seen before." Had they prayed? Yes. Had they given? Absolutely. Were they serving? You bet. But something just happens when we all show up.

They showed up. We understand the magnitude now of what that means. The Lord turns the world upside down. In Acts 10, this is the pattern, this is "our story." What would happen individually, what would happen corporately if we actually followed the pattern? God might just do what he did in Acts 10.