

Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian lawyer, political non-violent revolutionist, and anti-colonial advocate recalls in his autobiography how, in his student days in England, he was deeply touched by reading the Gospels in the NT. He seriously considered converting to Christianity that seemed to offer a real solution to the caste system that divided the people of India. One Sunday, he attended a church service and decided to ask the minister for enlightenment on doctrine and salvation. But when Gandhi entered the sanctuary, he was refused a seat and was told that he should go back to his own people to worship. He left and never came back. “If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu!”

Yet Christianity is a message that is for the good of the world. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” John tells us (Jn. 3:16). And in Acts 10, we get the account of how the story of Israel, her redemption, and her goal to be a light to the nations becomes a reality through Jesus, the true and pure Jew, who brings light to the world. What is it about God’s work that ought to inform us about how Christianity is good for the world?

Get God’s Global Vision (vv. 1-16)

The scene shifts in Acts 10 to a man named Cornelius. We are told that he was a centurion in the Italian Regiment. Since he is in Caesarea, we assume that he was not commissioned. In his role, he was not a high ranking official but was responsible for overseeing anywhere from 80-500 men. Luke tells us that Cornelius was God-fearing, and we can assume that during his time in the region of Israel that he had been exposed to the teachings of Judaism. While he had not converted, he had become deeply persuaded by the teachings to care for the poor and prayed to God himself.

One day he had a vision that God had heard his prayers and that he should send his men to Joppa to get a man named Peter who was staying at Simon the Tanners house. So he sent messengers and a soldier who had been caring for him to Joppa – a full day’s trip.

In the meantime, Peter was going about his daily prayers, coming before God as he had been accustomed to when he fell into a trance – a state where he was awake and had a vision. In the vision he saw a large sheet come down from heaven containing all sorts of animals that Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 forbade. And suddenly the voice told him to take up and eat. Peter recognized the voice and cried out to the Lord that he could not eat these animals – the OT law forbade it! But God had told him that he should take up and eat three times, and then the sheet was taken up into heaven.

All these things were revolting to Peter. We fail to appreciate how revolting this heavenly request was to Peter. Peter was so accustomed to a certain diet. This diet had been the practice of the Jews for centuries, and it had become the way that Jews marked themselves off from every other ethnicity and people group. The Jewish diet was one way that God’s people had distinguished themselves from the nations.

But over time, their dietary practices became more than an identity marker for who they were as the people of God. It became a badge of superiority and caused them to look at anyone who did not eat kosher to be dogs and filthy animals.

In Peter's vision, however, he had been told not to call anything impure that which God had made clean. And this would have disoriented Peter. But it would prepare him for what would follow. For God to declare the OT food laws now to be complete would challenge Peter's identity, his values, his beliefs. It would cause him to question his Jewishness and all of the ethnic markers that he had grown up with that set him apart.

God had given a vision – a grand vision – of his purposes to Peter. At this moment, Peter could not understand what was about to happen. But before Peter could go with the message of grace, Peter had to understand the grace of God that had reached him.

We are tempted to act towards others in ways that excludes people based on outward appearances. We too easily dismiss those who are different than us. But when God gives us a global vision of what he wants to do, what we need to see is that God welcomes all into his kingdom who are brought in by grace. The unclean. The detestable. The dirty. The creepy things.

This is how God works. God's global vision is that he welcomes people into his presence, especially the creepy crawling things. We are so used to a Christianity that looks similar to us, with practices like ours, so that we can get people who look like us to join us.

But God's vision for his kingdom is one of radical diversity. He invites people who are unclean to be brought in – even those that come creeping and crawling. What we need to see is that God's global vision ought to be our vision. There is a message for the world, and the display of his glory and grace will challenge our attitudes, any feelings of superiority, and our relationship with people who are different than us. For God's grace reminds us that we came into the kingdom not because we were so clean, but because we came as creepy crawly creatures who were unclean ourselves.

Be God's Global Messengers (vv. 17-33)

While Peter was wondering about the vision, the men from Cornelius arrived. Peter would have been taken aback by the presence of some messengers and the soldier unless the Spirit of God had prepared him to go.

Now Peter faced a critical moment. We are told that he was in Joppa, and this detail takes us back to another missionary moment in the OT. There, another missionary was called to go to a people that were unclean. Jonah had been told by the Lord to go to Nineveh, the great city of

his enemies, and bring to them a message of warning about the punishment for sin and the need for them to change. Jonah had refused at first, fleeing to Joppa and getting on a boat to go as far away as he could from those filthy dogs. But the grace of God had reached him.

Now Peter had his Jonah moment. Like Jonah, he knew that by God sending him to the nations, Deuteronomy 32:21 was true – the Lord was provoking the Jewish people by sending his message to the nations. But would Peter go?

But in the end, Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. And thus would begin his journey to welcome strangers, people who were unclean, people who would have formally disgusted him.

This would be the beginning of Peter’s journey away from his attitude of superiority. He would struggle with this problem for much of his life. Paul tells us in Galatians 2 that he had to confront Peter at one point because Peter refused to eat with foreigners on one occasion. When those from a strong Jewish background came, Peter refused to eat with those who were not Jewish. But by the end of his life, Peter would die in Rome – the center of power of the “unclean” nations.

The next day, Peter would go the 30+ mile trip to Caesarea with some others and with the men from Cornelius. Upon entering the house, Cornelius “fell at his feet and worshipped him.” Here was the challenge to Peter’s attitude of superiority. A Roman centurion falling at the feet of a fisherman in homage. What would Peter do? He would recall his vision and confess that he had been challenged by his own attitude of superiority. And what he found was the most receptive audience to the message of the cross.

The message of Christ crucified is for the world. It was never intended to be for a select group. But who would you struggle to have into your home? What if God had called you to go to the home of someone whose political views were the exact opposite of yours? What if God called you to go to the home of someone who was curious about Christianity who lived a lifestyle that you found repulsive? Could you go and sit with someone and tell them about Christ if they were a radical member of BLM? Could you?

We are called to be God’s global messengers. And the global message doesn’t mean that we have to go around the world to share Christ. It means that we have to be willing to go to the person next door who is radically different than us because we came crawling in to the kingdom by the grace of God.

Speak God’s Global Message (vv. 34-43)

As Cornelius welcomed Peter as a receptive audience, Peter began to explain the message of God’s grace. First, it is a message that is radically inclusive – for all have sinned and fall short of



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

the glory of God. We have more in common with people because we are all sinners. We are all needing God's grace. We are the ones who nailed him to the tree, condemning Christ to death. But Peter saw the Lord raised. He ate with him. He experienced resurrection power. Therefore "all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (v. 43). Everyone. This is the message that we proclaim. It is a global message!

Here is what is needed: we need to tell others about this good news. Jesus has died. He has risen again. And he has conquered sin and death for the forgiveness of sins for everyone who believes. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace. No one is beyond the hope of Christ. No one. Why? Because Jesus faced death itself yet was raised to life. So anyone who believes and trusts that Christ can welcome and receive sinners like that can also believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All around us are people wracked with guilt and shame. They suppress their hurt and pain. They stay busy. They suffer with addictions. They try to cope in any way possible. And what they need to know is that there is a forgiveness for sins. For wrongs done to us, and the wrongs we have done. And it is for everyone. There is no one – neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for whom this message does not apply (Gal. 3:28). As verse 43 says, "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

This is what Israel was to proclaim to the nations. This was why Israel was to live differently. This was why they had a different diet. It wasn't to make them morally superior. It was to make them morally distinct. But so often we allow the ethics of the Christian faith to cause us to act like we are morally superior. We, like Peter, need to remember that we ourselves came crawling into the kingdom like an unclean animal. And we remain in the kingdom not because we are so great but because Christ is superior and we trust him. And this message is for the world.

Watch God's Global Redemption (vv. 44-48)

Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and all who believed. And Luke comments that the Jews, who thought they were superior and had the mark of salvation by being circumcised, were amazed that even the Gentiles were saved. God's grace had reached out to them – the unclean, filthy dogs. God's grace entered their lives. And so they were baptized.

Paul would reflect these same ideas in Ephesians 2:11-22 (READ). The greatest barrier in the first century church was the barrier of overcoming Jewish markers that had created attitudes of superiority among Jewish believers.

And yet, how much of our heart is repulsed by the person who is an addict, who lives and claims a sexual identity other than ours, a person who is politically opposite of us? The good



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news of the kingdom means that there is a grace that goes and changes people from the inside out. God welcomes us as we are – sinners who confess our need for him – but he doesn't keep us that way. He changes us. And because we have this global message, we can believe Christianity is good for us...and for the world. So let's watch and go with God's vision, God's message, God's redemption as God's messengers for our good and the good of the world.