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**Acts 10:34–43, ESV.**

*<sup>34</sup> Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. <sup>35</sup> In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. <sup>36</sup> This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. <sup>38</sup> And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

*<sup>39</sup> “And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”*

**To us whom God had chosen.**

Easter has just passed. Jesus has been crucified, died, and risen. What now? To answer that, we need to remember a key thing about Scripture that many people either don't think about or are completely unaware of. The Bible, in particular the New Testament, including the Gospels, the many letters, and the history Book of Acts, weren't written just for a bunch of dead people who lived 2,000 years ago. Publishers often talk about the “shelf life” of books. Many novels are very short

lived. Some classics remain in print for hundreds of years. Popular histories tend to do fairly well and are read generation after generation, or at least until popular opinion changes our view of the given period of history. The Bible has had a rather long shelf life. This is deliberate. It was written to be relevant as long as people walk this Earth. We are reading something intended for us. Let's look at this a bit deeper. We'll look at speech made by the Apostle Peter. We find it in the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Acts, the book that tells us about the spread of the faith out of Jerusalem and throughout the vast Roman Empire. To set the context, consider Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army. He is the first gentile who is documented as becoming a follower of Christ. Here is how his conversion comes about. Luke tells us that already, before they accept Christ, Cornelius and all the members of his household fear God. Remember that in the Bible, to fear God means to follow and respect the Jewish God. But Cornelius has not become a Jew. Cornelius gives alms to poor Jewish people. He prays all the time. Most likely, he has lived with Jews all his life and has grown comfortable with their notion of God and has an intuitive feeling that he wants to be one of the faithful.

Jesus is the Jewish Messiah who did not come to destroy the Roman Empire and create an earthly empire. Jesus, until this moment, is a Jewish phenomenon. There is a beautiful story that precedes Cornelius' conversion. Until now, Peter has

seen himself as an evangelist to Jews. It wasn't yet in his heart to try to bring Christ to gentiles. Before he meets Cornelius, Peter is on a rooftop where he is presented with a variety of foods that Jews would consider unclean. Peter's reaction, as a devout Jew, is to reject this food. But a voice tells him that he should eat the food. Peter tries to refuse, saying he has always followed the Jewish food laws. But then the voice – which is obviously God – says: *“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”* Peter is still processing this statement from God when there is a knock on his door. Messengers from Cornelius tell him that Cornelius wants a visit from Peter. Two days later, Peter meets Cornelius, along with friends and relatives of Cornelius. We read this: *Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.* <sup>25</sup> *When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.* <sup>26</sup> *But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”* <sup>27</sup> *And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.* It's then that we are told how Cornelius decided to ask Peter to visit. Luke, the author of a Gospel and the Book of Acts, writes: <sup>30</sup> *And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing* <sup>31</sup> *and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.* <sup>32</sup> *Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon,*

*a tanner, by the sea.’<sup>33</sup> So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”* We see that it is an angel who appears before Cornelius, telling him that he should send for Peter. Peter, on the rooftop in Joppa, has come to understand that he shouldn’t consider anyone as *“impure or unclean”*. Luke then tells us: *Then Peter declared,<sup>47</sup> “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”<sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.* Cornelius and his family embrace the faith, they receive the Holy Spirit, and are baptized with water.

Let’s look at something that happens in the middle of this story. After Cornelius has sent for Peter and Peter has appeared at the home of Cornelius, but before Peter concludes that all Gentiles, not just Cornelius, have the right to hear the Word and follow Jesus, we are told this:

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*but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”*

Peter realizes that God doesn't elevate one group over another. He doesn't value Jews more than other people. No matter where you live, no matter what your ethnic makeup, if you follow God and if you do what is right in life, God accepts you as a believer. Peter is making a speech in this passage, and although nominally, he is talking to Cornelius, he is in truth talking to the readers of the Book of Acts – and that includes us. This is how many of the speeches, from very short to somewhat longer ones, in the Bible are engineered: people speak in the moment to specific people – and they also speak to all people in the future. That's why so many of the speeches in the Bible seem to make broader points than are strictly necessary in the immediate context. In this quote, Peter reflects on what happened when John the Baptist began preaching at the Jordan River. Christian baptism did not exist when John was doing this. Christianity did not exist. Jesus was unknown at this time. John the Baptist is carrying out ritualistic cleansing, giving Jews an opportunity through an ancient Jewish practice to renew their faith in God by asking for forgiveness. One of those whom he does this with is Jesus himself, and this marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He cleanses himself as a Jew to prepare

himself to usher in the New Covenant. Peter tells us that from then on, Jesus is a servant, rescuing people who are oppressed by the devil, by sin. Jesus ministers close to his home, never traveling far from Jerusalem. When he is done with his ministry, he is rewarded by being killed by a method engineered to be as agonizing as possible. But then, God raises him from the dead. He visits chosen people, those whom God wants as witnesses to his resurrection. God then sends these witnesses to preach to all people – and not just Jews. They carry the Word everywhere. I'd like to focus on this verse: *Then God allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses.* But first, let's step back.

There is a Greek word, *kerygma*, that's used by biblical scholars to refer to the earliest preachers who present the story of Jesus to new converts. These preachers include the Apostles, the great evangelist to the gentiles Paul, and others who either met Jesus or lived at the same time as Jesus. The word *kerygma* means "proclamation". The early evangelists proclaim the story of Jesus. Scholars have found strong commonalities in the biblical speeches of these preachers. They tend to tell very similar stories, and the general pattern is considered the *kerygma*. The form of this proclamation, this *kerygma*, is some variation on the following: One, Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies. Two, Jesus introduced a New

Covenant and a new age. Three, Jesus was in the family line of King David, and he performed many miraculous acts. Four, Jesus died on the cross to deliver us from evil. Five, Jesus was buried and rose from the dead after three days and visited select people, commanding many of them to preach the Word. Six, Jesus is now at the right hand of God. Seven, Jesus will return one more time at the end of time.

If we look at our passage from Acts, we see two things: First, there is a version of the standard *kerygma* in the passage; second, we are told that *“God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses.”* Note that Luke, through the mouth of Peter, tells us that Jesus appears to people who have been chosen to be his witnesses. If you keep in mind that this speech is intended for all the readers of Acts, and not simply Cornelius, the first gentile follower of Christ, then clearly, we were chosen in advance to be witnesses for Christ.

After Jesus rises from the dead, he meets with his apostles and other people over a period of forty days. We’re only seven days out from Easter. Jesus is still walking among us. Easter is more than a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, a celebration of our faith, and a celebration of our belief in something that many find unbelievable. Easter is the day that Jesus appears to us and tells us that from the beginning of time, we were chosen. When you leave here today, keep in mind that

Jesus has been resurrected, but he has not ascended into Heaven yet. You've got another thirty days or so to accept your commission. I'm actually serious.

When new believers ask about the Bible and how to study it, they are often told to begin with the Gospel of John. This is because, from a spiritual perspective, it is the most compelling of the four Gospels. It gives a powerful portrayal of Jesus the Messiah. It focuses on the choice between an eternal life and spiritual death. John, the author of the Book, is an Apostle of Jesus, and his personal witnessing is powerful. I remember reading it as a boy – and it heavily influenced my life. The Gospel of John is very different than the other three Gospels. While it appears that the authors of Matthew and Luke had a copy of the Gospel of Mark and used it as a starting place, and while those three Gospels are very similar, John stands out as unique. In the three similar Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the vulnerable, painful humanity of Jesus is laid bare. But in John, we see Jesus in his majesty. Jesus is going to suffer and die, but he is in control of his destiny every step of the way. In John's Gospel, there are no parables, Jesus does not deliver the Sermon on the Mount or any other extended sermon, and any miracles that Jesus performs are seen not simply as acts of mercy - like in the other three Gospels, for the most part - but as signs of Jesus' true identity as the Messiah. The Gospel is poetic in parts and makes heavy use of symbolism. It is the same Jesus, the same story, but



we see Jesus from a different, glorious perspective. Consider how the Gospel of John begins:

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

When I read this version of the life of Jesus, this Gospel, as a boy, I suddenly felt that I understood Jesus, that I knew who he was. I was in church at the time. The service was going on, and I wasn't paying any attention. I was reading a pew Bible – and it struck me that Jesus wasn't a character in a book. Jesus is real.

Jesus says this, in the Gospel of John, just before he is sentenced to die by crucifixion: *“My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”* The Jesus of the Gospel of John is who you should think about when you contemplate the risen Christ and his relationship to you. God chose us – chose you - to greet the risen Jesus. Celebrate that! Please pray briefly with me.

*God, Easter is over, but we are still chosen witnesses. And even after the 40 days unfold, he will be here among us, within us. Thank you for this gift.*