

# THERE'S ROOM AT THE TABLE

SERIES: WITNESS | THE SERMONS OF ACTS



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Acts 10: 24-48  
Fourth Message  
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*Acts 10:24-48*

I have the incredible privilege this morning to continue in our Acts series, "Witness." We are walking through the sermons in Acts.

Scott Grant kicked us off in Acts 2, where the spirit of God fell on the day of Pentecost and united people, and what opportunity we have in the Bay to proclaim and praise God together with *one voice*.

Then Paul Taylor unpacked Acts 3, and we looked at Jesus The Healer; Jesus offers healing to those that believe and times of refreshing.

Last Sunday, we looked at Stephen, who gave a sermon before being stoned to death; we were encouraged to pray for love and boldness.

That leads us to today's sermon in Acts 10.

The year was 2016...I was living in Southern California, just outside of Pasadena. My job was AS an executive assistant to our senior pastor. This was the very formative year I had never had up until that point in my life. Worked or served behind the scenes, I'd always been on stages STAGE. And God graced me to be able to have a season where He would work some things out of my heart behind the scenes. But even more than the formative aspect of it, I just really enjoyed that every week there was something different. You just never knew what you were going to get in this job and we had times where we would travel. I would hop in the car and drive my boss to different engagements and workshops. Every now and then I would hop on a plane and go to a different event with him. It was just a really, really fun time of ministry.

I'll never forget it. It was like it was yesterday. We were in the office and he asked me if I had booked the tickets for Angola. I said, "Oh no, not yet. But I'm going to get to it." I didn't know what he was talking about. I went to my office and looked up Angola, trying to find the e-mail request. I realized he was talking about the maximum security prison Angola in Louisiana. It's the largest maximum security prison in the United States,

18,000 acres, 6300 inmates, and 1800 employees. The name itself, Angola, is named after Angola, Africa because this was the place where slaves were housed. This was a former plantation. Nicknamed the Alcatraz of the South. If I'm being honest, I did not want to go. I thought about calling in sick, figuring out how I could get out of it. I did not want to go. Maybe it was because my father had spent some time in a place like this. Maybe it was because of fear of what I had heard could happen in prison. But as I think about it a little deeper, at the core of it, I didn't want to go because I had a deep issue with ministering to "those people." I'd always thought that God had called us to complete assignments. I would realize that oftentimes, God uses assignments to complete us. God was showing me that Cormac, there's room at my table. I've made room at my table for everyone. More specifically, I've made room at my table for "those" people. The implication, If I made room for them, so should you. And this is where we find Peter in our text today. Peter is invited to this ministry assignment that was a challenge for him because he would not have been associated historically with "those" people. He wouldn't have been found eating with "those people". But God would show Peter that he's made room at his table. There is room at his table, for us, for them. I've titled our time today: "There's Room at the Table."

Why is this important? You may be saying to yourself, Cormac, I'm glad God met you at Angola and met with Peter thousands of years ago, but what does this have to do with us here today? I believe God wants to meet with us through his Word to challenge those things that may get in the way of us being a witness and sharing the good news of the gospel with people who are different from us and whom the world has called "those people".

We are going to follow the journey of Peter as he was invited to this ministry opportunity and see if there are some helpful nuggets along the way that can help us in our journey here and now.

The story starts off with a guy name Cornelius. The Bible lets us know that he lives in a place called Caesarea and he is what would be the equivalent of a Non-Commissioned Officer in the military. There are three things the Bible highlights about Cornelius: he is

a devout man, a praying man, and he gives alms (he is a generous man). Although the Bible speaks well of him, he has not come to saving faith in Jesus. He has not yet heard the gospel. He was on the outside, pressing his nose hard on the window, looking in. Parenthetically I would like to say this is a good reminder that “good” people need the gospel. For it is not our “goodness” that gets us grace from God, but rather because of his grace that we experience the goodness of God.

One day Cornelius was praying, and an angel appeared before him and said, Your alms have been seen in heaven. Send for a man named Peter. He is in a place called Joppa, staying at Simon the tanner’s house.

After Cornelius has this encounter with God, he then sends men to Joppa to get Peter so he can hear whatever words God would have Peter share. The Bible says that while the men were going and were en route to Joppa, Joppa was about 30 miles away from Caesarea. Peter goes on top of the roof to pray to God. The Bible says that while he was praying he was hungry. I don’t know about you, but many times I can relate to that. You get it in your mind you’re going to go pray to God, you’re going to set aside some time and out of nowhere, you get hungry, or you get sleepy, or you start having a million things running around in your mind.

And so Peter is there. He’s praying, he gets hungry, and he falls into a trance, and what he sees would be the start of turning his entire worldview upside down. Interesting how God can use your needs to speak to you if you are willing to listen.

He sees a sheep coming down with all kinds of animals. And the Bible declares there that God said to him,

**Acts 10:13:**

**“Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”**

Peter’s response was quite interesting.

**Acts 10:14:**

**But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”**

**Acts 10:15:**

**And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”**

As I was reading the text, I could relate to Peter having a moment of prayer, being hungry. But when I heard him say “no, my Lord,” to food... to ribs...and bacon. I could not relate just on the surface. Those words have never been in the same sentence when someone offers me food “no my Lord”?

But as a 1st-century Jew, this would have been quite common and very normal. They were prohibited from eating certain foods. While at the moment, the Bible says Peter is simply perplexed. He would later find out that *this was bigger than food*. God was getting at something bigger; that it represented people.

This connects to the original promise to Abraham that he would make him a father of many nations. It’s always been God’s heart to make the opportunity to new life in Christ. Let’s look at a few examples of this thread.

**Genesis 12:1–2:**

**Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.**

**John 10:16:**

**And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

God was showing both Cornelius and Peter that there is room at His table for everyone, *that the Gospel of Jesus crosses over boundaries and breaks down restrictions set by culture and our personal bias*.

So Cornelius, after having this encounter with God, has instructed his men to send for Peter. They travel to Joppa from Caesarea. It’s about a 30-mile journey, and when the men arrive, they approach Peter.

## Acts 10:21-22:

**And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.”**

## God is at work (even when I can't see it)

This was not Cornelius' idea and for sure was not Peter's. It was all a part of God's plan. God was the one orchestrating this holy house party that would serve as a ripple effect throughout history. In the same way that he was working then, he is still working now to arrange for moments and opportunities for us to share the gospel here in the Bay and abroad.

I can hear the psalmist say, “Even when I don't see it you're working...” May that be an encouragement and a weight lifted that we are not asked to work on anyone's heart; God does. We are simply to act in obedience in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It was not a coincidence when your co-worker asked you for prayer after work. It was not a coincidence when that conversation started at that coffee shop, and you find out that this person has been searching for a “higher power” and just so happens to order that coffee and sit at your table, and you are there... *God is at work!*

Peter finally makes the journey from Joppa to Caesarea and arrives at Cornelius' house. When Peter gets there, he realizes that the house is full. A lot of people were waiting to hear what he had to say. I would have wanted to know how many people were going to be there.

Let's look at the words Peter said at the start of his message to those gathered at Cornelius' house.

## Acts 10:34-35:

**So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.**

For these words to come out of Peter's mouth—to come out of a Jew's mouth, in the presence of Gentiles—was a weighty moment. What do I mean by that? Well,

the great theologian William Barclay helps paint the picture again of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Barclay says:

*“It was common for a Jewish man to begin the day with a prayer thanking God that he was not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. A basic part of the Jewish religion in the days of the New Testament was an oath that promised that one would never help a Gentile under any circumstances, such as giving directions if they were asked. But it went even as far as refusing to help a Gentile woman at the time of her greatest need – when she was giving birth – because the result would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.”*

Wow. This ethnic, cultural, and religious pride ran deep for Peter. So for him to make the statement that God is not a partial God means that the journey he had to take in his heart was actually a greater distance than the 30 miles he would have traveled to get to Caesarea. Some theologians call this story the conversion of the Gentiles or the conversion of Cornelius. But as we look a little closer, Peter experienced a heart change. Peter himself was converted!! Peter had to surrender his judgments. That's our second takeaway from this story: Surrender your Judgment.

God uses us to complete assignments, but often times he uses assignments to complete us.

Peter had to be reconciled. Not just to God but to others. Not just vertical but horizontal reconciliation.

We see this in the Ten Commandments. The first half of that is our relationship with God (vertical), and the second half of that is our relationship with others (horizontal).

We see this in the “greatest commandment” there is (Matthew 22:34–40). The Pharisees ask Jesus what the greatest commandment is, and he says to love God with all that you are; that's vertical. To love others as yourself, that's horizontal.

Peter had to face head on his personal biases and cultural prejudice.

The gospel of Jesus says there is room at the table for *everyone*.

God doesn't have favorites. No matter where you are or where you come from, there is room for you at the table. People from every nation have access. They

have an open invitation to be part of the family of God.  
*Hallelujah.*

When the senior pastor and I entered Angola Prison, we had to surrender some things at the door. For you to enter these 18,000 acres, there were things you could not take with you. In my heart, I had to surrender my judgments. We have to surrender our judgments to be an effective witness to all nations.

For Peter, it was the Gentile community. For us, it could be different:

- socioeconomic classes
- cultural communities
- political communities
- alternative lifestyles

After Peter says that God is not partial and that there is room at this table for all nations, he then shares the gospel in verses 36 through 41.

#### **Acts 10:36:**

**As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)**

Notice what happens while he is sharing the gospel with the crowd.

#### **Acts 10:44-45:**

**While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.**

For Peter and those with him, this was a confirmation. In verse 45 they were amazed that these uncircumcised others had received conversion and transformation by the *same* spirit that they received. A further confirmation that the gospel of Jesus says there is room at the table for *everyone*.

May this be a reminder that it is the spirit of God who changes hearts and renews minds. It's not our

techniques but his Spirit. In God's economy: We provide the obedience. He provides the power. We focus on faithfulness, and he will produce fruitfulness.

We have this incredible opportunity in the Bay to impact the world with the gospel. This article in *TechCrunch* from September 2020 helps to paint the picture of this place that we are in here in the Bay and the level of influence this place has.

*Silicon Valley is the new Rome of our time, meaning a place in the world that ends up deciding how a lot of the rest of the world lives. No matter where you lived on the planet Earth, when the Roman Empire started to rise, it had plans for you one way or another, through your legal system, or your language, or culture, or something else. The Roman Empire was coming for you.*

*Silicon Valley is that for our time. It's the new Rome [in] that you can't live on planet Earth and be unaffected, directly or indirectly, by the decisions made in this relatively small patch of [the world].<sup>2</sup>*

## **Time of reflection and prayer**

You could invite people to reflect on who hasn't been invited to their tables in the past or who needs to be invited going forward.

Reflect on the story of Peter and Cornelius. Who needs Good News?

## **Endnotes**

1. Connie Looizos, "Writer Anand Giridharadas on tech's billionaires: 'Are they even on the same team as us?'" *TechCrunch*. September 24, 2020. <https://techcrunch.com/2020/09/24/writer-anand-giridharadas-on-techs-billionaires-are-they-even-on-the-same-team-as-us/>