

Introduction

1. What is a paradigm shift?
 - a. A paradigm is essentially a way of looking at something; it involves assumptions, values, concepts, practices, etc. through which we view the world around us—two examples would be evolution and creationism
 - b. In 1962, American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn coined the phrase paradigm shift which referred to the replacement of one dominant paradigm by another, newer paradigm
 - c. In his book, he proposed this takes place in four stages (I am going to use my own terms to describe them):
 - 1) **The accepted paradigm (Kuhn referred to this as Normal Science)**: in this stage, a dominant paradigm is active and it is the lens through which science is done in that particular field (i.e. evolution)
 - 2) **The paradigm challenged (Kuhn referred to this as Extraordinary Research)**: when research leads to enough problems with the paradigm, the paradigm is thrown into a state of crisis and scientists “push the boundaries of science” through something Kuhn called “extraordinary research” (essentially the willingness to try anything to make the science work to support the paradigm)
 - 3) **A new paradigm surfaces (Kuhn referred to this as adoption of a new paradigm)**: eventually, due to the weight of the evidence, a new paradigm is formed and gains new followers; however, while there is acceptance of the new paradigm it isn’t without resistance
 - 4) **The new paradigm realized (Kuhn referred to this as the aftermath of the scientific revolution)**: in the long run, the new paradigm becomes the dominant one
 - d. So, essentially, a paradigm shift happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way
 - e. Kuhn was a scientist so his work focused on paradigms in science, but the concepts of paradigms and paradigm shifts apply to all different aspects of life: science, medicine, philosophy, history, religion, etc.
2. In our passage today, we get to witness a major, theological and cultural paradigm shift and in many respects, it follows the pattern described by Kuhn so I am going to use those for my outline

A. The accepted paradigm

1. In the first century, most Jews believed that gentiles were unclean (unholy) because they didn’t practice the dietary and purity laws of the Old Testament
2. For this reason, most also thought that it was unlawful to associate with Gentiles for fear of being defiled themselves
3. With this said, we need to be clear about some things:
 - a. First, the Old Testament doesn’t categorically declare gentiles unclean or unholy and didn’t forbid Jews from associating with gentiles

- b. In fact, the Law actually permitted gentiles to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle/temple in the same way a Jew could (Numbers 15:14-16)
 - c. In addition, there were God-fearing gentiles in the Old Testament that lived faithfully among the Israelites, and in fact four of the five women Matthew lists in the genealogy of Jesus were gentile women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba)
 - d. If the Law prohibited interaction and/or associating with gentiles, then we have a problem with Jesus because He interacted with gentiles (e.g. the Magi shortly after His birth, the Roman centurion with the paralyzed son, the Canaanite woman with the demon possessed woman)
4. Regardless, the paradigm during the first century that many Jews held to was that associating with gentiles was unlawful, forbidden

<p>B. The paradigm challenged (10:23b-33)</p>

- 1. Our passage today picks up where our passage left off last week:
 - a. We were introduced to a god-fearing gentile named Cornelius, a Roman centurion who was living in Caesarea
 - b. One day while he was praying, the Lord sent an angel to him with some encouraging news and some instructions:
 - 1) The Lord had heard his prayers and accepted his sacrificial giving to His people as an offering
 - 2) The angel instructed him to send some men to Joppa to fetch Peter
 - c. As the men were on their way, Peter experiences a divine vision:
 - 1) Three times the Spirit lowers a sheet covered with animals that were declared unclean by the Law and commands Peter to eat
 - 2) Each time, Peter refuses
 - 3) And, after each refusal, the Spirit declares to Peter, **“What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”**
 - d. This is another one of those examples where there is a double meaning in something presented in the Scriptures:
 - 1) We know that what the Lord did here was to suspend the dietary food laws of the Old Testament because Paul makes that clear elsewhere (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:12; 8-10)
 - 2) However, as we’ll learn in a moment, the Lord intended another application and it relates to the paradigm described above regarding Jews and gentiles
 - 3) Peter didn’t understand this initially, but as we’ll see in a moment, he ultimately gets it
- 2. Peter arrives at Cornelius’ house (READ 23b-26):
 - a. When Peter arrives, we find Cornelius **“waiting”** for him (it would have been about four days since it was about a two day walk from Caesarea to Joppa)
 - b. This was no private meeting, however; he had gathered together not just his immediately family, but **“his relatives and close friends”** (24)
 - c. Based on his behavior when he saw Peter, Cornelius was obviously in awe of Peter (likely from what he had heard/learned about him):
 - 1) Most English translations state that Cornelius fell at Peter’s feet and **“worshipped him”**; the exception is the NIV which reads, **“fell at his feet in reverence”**

- 2) Either is possible here—Cornelius either thought Peter was a divine messenger similar to the angel he had seen earlier, or was following a common practice of bowing in reverence before someone of high stature or importance
 - 3) Peter’s reply can also be interpreted in two ways—either a rebuke for thinking he was divine or a rejection of reverence Cornelius was displaying for him
3. Peter announces a repudiation of the paradigm that forbid Jews from associating with gentiles (READ 27-29a):
 - a. Upon entering the house, Peter apparently finds many more people than anticipated
 - b. He recalled the existing paradigm—something they were familiar with: **“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him...”** (28)
 - c. But, just as quickly, with new-found revelation from the Lord he declares that paradigm null and void: **“and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for”** (28b-29)
 4. While Peter had begun to grasp what God was doing, his understanding was still incomplete—he didn’t quite understand the full paradigm shift that was about to happen (READ 29-b-33):
 - a. Contrary to the paradigm he had grown up with, he clearly understood now that it was okay to associate with gentiles
 - b. However, he still didn’t quite grasp the bigger picture and why God sent him to Cornelius
 - c. What Cornelius reveals to him was that God brought him there to **“hear all that [Peter] have been commanded by the Lord”** (33)
 - d. In other words, it was about the Gospel

C. A new paradigm (10:34-48)

1. When Peter hears Cornelius’ answer, it’s like a light bulb goes off in his head (READ 34-35):
 - a. He understood that God is impartial (e.g. He does care if one is a Jew or a gentile)
 - b. He understood that what matters to God is that one **“fears Him and does what is right”**
 - c. Anyone who does this—including the gentiles sitting before Peter—**“is welcome to Him”**
 - d. That was the new paradigm:
 - 1) Keep in mind, a paradigm is simply the lens through which things are viewed
 - 2) God did not change how people are saved—it has always been by grace through faith, even in the Old Testament
 - 3) God didn’t all of a sudden change His mind and now allow gentiles to get saved—gentiles were always part of His plan
 - 4) What changed was Peter’s understanding of God’s plan (e.g. the paradigm he was used to)
 - e. Now, just like Thomas Kuhn claimed would happen when old paradigms are challenged by new ones, we see in Acts and some of Paul’s letters that some like Peter immediately embraced it, others resisted at first but ultimately came around, and still others rejected it
2. As we learned in our passage from last week, Cornelius’ devotion, prayers and alms to the Jewish people were honored by God, but ultimately weren’t enough to save him—he still needed Christ and we see that reflected in the message Peter delivers to his gentile audience (READ 36-43):

- a. He begins by reminding them of the events surrounding Jesus' earthly life (36-39a)
 - b. He recounts Jesus' death and resurrection (39b-41)
 - c. He declares that God has appointed Jesus as Judge of the living and the dead and that only through belief in Him can one receive forgiveness of sins (42-43)
3. What Peter presents here is a new paradigm:
- a. In the old paradigm, gentiles were outsiders, separate from God's plan of salvation, with little hope aside from converting to Judaism and strictly following the OT Law
 - b. In the "new" paradigm, gentiles were just as accepted by God as Jews based simply on faith in Jesus Christ
 - c. Paul describes this beautifully in Ephesians 2:11-22 (READ)

D. The new paradigm realized (44-48)

- 1. One of the things that Kuhn proposed in his description of paradigm shifts is that a new paradigm becomes the dominant view once the evidence supports it; in other words, evidence is critical to the acceptance of a new paradigm
- 2. We see something similar here; what is the proof that this new paradigm which views gentiles as just as worthy of God's acceptance and salvation as the Jews were based purely on faith in Jesus Christ?
- 3. The proof is what happens next (READ 44-48):
 - a. Essentially, what we have here is a mini-Pentecost, but with gentiles instead of Jews
 - b. While Peter is still speaking, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the gentiles and they begin to speak in tongues and exalt God
 - c. Luke highlights the amazement of the Jewish believers that had come with Peter because it would have truly been an astonishing thing to them; it was outside the normal paradigm through which they viewed the gentiles
 - d. But that old paradigm is shattered right before their eyes as Peter declares, **"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"** (47)
 - e. The proof of the new paradigm—that God had accepted the gentiles, forgave their sins, and made them part of the Body of Christ—the proof of this was that they had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers had

Conclusion

Takeaway:

- 1. God is not partial when it comes to salvation: He doesn't care if you are black or white, Jewish or gentile, rich or poor, religious or not
- 2. What God cares about is found in Peter's words in v. 34: **"the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him"** which Peter defines in v. 43 as the one who believes in Jesus for the forgiveness of his or her sins
- 3. Paul repeats this in Romans, his doctoral thesis on the Gospel (10:11-13): **"For the scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' 12 for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'**