

South Bay Church Plant Sabbath School

6 – Who is the Church For?

Introduction

We often think of the church as existing for *us*. We go to church, we meet as the church, we are the church. What becomes clear as you read the book of Acts, however, is the strong outward and missional focus of the church. This week we will be looking at how the church reaches *them*, so that “they” become a part of us. A church focused on my tribe becomes a cliquish church – one that is comfortable to those on the inside, but exclusive and a mystery to those on the outside.

How comfortable do you feel reaching out to people who are not part of your existing friend group?

Acts 10:1-4

What characteristics show that God was working on Cornelius’ heart before the angel showed up?

Once again, we see as we did last week, that God is at work long before the Christian arrived.

Henry Blackaby, in his book *Experiencing God*, notes this aspect of how God works in our lives: “Anything of spiritual significance that happens in your life will be a result of God’s activity in you. He is infinitely more concerned with your life and your relationship with Him than you or I could possibly be.” How can we be more available to allow God to work in our lives? How can we see God at work in the lives of others?

Acts 10:5-8

Why did the angel direct Cornelius to Peter instead of just instructing Cornelius personally?

Acts 10:9-16

What lesson was God trying to teach Peter? Jiri Moskala suggests that the four-footed animals here included both clean and unclean animals, but that the unclean animals “contaminated” the clean animals by touching them. So, Peter could have eaten from the clean animals, but now he couldn’t because they had been made unclean. In the same way, he couldn’t be with Gentiles because they would make him unclean.

When has prejudice got in the way of your reaching out to others?

Acts 10:17-23

What was remarkable about Peter’s change in attitude? How comfortable do you think it was for Peter to have the Romans/Gentiles stay in his house overnight? How comfortable is it for you to witness to people who are not like you?

“If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them. the world would be turned upside down. How do we know? Because that’s what first century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it.” Henry T. Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda*.

Acts 10:24-29

How would you feel if someone had a vision about you with your name and your address?

While an angel might not be appearing to others to tell them to come find us, that doesn't mean that God doesn't have a plan for us to reach outside of our neighborhoods and our cultural cliques, and to touch someone else's life.

Revelation 14:6-7 (Matthew 28:18-20)

The word "angel" means messenger. How will the first angel's message be accomplished?

Unless a group of people are willing to leave their comfort zones and neighborhoods and go to where the "pagans" are, the "pagans" may never hear the full gospel, even if they are actively searching for God. How can you be more available to be God's messenger of the gospel?

Acts 10:30-35

What had changed in Peter's view of the church?

Acts 10:36-43

What was the focus of Peter's message? How does a message like this bring people who were former enemies together? Paul tells us how God broke the barrier between Jews and Gentiles because He reconciled them through the cross (Ephesians 2:11-22). How can a Jesus-centered message help us to reach people who are not part of our faith?

Acts 10:44-48

What was the reaction of the Jewish Christians to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles? How does this connect with the comment in Ephesians 1:13, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." What does it take for people to be "included in Christ?"

What does this story tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit?

Acts 11:1-18

What new details do you notice in Peter's retelling of the story? Why would the idea that the Gentiles could be saved have been so shocking to the Jews?

Acts 11:19-21

Even with the clear evidence of God working among the Gentiles, the church still struggled with accepting the mission of reaching non-Jews. So, God let them grow in reaching Greek-speaking Jews. How would this first step have helped them with the bigger task of reaching the world?

Conclusion

Based on what we have read this week, who do you feel the church is for – us or them? Or is it somehow both? In what ways?