

Acts 10:23b-48: Will You Follow God Even If His Path Makes No Sense?

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I. Introduction

God always has advice for you: you want to know which job to take, what school to go to, whether or not to marry the person you're dating, how you should handle that problem at work, and on and on. But often, very often, we either don't hear what God has to say or if we hear it, we don't like it, we disagree with it, so we continue our path as is, miserable and struggling. Why is it so hard to follow God? If we trust Him as God, then certainly He knows what He's doing, so why don't we follow Him even though it makes no sense to us? What would it take to follow God no matter what? How did Jesus do it? How did Peter do it? How did Cornelius do it...how can you do it?

II. Acts 10:23b-48: How Can God Become the Most Important Thing in Our Lives?

God has been at work at both ends of Peter's dilemma: whether or not to see Gentiles as people who are accepted by God. God spoke with the Gentile Cornelius and instructed him to call for Peter to come to his house. And God spoke with Peter clearly telling him that he's to accept the three Gentiles at his door without question. When all this began, Peter argued with God, but now he's beginning to realize what God is doing.

10:23, having lodged the three Gentiles, Peter sets off with them the next day to Cornelius' house, but not before taking six fellow Jews with him (they will play an important role in validating what happens at Cornelius' house, 11:12).

10:24-29, Cornelius was waiting for them and had gathered his family and close friends. When Peter gets there, Cornelius proceeds to worship Peter, but Peter quickly stops him, informing Cornelius that he too is just a man.¹ Peter, seeing the large crowd that has gathered, reminds them of how unlawful it is for him to keep company with or enter a Gentile's house.² But God has shown him that he must no longer look at Gentiles as unclean. However, that's the extent of what Peter knows, so he asks, "For what reason have you sent for me?"

10:30-33, Cornelius begins to explain to Peter why he's there: while Cornelius was fasting and praying God spoke to him through an angel, that God had acknowledged Cornelius' prayer and alms. Then God told him to call for Peter in Joppa, that when arrived Peter would speak God's words to him. So he thanks Peter for coming and tells him that they're all present before God waiting to hear His words.....note who Cornelius expected to hear from: he's not expecting to hear from Peter. He's waiting to hear the rest of what God began to say to him through the angel.

¹ Both men and angels who acknowledge that God is the only one who should be worshipped refuse this kind of worship, Acts 14:14-15; Revelation 22:8-9. Only God accepts this kind of worship, Joshua 5:13-15.

² One main reason Jews avoided associating with Gentiles is that Gentiles ate many foods that Jews considered 'unclean,' especially, meat from unclean animals, meat that had been offered to idols, and meat that had its blood still in it. If a Jew associated with Gentiles, especially if he ate with them, he could become 'unclean/impure.' That meant he could not socialize or worship God with others until he offered a sacrifice to become 'clean/pure' again. (Leviticus 11). However, the Mosaic Law did not forbid associating with or entering a Gentile's house; but the Mishnaic/Pharisaic law did.

10:34-43, Peter, realizing now why God sent him to the home of a Gentile—that God wasn't just interested in relaxing Peter's standards concerning Gentiles. He wanted Peter to usher them into the Kingdom, as he'd done for Jews (2:14-47) and Samaritans (8:14-25), which is what his Lord commanded in the beginning (1:8). This was a job that only Peter could accomplish; he had the keys to the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19). And this was necessary especially so that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, could fulfill his commission by the Lord (that's why Paul's story was interrupted by Peter's)—so Peter gives them the Gospel. Peter begins by acknowledging that God accepts everyone who fears Him and works righteousness regardless of creed or color. Then Peter gives a quick summary of Jesus' life, highlighting key points which Cornelius and those gathered already know: God sent Jesus with a message of peace not war, He is Lord of all (not just Jews), John the Baptist was His forerunner, He's not just any Jesus but the one from Nazareth whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, i.e., Jesus was Israel's Messiah, He was able to defeat Satan and heal all who were oppressed by him because God was with Him, Peter and the rest of the apostles witnessed everything Jesus did in Israel, He was crucified but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and showed Him to key witnesses, including the apostles who ate and drank with Him after He was resurrected, God commanded the apostles to testify to everyone that God ordained Jesus as the Judge of the living and the dead, this Jesus is the one all the prophets testified to, that through His name, all who believe in Him would receive pardon for their sins.

10:44-48, Peter had more to say to them, but the moment they believed in Jesus the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Those accompanying Peter were astonished. They couldn't believe their eyes: the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles! There they were speaking in tongues and worshipping God. Immediately Peter instructed his fellow Jewish believers to baptize them in the name of the Lord. Cornelius and the rest then ask Peter to stay with them a few days, not only for fellowship but undoubtedly to be instructed (discipled) as to what to do next in their new faith. Why did these Gentiles begin speaking in tongues at their conversion, does this always accompany salvation? There was a specific reason for this. In fact, it was the same reason that Peter and the apostles spoke in tongues at Pentecost—and note, Peter and the rest were already converted, (2:3-12). It was to authenticate to the audience that this was indeed a work of God. At Pentecost, it authenticated Peter and the apostles to the crowds of unbelievers who'd come to Jerusalem during Pentecost. And now here, the gift of tongues authenticated this Gentile Pentecost so to speak. That is, it proved beyond a doubt to Peter and the Jewish believers who came with him that God had indeed ushered Gentiles into the Kingdom as Gentiles and not proselytes—their only condition was faith, not faith plus Judaism. Additionally, tongues isn't always a sign of conversion, e.g., it wasn't part of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion (8:34-38) nor the apostle Paul's (9:1-19).

Will you follow God when it makes no sense? Peter was a faithful Jewish man; he'd never eaten anything unclean (10:14) or entered the unclean house of a Gentile. Now God wants him to do both. This makes no sense. Will Peter follow? The question is, "What's the most important thing to you, God or something else?" What do you worship? God took Jesus on a ridiculous path, but He didn't waiver (Matthew 4): God was the most important thing to Him (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 8:28-29). What's the most important thing to Peter, to Cornelius (10:29, 33).....to you?

III. Conclusion

And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common.".....Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."