

Acts 10:34-38 ³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

More Than It First Appears

Have you ever had one of those times where you formed an image in your mind and then when you saw the real deal, it wasn't anything like you would have thought? Maybe you haven't realized how big those people you see running around the field on your TV are until you stood beside one of them. Or maybe you have listened to your favorite radio personality only to see a picture that doesn't appear with the image in your head at all. Have you ever believed something, pictured something one way, only to find out that it was completely different?

That's how it is when people start to learn more about God. When they take a look at what they know about God and connected it with God's plan of salvation frequently God's Word changes the first impression to strengthen faith. You might find yourself saying, “I always thought God was this way. I always pictured him this way.” But then after spending some time in the Bible, you find out he's different. Is it possible that you have always believed something about God, even though it's not really true? Or is it possible that you have pictured God in a certain way that needs more detail?

That's what happened for a couple of people in the lesson from Acts 10—Cornelius and Peter. Both of them got more detail into who God was. As we focus on God's Word today you might find out something you never knew, you might find out that there was more there than you could first have imagined. More than it first appears.

The first person we meet is a man named Cornelius. Now Cornelius was a man's man, a centurion in the Italian regiment of the Romans army. An important man who had been carefully selected to oversee a part of the Roman forces stationed within a Roman headquarters. These centurions were in charge of 100 men, and they were always men of noble character, able to lead, and smart. The Bible describes Cornelius and his family as God-fearing and devout. *He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly* (Acts 10:2).

But God wanted his faith to increase. It appears that he knew well his Old Testament. He knew about his need for a Savior and how God had promised such a Savior. He knew about how God had guided his people in faith throughout the years. But he needed to hear about what God had completed in Jesus. He didn't understand that Jesus was his Savior.

So God gave him that message through Peter. Peter was able to put it all together, **You know what has happened...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...** That was an image that needed more detail of Cornelius. He needed to know that Jesus was the promised Savior. Jesus was the one who fulfilled what God had planned. That's what another of the lessons for today talked about. At Jesus' baptism, God the Father put his stamp of approval on Jesus, gave him a special measure of the Holy Spirit and gave him power. He used that power—**he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.** All those miracles that Jesus performed served one major purpose—to show that he was the Messiah, the only real way to heaven.

Peter continued to explain to Cornelius what Jesus did after his baptism. How Jesus took away the sins of the world by dying on the cross and then rose from the dead. He gets to find out that Jesus who he had heard of was his Savior. More detail and depth was added to his faith.

Can you relate to this Romans soldier? "I knew this for sure but God has now given me greater knowledge and appreciation for him," you might say. Maybe you have had that eye-opener when you have learned that Jesus is God. That your works aren't done to make God happy with you. Or that no matter how good you are, you'll never be good enough for God's favor. Through his Word, you find out that even the nicest person in the world still has faults, still has shortcoming, and because of those can never be nice enough to earn a way to heaven. That's what God tells us in his Word.

But then God opens your faith even wider to learn who Jesus Christ really is. You find out that he's more than a good person. He has done something for you that you needed. He took away all your faults and you know who he is. You get to see him as your Savior dying on the cross and rising from the dead leaving all your sins covered by his righteousness.

This good news enlightened Cornelius with great detail. But he wasn't the only person who saw more than had first appeared. God also gave Peter a look into a greater depth of faith.

Peter says, **I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.** Peter had difficulty with what he was seeing. He was in the house of a Gentile because God had told him in a vision. All of his years growing up, he had learned that he was one of the chosen people. He knew and liked the structure, regulations, and traditions of his Jewish faith. He always thought of Gentiles as outsiders to be brought into his way of believing.

And now, Peter sees that God loves the Gentiles with the same love in Jesus. Now God brings Peter to deeper faith that sees with his own eyes that God loves all people, regardless of what nationality they are. He wants all people to believe and be saved. Now Peter sees a much larger group to whom he could speak God's Word. This blew Peter away—changed the way he had thought. It loosened his grip on all the things he had built up around Christ by which he was able to show his appreciation of his forgiveness and let him see that just because that was how he chose to worship God didn't mean that it was the way everyone needed to say thanks to God.

Can you relate to Peter? Sometimes we forget that no matter who a person is, no matter their status or economic situation, or how they choose to worship God, God wants every person on the face of this earth to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. Sometimes it's hard to fully accept, that God loves me, but he also loves the other person. God loves me, but he also loves the other person who doesn't think like me. God loves me, but he loves them just as much. He doesn't show favoritism, as the Apostle Peter reminds us.

God changes the way we think – that's what happens when you spend time in his Word. And really, that's the purpose of our church. The purpose of our church is to get people in touch with this wonderful message, so that God can change people for the better. There are so many people out there, nice people who don't know the way of salvation. There are so many people out there like Peter, people who don't know just how loving our God really is. As a church, we are here to share with people these wonderful truths from God's Word, so that God can change people for the better, to get them to see more than first appears. That means by faith we will put aside at times the things we really like in order to reach others.

Before we leave this lesson also look at how God got this deeper knowledge to both Cornelius and Peter. God used a vision and an angel to get both of them to his chosen location for them to learn and grow in faith. But he didn't use the vision or the angel to bring his people home. He used fellow believers. God sent Peter to give Cornelius greater faith. God used Cornelius to allow Peter to see more than he first thought. Today, he is sending us to do the same for every person on this earth. So that we and they might join together and see more clearly the peace that we have in Christ. May God bless you, as you become a believer in his hands through which he blesses and changes hearts to see more than it first appears.