

# PLOT TWIST

**When God Surprises His People**

## Part 3: *Relational Revelation*

(A Regional Site Exclusive)

### INTRODUCTION — The Role of Witnesses

In this week's passage, notice the important role witnesses play in substantiating Peter's sermon to Cornelius as well as Peter's defence to the Jerusalem church. Witnesses are God's chosen way to spread his Word to the world. When God chose to reveal himself primarily through Jesus, he chose the way of witnesses. By revealing himself primarily in history (that is, through events and people rather than, say, through mathematical patterns, etc.), God chose a relational form of revelation for all people of all times. Aside from the original witnesses to an event, all people must trust some people in order to gain any knowledge of the gospel. God's relational being (relationship-in-unity) and his very essence (love), are woven into his methodology for revealing himself to the world. We must trust people in order to gain knowledge of the person of Jesus. And, for others to gain this same knowledge, we must be trustworthy.

### DINE IN – The Gentile Pentecost

Acts 10:44-11:18

### TAKE OUT – I'll Have That to Go Please

#### TAKE OUT #1 – Letting Go of the Past

Sometimes believers who have made an idol of tradition protest anything new. Most of the time, however, although these people can learn to embrace new things, the trouble comes when they have to let go of old things. Only then is their idolatry exposed. We all grow comfortable with the way things are and have been. We emotionally bond with what was and what is in a way that can threaten what should be.

#### TAKE OUT #2 – Discerning God's Will Today

In order to move forward with God, the early church had to adjust their understanding of Scripture in light of new experiences. Scripture was not meant to be clung to in the dark apart from experience, reason, and the ongoing insights of the community (tradition). Christians who say, "I just follow the Bible" are deceiving themselves, since no one "follows the Bible" apart from the influence of their own reason and experience and tradition (e.g., the Wesleyan Quadrilateral). Above all, the experience of the early church shows us that we should discern and confirm God's will together in community, since the church is the "pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15, TNIV).

#### TAKE OUT #3 – The Holy Spirit Today

Although in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit comes upon different groups of people in various ways according to the needs of the church at the time, as we move our study into the epistles we see some patterns emerging. 1) Baptism of the Spirit (being plunged into the Holy Spirit for cleansing, rebirth, and renewal) is assumed of every believer as the supernatural event that makes them part of the body of Christ, and is symbolized by water baptism. 2) Being filled with the Spirit on an ongoing basis is the

responsibility of the Spirit-baptized believer. 3) Tongues are one of a variety of potential manifestations of the Spirit's active presence in our lives. **John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 30-31; Ephesians 5:18**

#### TAKE OUT #4 – Responding To Arguments

When Peter was criticized, he simply retold the story of what he had experienced. This is something all of us can do. When people want to argue, at the very least, each of us can simply recall what our own experience of God has been through Jesus.

#### TAKE OUT #5 – The Importance of Communicating the Gospel

Faith comes to Cornelius and his household when they hear the liberating news of salvation through trusting Christ. As far as we know, God has chosen to save people as they respond in faith to his message. Beyond that, we simply cannot say with assurance how God saves people. Hence, we ought to take seriously our responsibility as ambassadors for God and his gospel. How active are you in spreading the news of Jesus?

Acts 4:12

### CONCLUSION – Giving the Gospel

Romans 10:13-14

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### HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS

#### Warming Up...

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of God's chosen method of relational revelation (trusting people as witnesses) as opposed to mathematical or intuitive revelation (where each person figures it out for themselves or simply "knows" what they need to know on their own)?

#### Look to the Book...

2. Take some time to review **Acts 10:44-11:18**. A) What verse, lesson, or idea stands out to you the most? Talk about it. B) In the midst of Peter's "words", the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the "word" (also see 11:1). Does reading the Bible ensure that we know the Word of God? How would you respond to someone who asked, "Do you think the Bible is the Word of God?" C) In Acts, people are typically said to be baptized "in the name of Jesus" (as in 10:48). Why do we tend to baptize "in the name of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit"? Does it make a difference? D) Why do you think the Holy Spirit gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave the Jews at Pentecost (tongues) when he entered them in this instance, but people don't all experience that same phenomenon when coming to faith in Christ today?

#### So What?...

3. Review TAKE OUT #1. Can you think of examples from your own life that demonstrate this reluctance to let go in order to move forward?
4. Review TAKE OUT #2. Which way of discerning God's will do you tend to default to most? Do you tend to follow "the Bible" alone (a Western Evangelical default), or Tradition (as do Catholics), or Reason (like many Liberals), or Experience (as do many Pentecostals and Charismatics)? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your default approach to learning God's will?
5. Review TAKE OUT #3. Read **Ephesians 5:18**. Paul asserts that it is *our* responsibility to ensure that we are filled with God's Spirit. What do you think this means? How do we go about this?
6. Review TAKE OUT #4. If someone asked what you believe and why, what would your answer look like in *narrative* form? Practice telling 2-3 minute versions of your story.
7. Review TAKE OUT #5. How seriously do you take your God-given role as ambassador of his message? Talk about ways you could grow in this aspect of your spiritual life. Commit to taking one concrete step this week to help spread the "word".

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