

Acts – Week 7

Gospel – Mission – Power

Xenophobia – Derived from the Greek word for “stranger”. Intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries.

“Psychology Today”

Just how arbitrary are these xenophobic feelings? Two famous public-school experiments show how easy it is to turn one "group" against another. California high school history teacher Ron Jones recruited students to participate in an exclusive new cultural program called "the Wave." Within weeks, these students were separating themselves from others and aggressively intimidating critics. Eventually, Jones confronted the students with the reality that they were unwitting participants in an experiment demonstrating the power of nationalist movements.

A teacher in Iowa discovered how quickly group distinctions are made. The teacher, Jane Elliott, divided her class into two groups—those with blue eyes and those with brown or green eyes. The brown-eyed group received privileges and treats, while the blue-eyed students were denied rewards and told they were inferior. Within hours, the once-harmonious classroom became two camps, full of mutual fear and resentment. Yet, what is especially shocking is that the students were only in the third grade.

The drive to completely and quickly divide the world into "us" and "them" is so powerful that it must surely come from some deep-seated need. The exact identity of that need, however, has been subject to debate. The late Henri Tajfel, of the University of Bristol in England, and John Turner, of the Australian National University, devised a theory to explain the psychology behind a range of prejudices and biases, not just xenophobia. Their theory was based, in part, on the desire to think highly of oneself. One way to lift your self-esteem is to be part of a distinctive group, like a winning team; another is to play up the qualities of your own group and denigrate the attributes of others so that you feel your group is better. Tajfel and Turner called their insight "social identity theory," which has proved valuable for understanding how prejudices develop. Given even the slenderest of criteria, we naturally split people into two groups—an "in-group" and an "out-group." The categories can be of geopolitical importance—nationality, religion, race, language—or they can be as seemingly inconsequential as handedness, hair color or even height.

Once the division is made, the inferences and projections begin to occur. For one, we tend to think more highly of people in the in-group than those in the out-group, a belief based only on group identity. Also, a person tends to feel that others

in the in-group are similar to one's self in ways that—although stereotypical—may have little to do with the original criteria used to split the groups. Someone with glasses may believe that other people who wear glasses are more voracious readers—even more intelligent—than those who don't, in spite of the fact that all he really knows is that they don't see very well. On the other hand, people in the out-group are believed to be less distinct and less complex than are cohorts in the in-group.

*Often it is when we begin to look at things from different angles and different perspectives that we begin the process of understanding.

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

*Remember that this response by Jesus comes after the disciples ask Him about the Kingdom being restored to Israel. Jesus is revealing that this restoration plan of the Kingdom is for all nations and people groups.

Acts 10:1-8 - At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, **2** a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. **3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." **4** And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. **5** And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." **7** When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, **8** and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Note:

Caesarea - was a garrison town that had a major port of travel that Herod the Great had set up that forced travelers to pass through and pay a hefty tax.

Cornelius - He was a representative of Rome. A military man with great authority. He would have been feared by many because of his position. Luke reveals that he is spiritual in the sense that he is in pursuit of the One True God, though he doesn't quite understand this yet.

*It is interesting to note God comes to Cornelius the seeker. He sees his heart, not his perfect theology or doctrine.

*God is committed to seeing His plan of this Gospel going to the ends of the earth (Rome) and is continually working through the disciples to break down their prejudices.

Acts 10:9-16 - The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. **10** And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance **11** and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. **12** In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. **13** And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." **14** But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." **15** And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." **16** This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. **17** Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate **18** and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. **19** And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. **20** Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." **21** And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" **22** And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." **23** So he invited them in to be his guests.

Note:

*Before Peter can effectively minister to these Gentiles, the Lord knows a transformation in his heart and mind need to transpire. Peter, like many of the other disciples still had his preconceived ideas of what God is doing and who it's actually available to. He's about to get a rude awakening.

*Many think chapters 10 & 11 are essentially about the conversion of Cornelius, his household, and the Gospel breaking into the Roman world, but the underlying narrative Luke wants us to see has far more to do with the condition of Peter and the early Churches heart. There is still a conversion transpiring within them.

*The issue of food laws had commonly been used as an excuse for the Jewish people to not associate with the Gentiles. The laws on forbidden food were given in Lev. 11. However, the idea of not associating with the Gentiles because of the food laws was actually used as an excuse to not engage with their neighbor.

*The table was a place of fellowship and you sat down to fellowship with family. To share a meal with Gentiles meant that you were welcoming them as family. To share a meal and enter into a Roman centurion's house meant, treating your oppressors and your enemy as worthy of your fellowship.

*In verse 14 – Peter denies the Lord, again. He’s rebuked, and then has it reiterated to him 3 times the importance of the dream. -> Peter denied Jesus 3 times, Jesus told him 3 times to feed His sheep, now he’s spoken to 3 times about his prejudice heart. Some people just need things reiterated multiple times before it actually sinks in.

Acts 10:25-33 - When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. **26** But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” **27** And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. **28** And 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.** **29** So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.” **30** 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 **31** and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. **32** 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.’ **33** 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.”

Note:

v. 28 – “Against our Law” -> *athemitos* – denotes what is contrary to ancient customs or prescriptions

OC – Began with 10 laws on Mt. Sinai -> 613 laws & customs by Jesus’ day

*What began as a good thing became distorted by man.

Acts 10:34-36 - 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)

Note:

*By Peter stating that God shows no partiality, he is emphatically declaring that the heart of God is for all people and not based on ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status. Jesus has brought a reconciliation between all these

Galatians 3:28-29 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

“There is no such thing as Sheep nations and Goat nations!!”

Matthew 25:31-33 - When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will **separate people one from another** as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

There are 2 Kingdoms:

- **The Kingdom of God - "Sheep"**
- **The Kingdom of Satan - "Goats"**

Acts 10:44-48 - 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.

- **Acts 2** – Baptism of the HS -> 120 – Tongues is the sign of the reversal of the curse of Babel. All people hear the praises of God in their own language
- **Acts 8** – Baptism of the HS -> Samaritans – The experience moves beyond Jerusalem and to a mixed/despised people group
- **Acts 10** – Baptism of the HS – Gentile/Romans/Enemies – The promise that Jesus gave in 1:8 is starting to unfold. The disciples begin to understand the heart of God for all people groups.

Acts 11:17-18 - 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?" **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.”