

Sermon on Acts 10:43-11 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

The air you breathe matters. Think of it. The level of oxygen, the toxins, the mold spores, the carbon monoxide... all in the air you breathe in and out and the balance of these things makes all the difference. Whether you are healthy and thriving, or suffering and gasping for something more.

This is true metaphorically in the church as well, shoot, in any pattern of thinking and believing. The air we breathe matters, it is even life and death.

In Western Christianity, here is the air that is in abundance: God created the world. Starting with a spark the expanse becomes a garden and life begins. A deity is responsible and he has given us free reign. God then desires for people to be good, nice, fair to each other as taught in the Bible and actually in most world religions. It is all suggestion and the best way to live really, so give it your best college try! While we are being good, the real goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself - the world revolves around you and when I say that I mean specifically me!

God is still there but he doesn't need to be particularly involved in my life until I have a crisis or need to resolve a personal problem. When there are bumps in the road to happiness, God is there to give me a comforting platitude to get through the day.

When the journey is all done, good people go to heaven when they die.

If we consume nothing but this air, our systems get used to it and actually start to crave it. Anything that smells different becomes suspicious and wrong. But it is bad air. Toxic leading to death. There is purer air to breathe.

All this metaphor for the reality of the good news of Christ infiltrating long-held, wrong assumptions and postures, a shock to the system. We see more of that in today's text from Acts 10.

The saving grace of Jesus unsettles lifeless religion.

Acts 10:34-48 "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. [36] As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), [37] you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. [39] And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, [40] but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, [41] not to all the people

but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. [42] And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. [43] To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

[44] 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. [46] For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, [47] “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.” (ESV)

The saving grace of Jesus unsettles lifeless religion.

I joked during my small group this week that if you missed last Sunday’s sermon, no big deal, Luke as the author of Acts tells the same story again for emphasis, so I am preaching the same sermon again!

If we did miss our previous installment, we have to set the scene for this proclaiming of Christ and move of the Spirit to fill new believers.

We have transitioned to the ministry of Peter, the apostle maybe most familiar with the faithfulness of Jesus. After leaving Jerusalem he has been preaching Jesus and been used by the Spirit to bring healing and the dead to life. Then he has this amazing vision.

While waiting for lunch on a rooftop he falls into a trance where he sees a sheet descend from the sky full of every kind of animal and he is told “what God has made clean do not call common.”

As the story goes, Peter realizes that God meant people not just bacon and he goes with the servants of Cornelius when he is invited to bring the good news to his house. The gospel is for all.

What was once taboo is no longer. The outcasts are invited in and the least are made family. Big news. History altering, religion assundering truth.

And it is into an environment that had been breathing stale air that defined who you would associate with and just how far the message of Jesus should go, Peter preaches, the Holy Spirit blows freshness and life into the room, and into the kingdom.

And it is something that unsettles the routine, what was normal and preferred. But it is something so much better than what we could dream up.

This is the pure air our bodies and souls long for, that makes us to thrive and live what we were made for. Any interest to breathe it in?

We will follow the story in three elements today - Jesus is Lord, Jesus saves sinners, and grace is unsettling. We will let this grace hit us in the face and see what happens!

1) Jesus is Lord

Peter enters the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion who has invited all of his friends and family, as well as staff and servants, to hear the apostle. There have been hints of this good news of Jesus being for more than Jews, rumors out of Samaria... but what is it that is changing the landscape of Judea?

“Peter’s story takes seventy-seven verses to tell and repeats his vision twice. God wanted to make sure we did not miss the point.” The gospel is for all people. There are no more distinctions and separations, all are before God and in need of a Savior and he has come.

“Peter now understood that Christ was for everyone! He was optimistic about what the gospel could do for all who believe.” So he has journeyed to Caesarea and opened his mouth to share Jesus.

God shows no partiality, in every nation those who revere him and do what is right, comes to him, are invited in, acceptable to Him. God’s favor is made available to Gentiles “of every nation.”

Peter tells the Jesus story with an emphasis we can’t miss. As for what was preached to Israel, that there is peace to be had through Jesus Christ. Peace between God and humanity, because things are not as they were meant to be - rebellion against God became the norm and every soul has been tainted by sin and our ongoing disregard for God - we need peace.

Jesus as not only a peace deliverer, he is Lord of all... Ruler, cosmic king over all things. Higher than Caesar, than the priests, Jesus is the I AM. Thick stuff, important.

Peter recounts Christ’s baptism, temptation, his miracles; his life, death and resurrection. A chosen witness commanded to preach sent to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

He is the Anointed One of God, an essential truth of the gospel. He is made Lord and Judge.

Peter never says Jesus is your homeboy... but your judge. Yikes. This is some different air! The buck stops with Jesus... so we better understand Jesus rightly!

“Jesus is the judge of everybody... (counter to lingo of giving Jesus permission to be lord). He is the One who gives permission, not we... Jesus is our judge, not just after we die but right now... That doesn't sound like good news because it isn't. It is bad news unless He is also our advocate, our defense attorney, our redeemer - unless we put our trust only in Him for our salvation. Then the Judge becomes our friend and advocate. Then the Judge gives remission of sin; that is, He removes from the record all charges against us. But until or unless we put our trust in Christ alone, He is our judge, and our sins are written large in front of Him. If we do not submit to Him, the gavel will come down, and there will be no mercy. We will stand on the basis of our righteousness, or lack thereof, before the judge.” Sproul

You think grace is unsettling, Jesus as judge is unsettling. That we are to be judged?

“The false god we're up against.. is bobble-head Jesus Junior, who never judges, never interferes, never demands, and can't save us, because he is us. Sweet, precious, miniaturized Jesus must make way for the glorious Jesus of the gospel.” Ortlund

If he can't damn you, he can't save you.

Peter is not just adding religious sounding words to the story, he is giving this household, and us, the keys of the gospel - broken, sinful people standing before the judge of the universe - the ONLY judge. What will the verdict be?

2) Jesus Saves Sinner

Acts 10:43 “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (ESV)

Boom. Everything changes because these words are true.

The whole flow of redemptive history, every story told to God's people, every example, points here - to forgiveness of sins. The judge made the Savior.

Everyone who believes in him... the Him that Scripture declares and history proves. Not a belief in myself or your abilities to achieve the perfection required to stand and be in relationship with God but belief in Jesus' accomplishment of that perfection, and as a substitute for you on the cross your sin deserved. Believing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

“The gospel is understood in terms of a definite content, and that content is not about me, and it is really not about you. The content focuses attention on the person and work of Jesus - who He is and what He has done - and added on this is how we receive the benefits of His ministry by faith.” Sproul... by believing and what you believe matters.

This is what Peter is preaching to the party at Cornelius' house.

1 Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (ESV)

Believe. That’s it! Peter doesn’t lay out steps to forgiveness, or ways to earn the justice of this judge. He says those that believe are forgiven.

These people are saved! No altar call! No invitation! They simply believed and were born again on the spot!

While Peter is saying these things, the Spirit fell and fills all who heard - undeniable. Grace has been extended to these once unclean people, those with Peter are amazed as they hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God.

For Peter and for this people group in the house, there is nothing that stands in the way of identifying with Jesus - being baptized in his name. Like the Ethiopian Eunuch before, they is nothing in the way of being a Christian - believe in Jesus, baptized into the family with him.

Usually to be given such a gift we have to earn it. Everything of the human experience is striving, and achieving, spending what we acquire on what we desire. This is something, before the judge of the universe, that you can’t purchase, you can’t inherit...

The crowd here didn’t do anything special, not all of them had pedigree or position. They came into the room with their need for a Savior and Peter introduced them to Jesus. The cross is the great equalizer - and place of redemption. The atmosphere changed, the air was super-charged with the Holy Spirit.

Amazing Grace! Extended to all people, validated by the work of the Spirit.

If Acts ended with chapter 10 I think we might be okay, the gospel extends the kingdom beyond presumed borders... goes to the ends of the earth. But Luke keeps writing and the story isn’t done, because there is more bad air the Spirit wants to blow out of the church.

3) Grace is Unsettling

We just can’t believe it. It seems too good to be true. There must be something more than just believing. Seems too easy... Surely the righteous Judge puts more criteria on whom can come?!

In the first century church, it was the broadening of borders that seemed a bridge too far.

Acts 11:1–3 “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. [2] So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the

circumcision party criticized him, saying, [3] “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” (ESV)

I think there are two important things going on, disbelief of the efficacy of the grace of Christ, and a disbelief of the response to it.

Can Gentiles really be saved? The circumcision party is no party at all! As bad as it sounds. Requiring the adoption of religious tradition in order to become a Christian - sure believe but also accomplish this list of rules before we can trust your salvation. This won't go away anytime soon, big chunks of the New Testament will be written to correct this wrong view.

But also, if they are saved - can a Jewish believer hang with Gentiles? What is preferred is individual sects of Christianity defined by affinities other than Jesus. This is what's at play in Jerusalem.

Peter, fresh off this encounter with God through a vision and the miraculous conversion and filling of the whole household of Cornelius, recounts what he was told - ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ How when he spoke the Spirit fell just like at Pentecost...

Acts 11:17 “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” (ESV)

The rules that couldn't save before don't save now. The perspectives that separated before have been overrun by the flow of the grace of Christ for all who believe in him.

This isn't just meant for some first century reordering of the religious system. This is meant to break up all the crud we attempt to throw on others to ensure they are “believers” of our liking...

‘If you preach grace won't people go on sinning?’ You all didn't need my permission before... By no means do we go on sinning... but my ability to sin or not did not save me, the blood of Christ was what met and satisfied the wrath I earned. End of story, full stop, drop the mic.

“We cannot repent our way into forgiveness,
nor assure ourselves of it by obedience,
nor sin our way out of it once it's been given.
Forgiveness is pure divine gift from beginning to end.” C. Bird - *that is unsettling*.

Amazing Grace is more than just a song we dust off every now and again - it is the life-altering gift of Christ to rebels made heirs.

"Grace is by definition not only something you don't deserve. It is being given something that is the opposite of what you deserve, which is what we have in Christ alone." - Michael Horton

The gospel reality goes face-to-face with legalism, with do better & try harder, and wins everytime.

Who am I that I could stand in God's way?

That this gospel is for all people is not only good news for "those other all people" it is good news for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and it is good news for us... because it doesn't leave us where we are in our presuppositions and preferences. It leaves us in awe, forever changed.

Acts 11:18 "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." (ESV)

The disagreements ended. Those skeptical silenced. God really has moved among the nations. The church glorifies him for this gift of repentance.

Instead of second-guessing grace, and how far it goes, it is awe that is meant to be our response. Worship of the giver for the gift of life we receive. The household of Cornelius experienced this by the move of the Spirit, the Jerusalem church experienced this at the words of Peter... throughout history when this grace is reclaimed and the church is reminded of it, worship and the mission of bringing it to others has been the order... This is still for us today.

Let it be unsettling as long as it brings you back to Christ. To his work on that tree, his blood shed for thee. Let this truth breathe life into your faith each day... as we are "gospelled" may we be in awe of the grace of Christ for us.

Where do we go?

If the good news of Jesus really goes this far - that it is for all people and everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name:

Rest in Him - If you have believed in Jesus you are his beloved. Full stop. The striving is over, you are claimed, made a child, and empowered for life. Who are we to stand in God's way? Let it change your days, your dreams, your drive for life. How you see others and what you see as essential.

Rejoice that you have been granted repentance that leads to life!

Take it to others - If grace goes this far let's run it to those we once thought beyond its reach. "If we do not believe the gospel is inclusive, if we are not optimistic about what it will do, if we are not a little aggressive about sharing it, people will not come to Christ."

“When awe of God has captured your heart, ministry will fill your schedule. You won’t need the church to schedule ministry for you; you will approach work, marriage, parenting, extended family, friendships, and community with a ministry mentality.” Paul Tripp

Begin with prayer. Since the Spirit can rework our hearts in an instant, prayer they would come to Christ. Then having prayer for the Spirit’s help, talk to them about Jesus when you see them.

The saving grace of Jesus unsettles lifeless religion. And delivers the beauty of Christ to rebels, gives life to those once dead in their trespasses, and is destined to be proclaimed to all people.

In might just unsettle your own “going through the motions...”

Friend shared the story of the great preacher, Martyn Lloyd Jones, his wife’s conversion. “Having attended church and prayer-meetings from Childhood, Bethan Lloyd-Jones had always believed she was a Christian...” In her own words:

“I was for two years under Martyn’s ministry before I really understood what the gospel was. I used to listen to him on Sunday morning and I used to feel, Well, if this is Christianity I don’t really know anything about it. On Sunday night I used to pray that somebody would be converted; I thought you had to be a drunkard or a prostitute to be converted. I remember how I used to rejoice to see drunkards become Christians and envy them with all my heart, because there they were, full of joy, and free, and here I was in such a different condition.”

Like any good pastor husband, he gives her a book... “I felt a burden of sin... Martyn saying “read this!” (The Anxious Enquirer Directed.) I have never forgotten what I read in that book. It showed how wrong was the idea that my sin could be greater than the merit of the blood of Christ - His death was well able to clear all my sins away. There, at last, I found release and I was so happy.”

Someone convinced she was a Christian... having an encounter with the real Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Forever changed. Freed by the grace of Christ.

May there be more of this!

“Some draw a circle that shuts men out;
Race and position are what they flout;
But Christ in love seeks them all to win,
He draws a circle that takes them in!” - Edwin Markham