

## SHARE THE STORY

### Acts 10 & 11

On December 27<sup>th</sup> Carrie Fisher died. For some of us who are not Star Wars fanatics that may not mean much. But for those of you who would not dare miss any of the 8 episodes of the Star Wars Movies ... she is an icon. She played the part of Princess Leia.

Jim Denison ... author of Denison Forum writes ... “neither Princess Leia nor the actress who played her knew the true Force of the universe.”

How sad! Here is a woman that had fame and fortune ... but did not have faith! And when she stands before God on Judgment Day ... God will not be a bit concerned in how many people watched her on the silver screen. His only concern will be what she did with his Son Jesus ... Did she serve him ... or did she reject him?

Her story is not unique! There are literally an average of 44,000 people that will die today that do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. BUT ... not only today but every day this year.

Knowing this fact should bring an urgency to us to do what Jesus Christ commanded us to do right before he ascended to Heaven. In case you have forgotten what that command was, you can find it in **MATTHEW 28:19-20**. It says ... **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** Did you catch that ... Bring them to Christ and grow them in Christ. That is his command.

Our **mission statement** here at Tri encapsulates that command. You can see it over the second set of doors as you come into the building ... it says this ... **“Preparing People for Eternal Living.”** That is our mission as a church body and therefore it is also the mission of each and every one of us who are individuals of this body ... you are commanded by Jesus Christ to prepare people for eternal

living. That preparation begins with coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

If we are not making an effort to see to it that this is happening ... then we are not fulfilling our mission. And if we are not fulfilling our mission then we are not doing our part in preventing those 44,000 who die every day without Christ from dying as lost souls and destined for Hell.

The book of **ACTS** is a history of how that very mission that has been passed down to us was carried out in the first century of the Church. That book is there to teach us how to share Christ ... with not only those who look like us ... but with every tribe and race and nation on earth.

If you were to look at the first chapter of **ACTS** you would see that right before Jesus ascends to Heaven he lays out his plan of reaching the lost. Look at **ACTS 1:8 ... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” Sharing the gospel started at home with the Jews. We see that in the first 8 chapters of **ACTS**.

Then it was to expand to the Samaritans. Stephen was stoned to death in Jerusalem because of his faith and the Christians scattered. We see that in **CHAPTER 7**.

Philip was one of those who left Judea and it tells us in **ACTS 8:4-5 ... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.** <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. The Samaritans were cross-breeds between Jews and Gentiles. **CHAPTERS 8-9** concentrate mostly on the Samaritans part of Christ’s plan of evangelism.

Then we come to a very interesting account in **CHAPTER 10**. That is where I want to park for the rest of the morning. **So ... turn with me to ACTS 10.**

In the first **8 VERSES**, we meet a man we have not seen as of yet in the New Testament. His name is Cornelius.

### **READ VERSES 1-8**

- **He is a Gentile** ... that is significant because we are about to see the third phase of Christ’s plan of reaching the lost come into action.

- **He is a Centurion in the Roman Army.** That would be equivalent to a sergeant-major in our military. A pretty important position.
- **He is a God-fearer.** This phrase can be misleading if we are not careful. A god-fearer was one that had grown disillusioned with the many gods the Romans worshipped and turned to the single God that the Jews worshipped. They did not buy into the laws of the Old Testament. They did not necessarily commit their lives to the God. They just preferred Yahweh over Zeus or Apollo and all their cronies.
- **He cared about people.** **VERSE 2** tells us that he gave to those in need.
- **He was a man of prayer.** We cannot possibly know the heart of Cornelius but it is possible that he was no different than many little children that we teach to pray. They pray but have no clue to Whom they are praying to. They may know his name ... but they don't know him.

When we get to **VERSE 9** we see the start of a lesson that all of us need to be sure we have learned. And here it is ... **The Good News of Jesus dying that we might live is for everyone. It does not matter what color of skin they have. It does not matter what nation they live in. It does not matter if they are male or female. The good news of salvation is for them. And we should not hesitate to share it!**

Let's look at **VERSES 9-16**

It is mid-day and Peter goes to the roof to pray. Because most of the houses were small and generally crowded. The roofs were flat. If you wanted privacy ... the roof was the best place to go.

While Peter is on the roof he has a vision. Actually ... he has three visions but they are all the same. **WHY?** Why does God give him the vision three times? For the same reason that you tell your kids something three or more times. So that they get it! So that they don't misunderstand what you are telling them.

The vision is of a sheet being lowered from heaven filled with what Jews would call unclean animals. They were forbidden to eat them according to **LEVITICUS 11**. What is God's point? What is he trying to tell Peter? He is preparing him for sharing the gospel with the Gentile family of Cornelius. People that the Jews considered unclean. To them they were dogs ... losers ... outcasts.

By the way ... Peter tells this whole story again in **CHAPTER 11**. Why would Luke write down the same thing twice? He would have been writing the book of Acts on a papyrus scroll. The longest they made the scrolls was 35 feet. You have to be picky about what all you wrote down. Why the same story twice? Because it was that important! **This story is the mile-stone of the Christian movement.** Up to this point ... it was basically a sect of the Jews. Now it is for everyone! It has reached the third level of Christ's evangelistic plan.

There is another thing that **CHAPTER 11** mentions that is not mentioned in **CHAPTER 10**. **CHAPTER 10** tells us that there were several Jewish Christians who went with Peter to Cornelius' house but did not mention how many.

**CHAPTER 11** tells us that there were six besides Peter. That is significant.

- Egyptian law, which the Jews no doubt knew, said that there had to be seven witnesses to prove a case
- Roman law said seven seals were necessary to authenticate a really important document.

Peter did not want any doubt left about what was about to happen!

There is one other thing I want us to learn from these verses. Peter has already begun to understand that the Gospel trumps the Jewish law. Who was Peter living with? A tanner. Where did they live? By the sea-shore. Why? Because tanners worked with dead bodies ... which made them spiritually unclean. They were not allowed to live in the city. Jews did not hang around with unclean people.

And in **VERSE 23** we see that Peter invites the men sent by Cornelius into the house. That was an absolute no-no for Jews! Gentiles were not allowed in their homes.

So ... what is the **LESSON** to be learned? No one is to be ignored when it comes to sharing the gospel! When God calls you to share the gospel with someone ... **it is not up to you to determine if they are worthy of being saved. It is up to you to obey the call!**

In **VERSES 17-33** tells us of the men that Cornelius sent meeting up with Peter and Peter and the 6 Jewish Christians going to Cornelius' house with them.

There is one thing that really stands out in these verses that once again is a lesson for us to learn ... look at **VERSE 24** ... **Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.** What is the **LESSON**?

Cornelius knew there was about to be a church service held in his house and he invited people to come to it. We need to be doing the very same thing. We have a tendency to get lackadaisical about this, don't we? We know we should invite people to church ... but we never get around to it! **Invite the lost to hear the gospel story ... no matter what tongue, tribe or nation.**

Starting in **VERSE 34** Peter preaches the Good News of the Gospel. It would be good to highlight **VERSES 34-41** in your Bibles. Here is basically what Peter shares with the Gentiles. Write these down. It is a good way of sharing Christ with the lost people in your life.

- Jesus was sent by God because he loves us.
- Jesus healed while on earth to show he cares about us
- Jesus was crucified on the cross
- Jesus rose from the dead
- People witnessed him being alive after his death
- The results are that those who accept Christ as their Lord and Savior are forgiven and have a new relationship with God.

That is it in a nutshell ... the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is everything you need to know to share the Good News with the lost ... no matter who they are.

The rest of **CHAPTER 10** is a victory story! It tells us about Cornelius and his family and friends giving their lives to Christ and receiving salvation. But it is a unique story. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles and they began to speak in tongues. Why? Peter answers that question in **VERSE 47** ... <sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can stand in the way (hinder) of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." He says it even more clearly in **11:17** ... So if God gave them the same gift (the gift of the Holy Spirit) he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" And so, he baptized them into Christ.

God did not want Peter to miss the fact that God was putting his stamp of approval on this event! The Gentiles were to be allowed in! The Gospel was not just for the Jews ... it was for everyone! Let me repeat that but in our setting this morning ... the Gospel is not just for the middle-class white American. It is for everyone ... every nation ... every tribe ... every gender.

The gospel is for the

- Red, yellow, black and white
- The homosexual or transgender or straight

- The Muslim or Buddhist ... Hindu or Satanist
- The person locked in the prison cells all over the world
- The Chinese ... Japanese ... Indian ... European ... and even the American.

We have some lessons to learn:

- 1 ... It is not up to us to determine who is worthy to be saved. It is up to us to obey God's call
- 2 ... It is our mission by the command of Christ to share the gospel with the lost ... no matter who they are.

Now it would be very easy to just sing the invitation song and leave ... right? But I don't want us to do that. I want us to put some feet on this message. **So, let's pray that the Holy Spirit gives us a name of someone we know that is lost. Let's pray.**

Now ... here are five things I want all of us to do ...

**1 ... Write down the name of someone that you know that is not a committed follower of Jesus Christ.**

**2 ... Commit to praying for that person by name every day**

**3 ... Ask the Holy Spirit to soften that person's heart toward the good news of the gospel**

**4 ... Ask the Holy Spirit to let you know when it is time to share the good news of Jesus with that person.**

**5 ... Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you with the courage and the insight to walk through the door of opportunity when it arises**

Let's pray ... God, help us to prepare people for eternal living by sharing the gospel that save them. Amen.

