

The Italian Job - Part Two

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 10 and we'll just read again in verse 24.

Acts chapter 10 and verse 24. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up saying, stand up. I too am a man.

Now I'm sure that whenever you watch an episode of your favourite weekly programme, it usually begins with the episode usually begins with what happened on the previous week and the previous episode. And the new episode begins with the statement previously on.

And then there's this recap. There's this summary of what's been happening in the storyline. And so that if we've missed anything in the storyline, it will bring us up to date with what's been going on.

[1 : 26] And, well, that's how I want to begin this morning. I want us to say previously on the Italian job. Previously on the Italian job. Because as you know, we saw last week Acts chapter 10 as a chapter as a whole.

It is the Italian job. Where the Apostle Peter, he is commanded commanded by God the Holy Spirit to go to the house of an Italian soldier to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to him and to his family.

And as we said, the Italian job, it's a pivotal moment in the book of Acts. Because the gospel is now spreading from the Jews to the Gentiles. Which is what Jesus promised would happen.

Because way back in chapter 1, Jesus promised his disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria out to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And that's what the Italian job is all about. It's about the gospel spreading out to the Gentiles. And the gospel is to spread by arriving at the house of this Italian soldier who goes by the name of Cornelius.

[2 : 37] Now when we considered the first half of Acts chapter 10 last week, we saw part 1 of the Italian job. And we learned there in part 1 that Cornelius was a religious Roman.

But what distinguished Cornelius from the other religious Romans around him who worshipped their Roman gods and goddesses and the emperor, what distinguished Cornelius was that he didn't find security or safety or satisfaction in all of these gods and goddesses.

No, Cornelius was this religious Roman who feared God, the God of Israel, and he gave generously to the Jews and he also prayed continually to this one God.

And yet, by this point, he wasn't a Christian. But he came to realise that his religion couldn't save him. He knew that it wasn't enough because there was something or someone.

His religion wasn't enough because there was someone missing in his life and he was seeking and searching for answers. And so when Cornelius, he has a vision, as we saw that in part 1, he had a vision to go and look for a man called Peter in Joppa.

[3 : 55] And after the vision, we're told that Cornelius, he immediately sends two of his servants and a Roman soldier from his garrison and he sends them to go and find Peter. Now, while Cornelius' men are on the way, you remember Peter, he went up onto the housetop to pray.

And while he's praying, Peter also receives a vision from the Lord. And it was a vision that commanded Peter to eat unclean animals. And of course, that went against everything that Peter had ever known and understood about being a Jew.

But in Peter's vision, the Lord was bringing down the barrier. This barrier that existed between Jews and Gentiles. And the Lord was revealing to Peter that the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be offered to all people everywhere.

And so part 1 of the Italian job had concluded with Cornelius' men that are all travelling back to Caesarea with Peter to meet Cornelius. And now as we come to part 2 from verse 24 onwards, part 2 of the Italian job, Peter, he comes to the home of this Gentile, this Italian soldier.

And he's there to fulfil the Italian job, to preach the gospel to him and also to his family. Now what we see in the second half of this chapter is that there's three things, an irrelevant barrier, an invalid bias, and an important baptism.

[5 : 25] Three things in the second half of the Italian job. An irrelevant barrier, an invalid bias, and an important baptism.

So we'll look first of all at an irrelevant barrier. An irrelevant barrier. We'll read again in verse 24. It says, Now it took two days for Cornelius' men, Peter, and some men from Joppa.

It took them two days to travel this 30 miles from Joppa to Caesarea. And you'll remember that Joppa and Caesarea, they were located on the Mediterranean coast of Israel.

They were right on the sea. Joppa was this little seaside town, and then 30 miles north was this, you could say, a seaport city of Caesarea.

And as we said before, Caesarea was not to be confused with the Caesarea Philippi, which is mentioned near Galilee. Caesarea Maritima was this seaport city, and it was the capital city of the Roman province of Judea.

[6 : 54] And as a city, we said before, it was a distinctly Roman place. It had lots of Roman architecture, and there was a very distinct Roman culture that went on in Caesarea Maritima.

It was a Gentile city with many Gentile people living there. In fact, Cornelius, he was permanently stationed in Caesarea with his family, along with his cohort of Italians, this 1,000 men cohort, and also their families.

But you know, what's remarkable is that with all these Gentile families living in the city of Caesarea, and with the prospect of Peter coming to preach the gospel in Cornelius' house, the first thing Cornelius does is that he takes the opportunity to invite all his relatives and all his close friends to come to his home.

You know, Cornelius knew that the gospel was going to be hard, and the first thing he does is find his friends and his family and bring them to hear the gospel. And you know, where better to hear the gospel spoken personally, and where better to see the gospel lived out personally, than in someone's home.

And for Cornelius, even though he's not yet a Christian himself, he wants his family and his friends to hear the gospel. Because Cornelius has come to the understanding that his religion won't save him or anyone else.

- [8 : 26] only the gospel will save. It's only the good news of Jesus Christ that's able to transform hearts and change lives. And you know, my friend, like Cornelius, you might not call yourself a Christian today.
- You might only think of yourself as a religious regular who comes to church. But you know that your religion of coming to church on a Sunday morning.
- You know that it's not enough to save you. And if you don't know that, I'll tell you now, it's not enough to save you. You know that you need to be saved. You know that you need to commit your life to Jesus Christ.
- It's not enough sitting in the pew on a Lord's Day morning. You know that sitting on the fence, as it were, it's not a comfortable place to be because you're neither in nor out.
- Well, the truth is you're actually out. You're not in. And you know, like Cornelius, even though you're not yet a committed Christian, you would still say that you would want your family and your friends to hear the gospel.
- [9 : 36] You would want them to come to church regularly. You would want them to be part of this congregation or whatever congregation they're closest to. You would want them to know about Jesus.
- And I'm sure that that's why many of you have baptized your children. I hope it wasn't just because it was the done thing to do. But because even though you're not yet a committed Christian today, you still want your children to be brought up to go to church and to be taught about Jesus and to know the gospel.
- But why is that? Why would you want your family or your friends to come to church even though yourself you're not yet a committed Christian?
- Why would you want them to hear the gospel? Well, is it not because you know in your heart that it's only the gospel that can change lives and transform hearts?
- And you've seen it. You've seen the gospel change lives in your own family. You've seen it with your friends. You've seen it how the gospel can change people and make them a new creation.
- [10 : 48] But as you know, my friend, it's not enough to hear the gospel. It's not enough to know the gospel. No, no. You have to come to the gospel.
- And the gospel is not a thing. The gospel is a person. The gospel is Jesus Christ. And you have to come to him for forgiveness and freedom from sin.
- You have to come to Christ in complete dependence upon him and commitment to him. And you have to come today. But you know, when Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, the first thing Peter would have seen is all these people and he must have got a shock.
- All these people gathered into one house. But it's not just, they were not just people. They were Gentiles. They were all Italians. Maybe there were other Gentiles there too.
- But you know, what would have taken Peter by an even greater surprise was that when he entered the house, Cornelius, the owner of the house, he immediately falls down at Peter's feet to worship him.
- [11 : 57] Now we have to understand why Cornelius did this. Cornelius, you remember, he had never met Peter. He didn't know who Peter was. He didn't know anything about Peter.
- He didn't know that Peter used to be a fisherman. He didn't know that Jesus had called him from his fishing. He didn't know the history of Peter's life. All Cornelius knew was that the angel had told him in a vision to go and find this man, Peter, in Joppa and bring him to your house.

Cornelius didn't know who Peter was. He didn't know that he was an apostle. He didn't know he was a disciple of Jesus. He didn't know anything about him. But even though Cornelius didn't know much about Peter, he thought that Peter was important enough to be worshipped.

Maybe Cornelius thought that Peter was divine because it was at that time that the Roman emperor had started claiming divinity and demanding to be worshipped. In fact, when a Roman emperor entered into your presence, the first thing you would do is get on your knees and bow your face in the dust.

And with Peter being this man who had been sent by God, maybe Cornelius thought that Peter was divine like the Roman emperor. But as we read, Peter very quickly he corrects Cornelius, telling him not to bow down and worship him, but to stand up because he's not divine.

[13 : 21] He says, I am only a man. I too am a man. And you know, when Peter confirms to Cornelius that he's not divine but human, he's not only highlighting that there was no moral division between them, he's also affirming that there's now no religious division between them.

Peter was emphasizing that there's no moral or religious barrier between them as Jews and Gentiles. And Peter affirms this by what he says in verse 28.

He said to them, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

So everyone who was gathered in Cornelius' house, they knew that what was going on was an unlawful meeting. It was unlawful for the Jews and the Gentiles to meet together.

Because even though the city of Caesarea was full of Jews and full of Gentiles, they never mixed. And they never met in the homes of one another. Rather, they would actually keep themselves to themselves.

[14 : 38] Gentiles would go and visit Gentiles. Jews would go and visit Jews. And there would always be this barrier, this separation between the Jews and the Gentiles. And sadly, the barrier was actually created more because of the Jews and their attitude towards the Gentiles.

because the Jews, they viewed Gentiles as unclean, uncircumcised, unholy, and ultimately unsavable. One commentator said, overestimating the distinction in the Jewish mind between Jew and Gentiles is almost impossible.

The Jews despised the Gentiles. In the Jewish worldview, everyone was divided into two camps, Jews and Gentiles. If you were a Gentile, Jews believed that God neither loved you or chose you.

And you know, sadly for generations, the Jews thought of themselves as better than everyone else. And they thought that God loved them and chose them because there was something in them as a people.

And for centuries, there was this barrier, this huge barrier of distinction and division between Jews and Gentiles. But as Peter says, the Lord showed him in a vision that the arrival of the gospel meant that the barrier was coming down.

[16 : 00] The wall was coming down. And there was to be no distinction, no division between Jews and Gentiles because salvation is to be offered to all people everywhere.

And what Peter says to this home full of Gentiles is that with the arrival of the gospel, the barrier that existed for generations, this barrier between Jews and Gentiles, it's now irrelevant.

It's an irrelevant barrier. It's an irrelevant barrier because salvation is to be offered to all people everywhere. So an irrelevant barrier, that's the first thing we see here.

But secondly, an invalid bias. An invalid bias. We see in verse 34, it says there, so Peter opened his mouth and said, truly I understand that God shows no partiality.

But in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right and is acceptable to him, as for the word that he sent to Israel preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all.

[17 : 14] So after Cornelius, and that's in verses 30 to 33, after Cornelius explains to Peter why he had sent for him, Peter responds by completing the Italian job.

You remember that the Italian job was that Peter was commanded by God to go to the home of this Italian centurion and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to him and to his family.

And you know, it must have been an amazing moment, a great moment for Peter to be invited to the home of Cornelius and then asked to preach the gospel to everyone gathered there.

You know, what a privilege being invited to preach the gospel to lost souls. And as we read, the house was full of Cornelius' family and friends. It was full of Gentiles, full of Italians, full of lost sinners.

And they were all there because they wanted to hear the gospel. They wanted to be saved. They wanted to hear about Jesus. And you know, standing in the house of Cornelius, you know, must have brought it all back for Peter.

[18 : 22] You know, he must have thought back to the times when he was in homes in Galilee and the house would be full of people and they're all there eager to listen to what Jesus had to say and how Jesus preached the gospel.

But at that point, Jesus was only preaching to Jews. And yet, here's Peter and he's presenting the gospel to Gentiles. Something Jesus promised he would do one day.

You know, the first thing Peter says in his sermon, he says, there's no barrier. There's no barrier here. He says, there's no bias between them as Jews and those who are Gentiles.

He says, there's no bias. He says in verse 34, God shows no partiality. God shows no partiality. In other words, there's no favoritism, no discrimination, no prejudice with God.

God shows no partiality. Therefore, God is impartial. He's fair and objective. And you know, what Peter makes clear from the outset of his sermon is that Christianity is not for a particular group or race or people.

[19 : 35] It's not just for the Jews. it's for whosoever. It's for whosoever. And in Peter's mind, he knows that the Christ of Christianity is now to be offered to all people everywhere without exception or qualification.

So my unconverted friend, salvation and becoming a Christian is not about what country you're from. It's not about what language you speak.

It's not about what family you were brought up in or even the religion you adhere to. It's not about being baptized as a child or your church attendance or your knowledge of the Bible or being a good person.

No, salvation and Christianity, becoming a Christian is all about claiming and confessing Jesus Christ as your Lord.

And that's what Peter says. God shows no partiality. There's no bias. He says there's no one whether Jew or Gentile.

[20 : 38] There's no one who is entitled to salvation. No one is good enough. Not because you're a Jew that you're good enough for salvation.

No one is worthy enough, he says. No one has enough merit to be acceptable to God. That's why we all need Jesus. That's why we all need this Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And my friend, the only requirement for entry into the kingdom of God is faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. The only requirement is to believe in your heart and to confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is your personal Lord.

And if you're adding anything to that, whether it's your baptism or your church attendance or your Bible knowledge or being a good person or your charity giving, then that's not the gospel.

That's Jesus plus. That's not Christianity. That's not salvation. salvation. And if you have Jesus plus in your mind, then let me tell you again today, you're lost.

[21 : 53] You're lost. And it's a frightful position to be in. But God shows no partiality, which means that God is not favouring you more than anyone else today because you're in church and they're not.

God is not favouring you more today because you're baptized and someone in the community is not. God is not favouring you more today because you're reading the Bible this morning and they're not.

God is not favouring you more today because you think you're a good person and they don't. God is not favouring anyone more than someone else because the reality is these things don't make you good enough or worthy for salvation.

No, my friend, no one is entitled to salvation because of who they are. No one is good enough. No one is worthy enough. And you know, I often hear people say to me, I'm not good enough.

I'm not worthy enough. But no one is good enough. No one is worthy enough. No one has enough merit to be acceptable to God. That's why we all need this Jesus.

[23 : 05] That's why we need this Christ who went to Calvary. That's why we need his death and resurrection. That's why we need this saviour who saves sinners. And you know, that's what Peter told this crowd of Italians who had gathered in the house of Cornelius.

He told them all about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what he says in verse 37. You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed, 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. And we are all 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.

But God raised him on the third day and caused him to appear, 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.

You know, Peter, he reminded these Gentiles, these Italians and us, that God shows no partiality. There's no bias with God.

[24 : 26] No one, whether Jew or Gentile, no one is entitled to salvation. No one is good enough, no one is worthy enough, no one has enough merit to be acceptable before God.

That's why we all need Jesus. And this is the message of the gospel. We all need Jesus. And you know, Peter says that same Jesus, verse 42, 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.

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. And you know, Peter, he reminds the Gentiles, he reminds those for whom the gospel is being proclaimed to, he reminds them that this Jesus has been appointed by God as the judge of the living and the dead.

But he also reminds them that the offer of salvation is to both Jew and Gentile. It's to whosoever. Whosoever, he says, whether Jew or Gentile, churchgoer or not, baptized or not, good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whatever situation in life, Peter says, Jesus is on offer to whosoever.

That includes you. That includes you today, my unconverted friend. That includes you. The call is as wide as possible. Whosoever.

[26 : 11] The call is as wide as possible. But the condition is as narrow as possible. The condition is as narrow as possible whosoever believes.

Peter says, whosoever believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins through his name. Whosoever believes in their heart, and I know you do.

I have no issue with that. You believe in your heart. But it's the second part, isn't it? Confessing with a mouth. Whosoever believes in their heart and confesses with their mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, they receive the forgiveness of sins.

My friend, that's what's on offer to you today. As it's on offer to you every week. Every week it's on offer to you. Free pardon and full forgiveness.

Grace by the way, glory in the end. It's all on offer to you today. And you're asked just to come. believe and confess.

[27 : 26] Because that's what the Italian job is all about. It's all about preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to lost sinners. And so we've seen an irrelevant barrier, an invalid bias, but as Peter was preaching, there was an important baptism.

baptism. That's what I want us to see lastly, an important baptism, an irrelevant barrier, an invalid bias, and an important baptism.

Look at verse 44. While Peter was still saying these things, while he was still preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised, that's the Jews, who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. You know, it was while Peter carried out his Italian job of preaching the gospel to whosoever.

[28 : 48] Lost sinner. He was preaching the gospel to whosoever so that they would receive forgiveness of sins through the name of Jesus Christ.

And as he was preaching, we're told that those who had gathered in the home of Cornelius were then baptized with the Holy Spirit. We're told that the Holy Spirit fell on them, and the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them.

They were baptized with the Holy Spirit, which simply means they were converted. They came to believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

And those who were Jews, who had come with Peter, they were witnessing this pivotal moment in the early church. Because with the arrival of the Holy Spirit in this house full of Gentiles, the Lord was confirming that the gospel was for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

And following the Gentiles, baptism of the Holy Spirit, we're told in the last two verses that they were baptized with water. So there was two baptisms in these four verses.

[30 : 00] The baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism with water. The question I want us to think about just as we conclude is which baptism is more important?

Is it the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the baptism with water? Which baptism was an important baptism? Which baptism was necessary for salvation?

And of course the answer is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because as you know or as you should know, your baptism with water when you were baptized as a child it doesn't save you.

It doesn't cleanse you from your sin. It doesn't make you safe as some people like to say. It doesn't make you safe if you die. It has no bearing upon your salvation.

Your baptism as a child was a promise that your parents made before a holy God to bring you up to know the Lord. And for those who are parents we've made these same promises for our children.

[31 : 09] And some parents they try to earnestly and faithfully uphold their promise before God while others don't bother. But you know we're all accountable on the day of judgment.

We'll all be accountable for these promises. But you know our baptism with water or baptizing a child with water doesn't save us, doesn't save them.

doesn't make them special, doesn't make us special. Doesn't make us more favorable to God, doesn't make us more favorable to God. As Peter said God shows no partiality.

Our baptism doesn't make us more favorable with God today. No we baptize with water as you know as a symbol and a promise and a commitment to the Lord.

It doesn't have any spiritual effect upon our soul. Therefore the baptism we need whether we're young, middle-aged or elderly. The baptism we need today is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 13] Because the baptism of the Holy Spirit is what you need to be converted. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what you need in order to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour.

It's the baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes you a Christian. So how are you to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? How are the unconverted friends sitting here this morning to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

You ask the Lord. You pray to the Lord. You seek the Lord. You seek him.

And you know I say that you have to ask the Lord and pray because you know it's remarkable the amount of times prayer is mentioned in this chapter in relation to the spread of the gospel.

Everybody's praying in this chapter. Cornelius was praying. Peter was praying. They're all praying. And the Spirit comes. And you know it ought to be a reminder to us that prayer accompanies the gospel.

[33 : 20] Prayer goes hand in hand with the gospel. gospel. And so my unconverted friend, whenever you hear the gospel preached, whether it's on a Lord's Day morning, or wherever you go and you're under the sound of the gospel, you should be asking the Lord.

You should be seeking the Lord. You should be praying to the Lord that he would baptize you with his Holy Spirit so that you will believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour.

You should be asking, seeking and knocking every time you hear the gospel preached. Because if you're not, as Jesus says, you're only throwing burning coals upon your head.

You know, you need to be asking, seeking and knocking as you hear the gospel. And so in Acts chapter 10 we have a pivotal moment in the early church, we have the Italian job.

Peter was commanded by God the Holy Spirit to go to the home of a Gentile, this Italian soldier, and he was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to this Italian, this Gentile, and to all the lost Gentiles who were in front of him.

[34 : 39] And of course it was because of the Italian job that Cornelius and many others, they committed their life to Jesus Christ. And you know what's wonderful is that so many after them did the same.

They weren't the first Gentiles and they weren't the last. There were so many after them that committed their life to Jesus Christ. The question is, will you now be one of them?

As a Gentile, you're not a Jew, you are a Gentile. As a Gentile, will you be one of them who commits their life to Jesus Christ and follows him with all their heart?

Because that's the call of the gospel today. Whosoever believes and confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord will be saved.

So are you one of them. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray. Oh Lord, we give thanks for the wonder of the gospel that it is offered to whosoever and that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

[35 : 57] And Lord, we give thanks that that is thy promise. It's not the promise of any man or any institution or any church, but it is the promise of the king and head of his church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

help us then, we pray, to take thee at thy word and to claim these great and precious promises, to know that when we come in faith and obedience, Lord, the God who promises to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, all because the blood of Jesus Christ, thy son, cleanses us from all sin.

Oh Lord, hear us then, we pray. Bless us, we ask, that thy spirit would be poured out upon us, that we would know his presence, that we would know his salvation, we would know the wonder of what it is to follow the Lord for time and for eternity.

Do us good then, we pray, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 67.

Psalm 67 in the Scottish Psalter, it's on page 300. Psalm 67.

[37 : 21] We're going to sing the whole psalm. This is a prayer of blessing upon all the nations, not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, that God would make himself known to all the Gentiles, all the nations of the earth.

Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face, that the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace. Let people praise thee, Lord, let people all thee praise.

O let the nations be glad in songs their voices raise. We'll sing the whole psalm to God's praise. Lord, bless and let the eyes shine on us with thy face.

of the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace.

praise. Let people praise thee, Lord, let people all thee praise.

[38 : 42] O let the nations be glad, praise thee, Lord, in songs their voices raise.

The justly people judge, on earth through nations all.

Let people praise thee, Lord, let them praise thee, both great and small.

The earth, the fruit shall yield, our God shall blessings send.

God shall us bless men, and shall them fear unto earth's utmost end.

[40 : 04] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.