

WELCOMING EVERYONE, ACTS10

The Church You've always Longed For #3

◆Intro: I'd like to read you some of Dr. Seuss' story, *The Butter Battle Book*:

On the last day of summer, ten hours before Fall...my grandfather took me out to the wall.

For a while he stood silent. Then finally he said, with a very sad shake of his very old head, "As you know, on this side of the Wall we are Yooks. On the far other side of this Wall live the Zooks."

Then my grandfather said, "It's high time that you knew of the terribly horrible thing that Zooks do. In every Zook house and in every Zook town every Zook eats his bread with the butter side down!"

"But we Yooks, as you know, when we breakfast or sup, spread our bread," Grandpa said, "with the butter side up. That's the right, honest way!" Grandpa gritted his teeth. "So you can't trust a Zook who spreads bread underneath! Every Zook must be watched! He has kinks in his soul! That's why, as a youth, I made watching my goal, watching Zooks for the Zook-Watching Border Patrol!..."

◆The book goes on to describe how each side kept making bigger weapons to destroy the other with. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to dislike someone different than you? And how more readily at ease we are with people who agree, or think, or live, or look just like us? Or how easy it is not to like someone we think is doing something wrong? The same thing was going on among the first followers of Jesus in the first century. The first Christians were from Jesus' Jewish race. And Jews had rules amongst themselves that they did not associate with non-Jews any more than was necessary. They knew that God had chosen their race as the His access point, His influencers in the world. But over

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time, they let their calling become their idol such that they ended up with a distaste for the world they were meant to influence. I.e. they did not like or love other races. And here's our first learning from our text:

◆**1. The church Jesus longs for welcomes every kind of people. (34)** God is serious about loving all races, all types, all shapes, all cultures. And at this point the first church needed to learn that. God wants our hearts to be open to all kinds of people. More than that, to welcome them close. When it comes down to it, isn't that what we long for too? To be welcomed?

◆A. Maybe it's because down inside we know how easy it is to be uncomfortable around, or even repulsed by one quite different, or foreign to us. Someone who dresses in, say, Goth makes someone who doesn't a bit uncomfortable. And then there's those folk who eat their bread with the butter side down! Now since we know how easily uncomfortable difference makes us, I think we intuitively feel out of place when we're the one who is different!

◆Someone coming into a church for the first time, has no idea where the bathroom is, or even if there is one. People have told me they attended around here several months and didn't even realize we had a gym back there! They were hesitant to go poking around. Go to someone else's church sometime and notice how YOU feel.

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◆ Jesus is teaching his church that we're supposed to be a welcoming place rather than a separating place. Repeatedly in the Old Testament the Jews were told that they were the "light to the nations". For example, Exodus 19 when God was giving them the Ten Commandments.

◆ "...out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Exodus 19:5, 6, NIV.

◆ (But what are priests for? Connecting people to God!)

◆ "he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."" Isaiah 49:6, NIV.

◆ B. Israel was supposed to go to the nations! Witness. *But they weren't doing it naturally!* And neither were the disciples right after Jesus' ascension! Lets get back in the text:

◆ 1) In the vision God lowers down all these animals for lunch. Lobster, oysters, pork rinds, snake bellies (v11). The Book of Leviticus written about 1500 years earlier had always taught them these were off limits. Talk about tradition! The Israelites had learned to despise

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these things as dangerous. If a lizard so much as touched your cereal bowl you had to throw it in the recycle bin! If you touched a pig by accident, you couldn't go to church for a while. You were "unclean". Now there were theological reasons behind these practices which we don't have time to get into, but the Hebrews had let them grow into traditions of repulsion.

◆ "He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." Acts 10:28, NIV.

◆ This is not in Mosaic law! In fact the term used here refers to ancient custom or taboo, not a decree from God. There's more irony here too. Did you notice where Peter is? Joppa. Anyone remember a former famous prophet of Israel who went to Joppa and why? Jonah, so that he could sail away from being sent to gentiles of Nineveh! Remember how he felt about Nineveh?

◆ *Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program*

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of forgiveness! So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!" Jon.4:1-3

◆C. Grace hadn't sunk into Jonah yet. And grace needed to sink into Peter more too. Maybe the biggest conversion in Acts 10 is in Peter rather than Cornelius!

◆Both Peter and Cornelius had visions from God. But Neal responded immediately and expected God to act(v33). Peter took convincing and needed 6 buddies to come with.

◆v16... How many times did the vision repeat? Now ask yourself, how many times did Peter deny Jesus? And how many times did the resurrected Jesus recommission him in John 20? That's right, three. Three is significant to Peter. It indicates a growth area for him. Peter was learning to accept people not like him, and folks that made him nervous, and individuals who lived very differently than he did.

◆D. Who are the people very different from you? Who are the folks you'd just as soon steer clear of? A style? A race? A religion? Or, who are the little people in your world? The ones you probably don't notice? Now, in your mind imagine Jesus hugging them. Why? because like Peter, we need to have our inside disposition toward others become welcoming.

◆**2. To be more welcoming, I need to learn humility.**

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◆A. Pondering God's grace can help me become humble and thus more welcoming of others. It doesn't take grace to be kind to people you agree with, and it's not hard to accept people who are like you, who don't offend you or make you uncomfortable. It's the opposite situation where grace is necessary and shines.

◆Grace is like a father or mother who is willing to pick up a dirty kid with snot hanging from his nose -and it's not their kid!!

◆Grace is like a mother who gently rubs the back of a small girl throwing up, and after comforting her, cleans up the whole mess without complaint -because she sees not a repulsive smelling person, but a suffering child.

◆Grace is something you show with someone you have trouble with, disagree with, or who has things about them that hurt or offend you. Otherwise it isn't really grace.

◆Think of it. Isn't it exactly what Jesus does with each of us? We are so different from him, aren't we? He is without sin. The Bible says it is his nature to be a *consuming fire* when it comes to sin. You might say we are creatures God "has trouble with." So every one of us in a very serious way carry something that "repulses" God. When we cuss someone out, it turns his righteous stomach. When we look

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with a lustful eye, his heart hurts. When we take advantage of our employer, it disturbs God even if it doesn't disturb us. He doesn't want to live that way, or for any of his creatures to live that way. Therefore, *should we not be impressed that Jesus, for example, ate with fraudulent tax-collectors, hung out with prostitutes, spoke to women (as no Jew would do), even divorced women, even foreigners too (Jn.4)??* God's son was willing to descend to us so we could ascend with him! He was willing to touch the leper, to clean up the vomit of our sin. That's grace. You can't really look at grace and then not be affected! So pondering grace can help me learn the humility it takes to be welcoming. [That's what we'll be doing at the Lords Table in a few minutes.]

◆ B. Being a servant can teach me humility. Neal was a servant type leader. You can tell. He was generous to those in need and prayed regularly (v2). He had a vision from God and obeyed immediately. He gathered all his peeps to his house and waited for Peter to show up from Joppa (24-25, 33). Never any doubt that he would. He fell at the feet of Peter (v25)! Now hold on. Did you know he was a Centurion? Officer over about 100 crack Roman soldiers? Six centuries made a regiment, and ten regiments made a legion of the Roman Army. This is an important officer! Rome occupies this land! And he's bowing before a

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fisherman. He's waiting for instruction, and learning. All of this displays humility.

◆C. Lets take a lesson from Neal the Centurion: look for ways to step beyond your personal world into someone else's. Somebody drops their groceries and you see it? Go help them pick them up! Someone needs a ride? Give them your time. Someone is standing alone? Go say hi. Ask them about themselves. You be the one! Paul said

◆*"Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."* Romans 12:13-16, NIV.

◆How about missions, or service projects. These stretch you, step you out of your world, and build humility. We'll talk more about that in a few weeks.

◆**Conclusion:** After 35 years on ministry Mel White revealed to the world that he struggled with homosexual feelings. A TV interviewer asked his parents, "You know what other Christians are saying about your son. They say he's an abomination. What do you think about that?" "Well", the mother answered in a sweet quavery voice, "he may be an abomination, but he's still our pride and joy." His struggle with sin didn't keep her from offering love to her child. And that friends is the way our Father

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in heaven is. Our sin doesn't keep him away! He came *to* us through his son.

◆ Like Jesus, we are meant to live as conveyors of grace, not avoiders of contagion. When I find our myself in the grip of severe disagreement with someone, God wants me to see the way Jesus sees. An erring child of God. A child the Father loves and grieves over. A thirsty person. A needy person. An immoral person like myself, yet still valued by his creator who wants to free him/her into righteousness just as he wants to free me! The sin is the alien. The real self is underneath the grime needing the love of God to free him. Can we learn to see that? And then share Christ's welcome?