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## The Greatest Miracle

**Acts 10:34-48**

**Intro:** What is the greatest miracle that God can do for us? Some might say that an instantaneous physical healing of some incurable disease or inoperable handicap would be a great miracle. Others would say that raising someone from the dead would be the greatest miracle. Now, from a human perspective, both of these would be a fantastic display of power because either would be impossible for us to do and we don't see it happen very often if at all. Besides, from God's perspective, these miracles require no expenditure of effort on His part whatsoever.

Let me rephrase the question again: What does God consider the greatest miracle He can do for humanity? When the question is presented that way, I would have to say that the greatest miracle of all is the salvation of a lost sinner.

Salvation is the greatest miracle because it cost the greatest price.

Salvation cost God the life of His only begotten Son. Jesus had to leave the glory of heaven; take on the form of a man (His own creation); live a sinless, holy life in the face of great opposition and hatred and after all that, pour out His blood on the cross for the sin of the world.

Salvation is also the greatest miracle because it produces the greatest result. It's better than a physical healing because it delivers us from both the guilt and the power of sin, a disease that's worse than cancer. It's better than being raised from the dead because salvation transfers us from spiritual death into spiritual life. That transfer is permanent and eternal.

Every person Jesus healed or raised from the dead when He walked this earth eventually died of some other physical complications. But, not one person who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior has ever been lost by Him, not one.

Salvation is also the greatest miracle because it brings the greatest glory to God. As I said before, God can heal or raise the dead without batting an eye but it took thousands of years of human history to prepare the world to receive its Savior. It took an unprecedented outpouring of grace and longsuffering on God's part to carry out and pay the full price required to

bring His plan of salvation about. And, after all that, God can't force salvation of anyone. He must woo them with the truth, He must draw them with love and fill them with faith and then wait for the Spirit to convict and ultimately convince them that salvation is something that they need. When this takes place – it is the greatest miracle the world will ever witness and it brings God the greatest glory because it proves the price was necessary.

As we have been looking at the Apostle Peter's itinerant ministry in [ch9-10](#), we have seen a miraculous healing and we've seen someone raised from the dead. Today in our text, we'll see the greatest miracle of all – Cornelius and his family will be saved by responding in faith to the preaching of the Gospel, filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized. What makes this event so special is this will be the first time this has happened to a strictly Gentile person. You see, up to this point in the Book of Acts, the Gospel was always considered and explained in exclusively Jewish terms. Jesus was a Jew, the Apostles were Jews, the original 120 disciples in the upper room were all Jews, the first converts at Pentecost were all Jews – everyone who accepted Christ for 8-10 years after had all been Jews or had been associated with Judaism in some way. But now God, through divine intervention and direct revelation, was showing Peter that the Gospel message wasn't just for the Jews – it was for the entire world.

Today the gospel is preached to Gentiles as Gentiles. It's not required that they become Jews in order to become followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Savior and Lord of Jews as Jews and of Gentiles as Gentiles. Gentiles don't have to come to church wearing yarmulke on their heads. They don't have to eat kosher food. They don't have to make yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the required feasts. This was not always the case, and the reason it's not the case now is because of what transpires here in [ch10](#). The events recorded here are a crucially important explanation for why Christianity is not just a sect of Judaism but is, in fact, a belief system for the whole world.

The first half of [ch10](#) highlights the intervention and revelation of God. Cornelius was a righteous Gentile who was known for his good works and his desire to know the God of Israel. God sent him an angel with a message that his prayers had been heard and he needs to send for Peter in Joppa who will explain all he needs to know. Meanwhile, Peter has a strange vision that he doesn't quite understand and he has it 3 times – still clueless. But,

the men from Cornelius show up and God tells him to go with them without questioning. Peter arrives at Cornelius' house and it all starts to make sense. He realizes that God has brought him here to share the Gospel with this Gentile family. Let's look at Peter's sermon and its wonderful results

**34-35** – Peter's sermon has 3 parts. This is the opening statement where Peter describes how he has come to be there and what he believed God was doing. Peter has been doing some hard thinking lately or should I say, he has allowed the Holy Spirit to bring about a major change in the way he thinks about things. God has been teaching him that the Gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. So when Peter arrived at Cornelius' house and actually had a congregation made up of strictly Gentile people, he began by acknowledging the truth that salvation is for all who will come to God through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

This statement goes completely against the prevailing Jewish thought at that time. The Jews believed that God most certainly did show partiality – towards the Jews and against the Gentiles. And they did this despite their own Scriptures telling them otherwise (**Deut 10:17; II Chron 19:7**). All of this would change after Peter brought the Gospel to Cornelius and his family. Christianity was the first religion to disregard racial, cultural and national limitations.

accepted – Peter wasn't implying here that righteous men like Cornelius were already right with God and didn't need to become Christians. The point he's making here is that righteous individuals did not need to feel excluded from God because of their national background. God doesn't see nationality, or color, or economic status, or ethnicity or even political party affiliation – God only sees the heart, that's what He wants to change.

**36-42** – This text makes up the body of Peter's sermon. It contains a basic presentation of the Gospel, or what Peter and the other Apostles believed was essential for all people to learn. What the first essential thing Peter wants them to know? (**v36**). This is a summary statement or an introduction to the gospel. The reason the Gospel is good news of peace is that, apart from the work of Jesus, we're not at peace with God. We are actually, naturally, at war with God. Paul puts it another way, saying we're under God's wrath. The world says, everything's okay but God says everything's not okay. He says the world is in rebellion against Him. Humanity wants to

fight Him to the death. How do we know? Because when God did take a form in which human beings could fight Him to the death, that's exactly what they did. So in our natural state, we're at war with God. And the 1<sup>st</sup> announcement of the gospel is that peace with God has been made for those who will have it. Peace has been made by Jesus Christ.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing Peter mentions is the baptism of Jesus. This topic was of greater importance in early preaching than we would think and it's evidenced by the fact that each of the 4 Gospels basically begin at this point. Why was Jesus' baptism so important to early believers? Because, when Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke audibly from heaven, authenticating Him as His Son and Jesus was then visibly anointed with the Holy Spirit for the work He had to do. John the Baptist testified that he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Him, and the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" ([Matt 3:17](#)). That's why each Gospel writer either begins with or moves quickly to Jesus' baptism – that's where God set His seal of approval on Jesus, identifying Him as both His Son and messenger, someone we should certainly listen to!

The 3<sup>rd</sup> part of Peter's presentation of the Gospel concerns Jesus' public ministry. His ministry involved two things: good works and certain special acts that demonstrated His power over Satan. It's interesting: Peter doesn't mention the teachings of Jesus. His teachings were a major part of His earthly ministry and yet, Peter says nothing about them. The reason for this is: if we start talking about Jesus' teachings without first explaining the need for repentance and faith in Jesus as Savior from sin, people will think that Christianity is just about doing good. It's just learning what Jesus taught and trying to put it into practice. This promotes self-righteousness, trusting in human righteousness, which is harmful. The teachings of Jesus are important but only after people have turned from sin and have come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The next essential thing Peter brings up is the crucifixion of Jesus. What was the point of His death? If He was God's messenger, the One we should listen to, shouldn't He have stayed alive to teach us? Well, the critical point of His death is that He died for us, in our place. This is how He made peace between sinful man and a holy God. He took the Law that we have broken, the Law that condemns us, and He nailed it to the cross.

Our sin is like a great chasm between God and us. We can't bridge it to make peace with God. We're on the far side of the chasm, fighting God the whole time. How can that chasm be bridged? The cross is God's answer. At the cross God took our sin, placed it upon Jesus and punished it there. Jesus did not die for Himself; He had no sin. He didn't die just because He was a man. He died for us, in our place, because of our sin.

This is the imagery of the sacrifices. One who had sinned could take an innocent animal, bring it to the priest, have it killed, and then go away knowing that an innocent had died in the place of the guilty. True, a mere animal doesn't take away sin. But the animal pointed to Christ, who could take away sin. Because Jesus is the eternal God, His death had inexhaustible value. When we trust in Him, coming to God on the basis of His death, our sin is removed. And what was before a relationship of hostility becomes a bond of peace.

The next essential point Peter mentions is the resurrection. He stresses the eating and drinking with Jesus because that's a way of saying that His resurrection was real. This was not some mystical appearance of a disembodied Christ like you see in the movies. It was not a resurrection in principle: "Jesus died, but what He stood for lives on." It wasn't a mass hallucination nor was it just His Spirit that was somehow manifesting with them, inspiring them. No, it was a real resurrection; Jesus had a real body; they sat at a real table with this real Christ and ate and drank real food with Him. When they first saw Him in the Upper Room they thought He was a ghost. But when He ate with them they knew that He was really risen from the tomb.

Peter's final point is that God appointed Jesus "as Judge of the living and the dead" (42). Peter even shares that it was Jesus Himself that commanded them to preach this truth to the people. This is also part of the gospel but it's the first specific mention of Jesus' role as judge in Acts. Of course, Jesus is only going to be the Judge of 2 groups of people – the living and the dead – so, unless you've got another alternative, I guess that means everybody!

I've seen a few vinyl stickers on the back of several vehicles declaring, "Only God can judge me" which, for the most part, is true. But I wonder if



they are using that as an excuse for a less-than-stellar lifestyle because, if you live your life with the consistent knowledge that you will one day be judged by God, then you really don't need to worry about other people judging you. If you live to please God more than yourself or other people, then there won't be much for others to complain about. "Only God can judge me" and He will! Are you ready for that?

**43** – This is the last part of Peter's sermon – the application. Many modern preachers conclude their message with a general invitation for people to accept Christ as their Savior but Peter doesn't do that, at least not directly. Maybe he is still not sure what's supposed to happen; maybe he's just getting cranked up in his message. Whatever the case, Peter declares that even the OT prophets witnessed that through His name (authority), whoever believes in Him will receive remission from sins. Peter expresses here the broadness of God's promise of salvation – whoever believes!

**44-48** – Peter's audience must have been listening intently and receiving his message whole-heartedly because as soon as he declares the broadness of God's promise of salvation, they all respond to it in their hearts with faith and the Holy Spirit was poured out on them indicating that they were born again as they listened and believed! Do you see that? While Peter was still preaching, each one of these individuals made a secret and invisible transaction in their hearts with God by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. This means that the moment of a person's salvation isn't necessarily when they raise a hand or go forward during an invitation or even pray a prayer. Salvation occurs at the moment one surrenders to God by embracing Jesus in faith and the sincerity of their hearts.

I don't know if Peter had arrived at the end of his sermon but the Holy Spirit was doing His work so Peter's job was done, for the most part. He recognized that their faith was legitimate and called for water so they might be baptized.

The other Jews that came with Peter were shocked, not that Gentiles could be saved but that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on them so freely and so suddenly. They thought the Gentiles would need to become Jews first. At Pentecost, people repented, were baptized and afterward, the Holy Spirit came upon them. In Samaria, people were already saved but the Holy Spirit didn't come upon them until after the Apostles laid hands on them. But here,

this Gentile congregation received the Holy Spirit just as the Apostles and the other 120 did in the Upper Room – and they didn't need to be circumcised first!

Nobody had any objections when Peter called for water. What could they say? The presence of the holy Spirit was undeniable. Once again, God's action trumped man's expectations. Without being circumcised, without becoming Jews, these Gentiles were victoriously received into the great, growing, international church of Jesus Christ.

They were saved because they "heard" the message Peter preached. That message began with a declaration of peace with God. Have you heard about that peace? Have you entered into that peace? If not, why not?

In December of 1944, Hiroo Onoda, an intelligence officer in the Imperial Japanese Army, was sent to the island of Lubang in the Philippines to organize a resistance to the impending American invasion. His was forbidden to kill himself or surrender unless ordered otherwise from high command. The invasion happened 2 months later and in no time, all the Japanese defenders were either killed or surrendered except for Hiroo and 3 others. They fled into the jungle. While they were in hiding, the Philippines were liberated by the Americans, Okinawa was invaded, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan agreed to an unconditional surrender and the war was finally over, but not for Hiroo or his companions. They didn't know, they hadn't heard

One day, they found a flyer that said the war was over but they discounted it as propaganda. Later, an Air Force plane dropped leaflets into the jungle announcing Japan's surrender and the end of hostilities but they didn't believe that either. So, they stayed in the jungle, they kept fighting, not for months or years but for decades. It was not until 1974, almost 30 yrs after the end of the war, that Hiroo Onoda surrendered to Philippine authorities and that was only after the Japanese government found his original commanding officer and sent him down to Lubang to order Hiroo to surrender. Think of all the time that was wasted fighting a war that was already over. Think of everything he missed, not just in the world in general but in his own personal family.

Peace has been declared with God through Jesus Christ. Have you entered

into that peace agreement or are you still hiding out in the jungle fighting a war that you could never win? 😊