

The Holy Spirit, Boundary Breaker **Acts 10:44-48**

Intro The Inter-Korean summit

[ppt 1] Have you ever been to Korea? It's far from here. I know that when Dick was in the military, he served in Korea. Of course, it was long before I was born so I didn't have a chance to meet Dick in Korea. Other than Dick, I don't know how many of you have been to Korea. But now, you have a connection with Korea since you have a Korean pastor. I don't think you would mind learning a little bit about Korea. Would you?

[ppt 2] Compared to the United States, Korea is a small country in size but it has a long history. It has about five thousand years of history. But the modern history of Korea is filled with many tragic stories. In the early 20th century, Korea was occupied and exploited by imperial Japan for several decades. [ppt 3] Right after the liberation from Japan, Korea was divided into North and South Korea by the United States and the Soviet Union. [ppt 4] The Korean War broke out and nearly five million people died during the war. [ppt 5] Korea is still the only divided nation in the world. North and South Korea are not at peace, but remain in a status of the ceasefire. I ask you to pray for peace and the unification of the two Korea.

I will show you two pictures. [ppt 6] One was taken during the inter-Korean summit on April 27, 2018. The other was taken on June 30, 2019 during a quick meeting between President Trump and Kim, Jong-un. I know that some of you may have different opinions about how the U.S. government should handle the issue of North Korea. I also realize that there is still a long road ahead for the final reconciliation of Korea to occur. But for me, watching the leaders of South and North Korea holding their hands together at the border of the two Korea was a very moving moment. I hope that the U.S. government genuinely cares about peace in the Korean peninsula and that you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for peace in Korea.

These pictures also remind me that a border is nothing more than an arbitrary line. It is just a line that anyone can cross if we have the willingness to embrace one another in trust and love. We, as Christians, are called to break boundaries between people and nations, and invite everyone into God's family. We are called to be boundary breakers, not barrier builders.

In fact, it is God who first crossed the boundary between the divine and human beings, became flesh, and lived among us. (John 1:14) Throughout church history, the Holy Spirit has continued to break ethnic and cultural boundaries, and shatter people's stereotypes in order to call everyone into God's household.

1page Problem is the text – Peter did not expect the gift of the Holy Spirit pouring out on the Gentiles

Today's scripture is an obvious example of the Holy Spirit's boundary breaking act. What we read today is a climax of the episode that covers the entirety of chapter 10. In the beginning of chapter 10, we are told of Cornelius. Cornelius was an elite military officer in the Roman Imperial army. But he was also a pious and God-fearing person along with his entire household. God revealed Himself to this Gentile man, and told him to invite Peter to his house.

While his messengers were on their way to Peter, Peter also had a vision. In that vision, Peter "saw the skies open up." Something that looked like a huge blanket was lowered by ropes and settled on the ground. In it, this is my imaginative interpretation, . . . in it, there was a meat section, a seafood section, a fowl section and an exotic food section. . In the meat section, there were live pigs, monkeys, bears, lions, kangaroos, donkeys, cats, dogs and other animals. In the seafood section, there were blue crab, lobster, octopus, squid, shrimp and even sharks. In the fowl section, there were American Eagles, Owls, Ravens, Osprey, Falcons, and Bats. In the exotic food section, there were snakes, caterpillars, lizards, snails, frogs and alligators. Are there any of your favorite foods on this list?

When Peter saw them, he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter—kill and eat.” If you were Peter, how would you respond to God? If I were Peter, I would say, “No thank you sir. I like fresh food but I prefer Trader Joe’s foods to these wild animals.”

But Peter refused to kill and eat them for a different reason. Peter said, “Oh, no, Lord. I’ve never so much as tasted food that was not kosher.” Peter was a faithful Jew and he strictly followed the purity laws of his time.

Then, the voice came a second time: “If God says it’s okay, it’s okay.” This happened three times, and then the blanket was pulled back up into the skies. It seems that Peter was a stubborn person as he even refused God’s offer three times. For Peter, the Jewish law was an important part of his religious identity that separated his people from other people. The Jewish law was a boundary that divided the pious Jews from the unclean Gentiles. This was such a strong boundary that even God had a hard time convincing Peter to break the Gentile barrier.

In fact, Gentiles were considered unclean people. Even being in contact with the Gentiles was regarded as an unclean act. To keep his purity... to remain clean, pure and faithful, Peter wanted to maintain his own boundary. He never considered that the Gentiles could know and follow Jesus. That was Peter’s problem.

2 page We do not expect everyone is deserving to God’s grace or gift

But this is not a problem specific to Peter, but also to us. If we are honest with ourselves, all of us have people... or at least one or two people who we would deem unlikely candidates for God’s grace. There are some people we would never consider to be Christians. They may be people that we don’t like. Or they may be people who have done horrible and unspeakable things in the past. They may seem to us to have nothing to do with Jesus. Have you ever met these types of people in your life time?

I had one. As you may know, all Korean men have to serve in the military. That means reckless young men from diverse social backgrounds gather and live in small barracks together for 2 years whether they like it or not. Hierarchical relationships in the army often creates a bad military culture in Korea. Many senior soldiers often physically and verbally abuse junior soldiers. I had a really bad senior soldier. He was a very violent person. He often battered junior soldiers. On one occasion, he severely battered a junior soldier to the point where he was imprisoned in a military prison for a month. Unlike the U.S military, it is a mandatory military service so there is no concept of a dishonorable discharge for a soldier. People must complete their mandatory service period. Knowing that I was a seminary student, the company commander who was a Christian, put that man into my squad after he came back from prison. Of course, I didn’t like the decision but what could I say to the company commander? I just hoped that nothing bad would happen to my squad until he was discharged. Honestly, I hated him and I never considered him to be a potential candidate for God’s grace and love because he was so violent and such a wretched person. I drew a boundary between him and me.

One night, he wanted to talk with me. So we talked. This is when I first heard how he had lived during his teenage years. He was raised by a single mom in a poor family. Since there was no one to take care of him, he became more and more violent as a self-defense mechanism. When he was in high school, he became a gang member. He said that he could not go back to his hometown even now because he had stabbed a rival gang member before his enlistment, and the rival gang was looking for him. After hearing his life story, I could not simply blame him any longer. He was just a person with a deep wound in his heart because of an unfortunate life. If he had had a good family as I had... if he had had more reliable friends as I had... if he knew the love of God as I had experienced it during my teenage years, would he have been any different than me? But most importantly, could this man be a different person? I don’t know... I don’t know.

But after hearing his story, I could not simply judge him as a bad person. All I could do was pray for him. So I asked him if I could pray for him and we prayed together. To be honest, I didn’t expect anything from

him or from God because, as we all know, people hardly ever change. I probably prayed for him out of my sense of obligation, not from a genuine heart of love and compassion.

But do you know what happened? He did change a little. He did not make any trouble until he was discharged. He did not batter other soldiers though he occasionally said bad words to them. One day, he even bought snacks for our squad members which he had never done before. I never met him again after he was discharged. I just hope that he was on a better path in life.

The point of this story is not to say that my prayer worked well. No. That's not my point. What I would like to share with you is that the Holy Spirit can work without any limits. We cannot change anyone's heart but God can. We may regard some people as unacceptable for God's grace but there is nobody who is unacceptable or unforgivable to our Christ.

3rd page the Holy Spirit is given to Gentile

Like Peter, we draw boundaries between our people and others, but the Holy Spirit breaks those boundaries.. That was what was happening in today's scripture. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his entire household. The Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and his family even before they received baptism. Peter and his Jewish friends could not believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the "outsider" non-Jews. They were surprised because they never thought about the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit challenged Peter and his companions to break their own prejudices and stereotypes toward the Gentiles as well as the workings of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit broke their narrow-minded beliefs and expanded their insider and outsider boundaries.

We need to think of the boundaries that we have built. Of course, there are many boundaries. Racial and cultural boundaries are difficult to overcome. . Religious boundaries seem insurmountable unenterable walls that divide people. Social class can also be a barrier..

But one boundary that seriously affects our Christian life is the boundary we draw in our hearts. As we all know, most mainline churches in the United States are declining. Even self-proclaimed Christians often do not come to church. Many of your children and grand-children do not believe in Christ or do not go to church as they used to. I believe that you did your best to raise them in Christ. But it is not easy to swim against the current of our time.

As you talk about your faith or invite your children or friends to Christ, how do they react to you? They might just avoid the topic or ignore it. Or they might become argumentative or combative. Some of them might assert their First Amendment Right, the right of religious freedom. How do you feel when they react defensively? It hurts. We don't want to make trouble within our families, so we keep the topic away from our dinner table. And we draw a line in our hearts and conclude that they will not listen and so we stop sharing the good news of Jesus with them. Like Peter, we can't even imagine that the Holy Spirit could fall upon our family, children, grand-children and friends. Perhaps, this is what is happening in most mainline churches in the United States and Europe.

But my friends, while we draw lines, our Christ erases the very lines we draw. [ppt7] The Holy Spirit breaks human-made boundaries and can work in the lives of every person. Do you remember how God even worked in Paul who persecuted the early Christians? I know it is hard to imagine our children ever coming back since it has been a long time since they left the church. But don't give up hope. Don't draw lines in your hearts. Trust God who continues to break all boundaries and invites all people into fellowship with him. With faith, let us join in God's work, erasing dividing lines within us and among us. Continue to invite lost souls into God's household. God will surely be with us. Amen.