

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 10:1 as we continue our journey through the book of Acts.

We have told you, I know, more than once that Acts is a thirty-year history of the establishment and then the growth of the early church beginning at the time that Jesus rose, ascended into heaven, and then sent the Holy Spirit out upon the saints on Pentecost (which you can read about in chapters 1 and 2).

We have challenged you to ask yourself a couple of questions, and I think they bear repeating a lot. That is, in the book of Acts - since it's a narrative, it tells us the ongoing exploits of God's people - God tells us this is what He wants you to know about the early church. The questions are: What kind of church should we be? What should we be involved with? Do you find a church in the book of Acts involved in politics? Do you find a church in the book of Acts involved in political activism? Or do you find a church that is mostly interested in preaching the gospel of Jesus? Is that where their hope lies? What kind of people does God use? And I think that we've tried to point out to you, as we've gone through, that you can ask yourself that question a lot. What kind of people did God use, and could we be those kinds of people? This is, after all, the very 1<sup>st</sup>-century church. It is the beginning of God's work. You're closest to the nexus. You would certainly want to see what God intended as He began.

In chapter 9 (just to look back a little bit), we saw the dramatic rescue and salvation of Saul, a man who was very learned. He was a scholar, a Jewish scholar, a man of the world, and yet he was completely devoted to wiping out Christians. The description in the Bible is that he was "breathing threats and murder" (Acts 9:1), causing "havoc" (Acts 8:3). He was traveling ninety miles away from Jerusalem just to go find some more Christians to maybe imprison or, worse, take their life. We looked at his conversion in chapter 9. He lost his religion. We learned from Ananias, as he was sent to pray for Saul, that God had a plan for his life. And we spent some time with you (and if you weren't here, I hope that you'll go back and listen to it) talking about how God prepared Saul for the ministry that fills, really, more than half of the book of Acts. Because I know if you read through it, and you're not stopping to consider what is written, it seems like he just

went from lost to saved to apostle - the chief guy. He spent a short time in Damascus after he came to know the Lord. He spent three years (according to Galatians 1:17-18) in the Arabian wilderness. Arabia is not very far from Damascus in terms of Bible lands, if you will. He went back to the desert. He came back from there (after three years) to Damascus, where he wasn't very well received; they tried to kill him. He was let down in a basket outside the walls. He fled to Jerusalem where he hoped to meet with the church. Barnabas met him, introduced him to two apostles; they're the only two that would see him - Peter and James. He was there fifteen days (Galatians 1:18 tells us) before the church wanted to get rid of him from Jerusalem as well. He was a powder keg, he was a problem. And so they sent him home to Tarsus where, for the next seven to ten years, he absolutely disappears from the scene which is why we have this inset of God using Peter before we get back to join with Paul. Paul will be introduced to us at the middle of chapter 11, just for a few verses, as Barnabas goes to get him after these years of being secluded. And Barnabas is being used by the Lord in a place called Antioch up in Syria to the north, a long way. And he went to get Saul who, for the next year, would teach with him before they would become not only the church through which the missionary field was opened, but Paul would spend years making himself accountable to this fellowship of mostly Gentile saints. So, it's easy to read the book of Acts and come away thinking, "Gosh, why isn't God using me so fast?" Well, He didn't use Paul so fast. It takes time to be prepared, and I would say to you tonight God is preparing you. Don't know what for. But know that He has a plan.

So, from chapter 9:31 or so through chapter 10 (and basically to the end of chapter 11), we will be taking up with Peter. His ministry will finish. He will disappear. In fact, in chapter 12:17, it says at the end of that verse, "And he" (Peter) "departed and went to another place." And that's all we know. See ya later, Peter. He had his work done, and he disappeared. Now we have some extra-biblical literature we could tell you about as far as what may have happened to Peter, but biblically, that's all that we know.

So last time we turned from Saul, who was sent home, and that's where he is - it's in that seven- to ten-year period. And we started in verse 32 of the last chapter with Peter going out on the road. Remember, the church had been chased out of Jerusalem with Stephen's death. And God was working. And Peter wanted to go and see some of the things that God was doing, so he went to some of the neighboring towns where God's Word had taken root. He went to a place called

Lydda, where a fellow named Aeneas was delivered from a paralysis he'd been suffering for eight years, lying in bed. Peter was then invited to Joppa. There was a woman there who was extremely ill. Her name was Tabitha. And she was a blessing to the church - she had done a lot of good works. Everyone loved her. They wanted Peter to come pray. By the time he got there, she had died. And Peter put everyone out. He wondered why the Lord had called him there. He had arrived late. And God, through Peter's prayer and faith, raised this woman from the dead. And, as you might suspect, this miracle affected everyone. In fact, in verse 42 of the last chapter, it says, "Many" (because of this miracle) "believed on the Lord" there.

So, we ended in verse 43 of the last chapter that Peter settled down in Joppa for a time. We don't know how long he was there. But he stayed with a fellow named Simon who was a tanner which, as we mentioned when we quit last week, was quite a step for a Jewish boy to take. And I'll tell you the story here that goes between here and the time that Peter shows up at Cornelius' house to preach the gospel - the message is all about overcoming prejudice or religious prejudice, if you will. Because the background of the Jews was that they had come to a place where they believed they were the only people God would deal with. They were the only people that God cared about. They were the only people that were going to make it with God, and everyone else around them was pretty much cast off. So what you find as you go through the book of Acts, early on especially, is this not only preparation of God upon guys like Peter's life (and others) but the gospel going out to different segments of the population. It went to the Jews, it went to the Hellenists (which are basically Jews with lots of Greek or Gentile influence; even so, their whole way of life, their whole culture would have been, probably, offensive to the Jews in Jerusalem - they were called the Hellenists), it went out to the Samaritans (which were mixtures of Jews and a hundred other faiths), and God sent a Hellenist there to minister to these Jews. We find the gospel going to Jewish proselytes, folks who were Gentiles before they became Jews - like the Ethiopian eunuch who came to Jerusalem looking for the God of the Jews and went home disappointed because he didn't find a relationship with this God until the Lord sent and ministered to him there in the wilderness. And now the final step of the process, if you will, that Jesus came to save the whole world - Peter will be now sent to the Gentiles, pure unadulterated heathen. Right? The outcasts.

Our verses tonight, and I hope they drive home to you as well, illustrate, though, how it takes a time for God to change your prejudices or your outlooks. Or, if you

will, God'll save you in a minute, but changing you will take a long time. And sometimes we go down fighting, don't we, and swinging. Look, Peter, like most of us, grew up with some very deep-seated traditions, and they weren't all good. But they were all that he knew and all that had been driven home - opinions and prejudices. Some were racial, if you read the Scriptures. Some of them were political. Some of them were certainly spiritual. And a lot of times it was just kind of a combination of all of them, and yet these lost, prejudicial, hateful, self-serving, applauding folks are the ones that God brings into the church, and now He wants to begin to change.

The primary purpose of the church is not to pursue those problems in people's lives but instead to bring people to Christ, who can change their heart; and when the hearts are changed, the prejudice goes away. It's healed. God delivers us from it. The solution is very simple - a relationship with Jesus by faith brings a new birth; a new birth brings a new heart; a new heart brings new life; new life makes a new outlook. And God delivers us even as He's promised to do.

So, think about Peter as we start our chapter tonight. We're going to go down to verse 23 or so. Peter was raised in a Hebrew home. He was taught as a little kid that the Gentiles were dogs. They weren't really made by God to be saved. The mission had declared of the Gentiles, "They were fodder for hell. God made them as firewood." And that's what he was taught. That's what he grew up with understanding - that God had chosen one family, Israel. What they won't and didn't hang on to was that God desired to bless them and through them to bless all of the families of the earth. That's what it says in Genesis 12:3. Or Isaiah 49:6, "You're going to be a light to the Gentiles. You're going to be salvation to the ends of the earth." He said that to God's people. That was His intention. Unfortunately, Israel turned their election into favoritism. They soon began to disdain the Gentiles of every sort. They even passed laws that you had to separate from them physically, that you couldn't brush up against a Gentile, that you couldn't speak to or bring aid to or have a conversation with Gentiles. Their prejudice was fueled over the years by the hatred of those who ruled over them. And a lot of these world kingdoms were like the Romans - they exercised authority over them, they made it difficult for them. That's Peter's background. That's where Peter came from. That's all Peter knew. And yet he comes to Jesus, and God begins to work on these preconceived ideas of hatred and attitudes. And just to get to verse 43 of last week's study, for him to stay in a tanner's house is a huge step forward for Peter. He's now, as a Jew, hanging around with a guy that's got dead

bodies in his house. Oh, they're animals, but they're unclean. And so the Law says (Leviticus 11:35-40), "Woe to those who are tanners." The Jews realized that they needed them, but they declared that they were continually unclean, and they had to live at least fifty paces outside the walls of the city. So there was no place for them. And yet here, Peter, saved now, being changed, hanging around with a guy (no doubt a believer) in a beach house in a beautiful part of the country but yet surrounding himself with something that the traditional Jew would have been appalled by. So Peter, as a Jew, would have refused to stay here. As a Christian, though, he's free to stay here. Right? So these are the changes that are taking place. And the change towards Gentiles in the Jerusalem church was slower than anywhere else. It was the center of religion. So as people got saved, they came to Christ, but they had to shed a lot of things because that's what they grew up with. And so the further away you get from Jerusalem, the easier that salvation became because there were less things to inhibit you, if you will. My dad was a very strict Catholic. I went to Catholic school, but I always.....you know, a kid, what do you know, you don't care. But my dad cared. He lived, breathed, died, "Yay, Pope!" That was his deal, man. And you'd argue with him, he'd get mad at you. So when he got saved, it was really hard for him to let go of a lot of things that he didn't need anymore. For me, when I got saved, it was a lot easier. But the closer you get to your religious, I think, background, the harder it can be sometimes to find the freedom that you have in Christ. Paul writes to the Galatians (3:28), he writes to the Colossians (3:11). "In Christ there's not a Jew, and there's no Greek. There's no circumcised or uncircumcised. There's no barbarian or Scythian or slave or free, no male or female. Christ is all in all." His point being we all need Jesus, and He's the only way we make it. So there's no sense, then, finding yourself on some kind of a high horse.

So God has been taking Peter through it, taking him forward, to learn that God's love is for all men regardless of anything that you might find to divide you. But, at the same time, he's got a long way to go still. And that doesn't happen overnight. Usually, when people get saved, they are satisfied when God begins to change them. But you should know that God's not satisfied until He totally changes you. He has a greater desire for your full deliverance than you do, and that progress takes time. We're going to see Peter do really well here. Right? He's going to be preaching to a whole room full of Gentiles, walking away amazed that God loves the Gentiles; tell the whole council in the next chapter, "God loves the Gentiles. I'm more surprised than you are!" But you get to Galatians 2:11-12, and when some folks come there and Paul is there with Peter in Antioch and some folks of James come (James, the

head of the Jerusalem church), it says that Peter, who was eating with the Gentiles, when he saw them coming, went to sit with the Jews. This is years later. So, he's making some good progress, but he's got some ways to go, and certainly you can watch that. Fear will even revert you, sometimes, back to your old ways. But Peter's learning God's heart. When Jesus (in the Great Commission, there in Matthew 28:19-20) said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," (tell everyone, in other words) "teaching them.....I am with you always, even to the end of the age." That was God's heart, but that didn't and wasn't embraced immediately, if you will, by the early church. So, Luke will record this lesson twice: here, in his own words; in the next chapter, in Peter's testimony before the church council, because it was such an important issue - this sending of Peter to a Gentile's home where there were hungry hearts that wanted to get saved, and Peter couldn't even finish his message before God was saving them; they were that ready, if you will.

Back in chapter 16:19 of Matthew, Jesus had given Peter the keys to the kingdom. It means a lot of different things, certainly the authority to be able to preach how do you get in. But interesting picture for Peter. Peter gets to preach the gospel to the Jews on Pentecost. He is sent to the Samaritan town to confirm that salvation's happening there. He then gets sent to Cornelius' house to preach to the Gentiles. So he literally touches Jew, Gentile and the mixture of the two in the middle before he disappears from the scene. He had a lot to learn, but he's learned a lot. And I would say when it comes to your life and mine - we have a lot to learn, we've learned a lot, but God's not through with us yet. He's got lots to do and lots He would like to continue to do with us. We don't have time for the verses, but there you go with the introduction. (Laughing) I tend to do this a lot. I apologize.

Verse 1, "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always." Caesarea, if you've looked at a map, is about forty miles north of Joppa (or Jaffa, today). The main port city of the area was Caesarea. Because it was the main port, it had a deep water port. The Romans put all of their headquarters there. The official headquarters of Rome and their occupation was in Caesarea. In fact, if you go with us to Israel, you'll see a lot of (still) Roman things that were built, even see some of the palaces off the shore in the water that had been kind of falling down, obviously, but you can still see the ruins of them. It was predominantly, because of

that, a Gentile town, run by Gentile rules. And it was certainly different than Jerusalem, just down the way. We read of Cornelius living there, that he was a centurion. Just for your information, the Roman army had divisions or leagues of Roman soldiers - six thousand men. Ten bands of six hundred made a division. Six groups of one hundred in each band were led by a centurion who held kind of the same rank as in the army, maybe a master sergeant. So, lots of divisions - this one a group from Italy. Centurions (what we can gather from secular writing) were chosen primarily for leadership skills, for their bravery, their wisdom and integrity. This is the third centurion we meet (if you've been reading through the Bible in the New Testament). When you get to here, you've met three. There was one in Capernaum (in Luke 7) whose friends, you remember, came to Jesus to ask Him to come and deal with a servant of his that was sick and all. And when Jesus talked to him, he said, "I'm not worthy to have You come under my roof. You can just say the word from here, and I know that my servant will be healed." The second centurion we meet in Matthew 27:54, who stood at the cross. And when Jesus died, he declared (to no one in particular), "Certainly this was the Son of God!" And here's the third one - Cornelius. All of them that we meet in the Bible are honorable, are reputable, are not people you would hate but people you would admire.

In verse 2, Cornelius is described for his faith. Look at the words that are used there. He was "devout" is the word in Greek for pious or sincere. He was a God fearer, "one who feared God," and you should know that that's a description of a religious man, sincerely so, but not the description of a believer. A God fearer is just that - someone who fears God but doesn't really know God, and it is a term in the Bible almost extensively (in fact, I would say always in the Bible) used to describe someone who doesn't know the Lord, but yet he is moral and ethical and maybe religious. For example, Cornelius believed in one God. So he came around to the Jewish way of thinking, if you will, even though he was a Gentile. But, because he was a God fearer, he wasn't baptized, he didn't offer a sacrifice, he wasn't circumcised. So he was an attender, a believer in that regard, without really involving himself in the machinations of the religion itself. So, he was devout and a God fearer. He was "generous." He gave to a lot of people that were in need. And, notice, he was a man of prayer. He was "always praying to the Lord" along with, as we will read, his household. So, he led his family away from the idolatry of Rome, even though he was a Roman. He leads them to the God of Israel, though he doesn't know this God personally. He is a strong leader, both at home and at work. He is, I think, the Gentile equivalent of Nicodemus. He's a devout man. He hungers

for the things of God. He sought to know what to do to be saved. (We're going to learn that as we go). His prayer to God every day was, "How do I get saved? How do I know I'm going to heaven? How do I know that I'm right with You? What do I need to do next?" Everything that drove him, drove him in this hunger for the things of God. They are both wonderful examples - both he and Nicodemus - that good is not saved, that both these God fearers had to come to the Lord and to come to Jesus to be saved to find eternal life. Yet don't miss this truth - if you're hungry, God'll find you. If you're seeking, God'll speak to you. And these men, including Nicodemus here, plopped in the center of Roman life - Roman army life, Roman city life, Roman control - had a deep, driven desire to know the truth. And, because of that, God met him as He always does. The Ethiopian eunuch is a pretty good example of someone that is hungry and frustrated to know God, and God will move heaven and earth to get someone to him so that they can say to him, "Here's how you'll go to heaven. Here's how you can find life." And the same thing is true here. If you're hungry to know the truth, God will make Himself known to you. And I take great comfort in that because you share with people, and you wonder, "Well, how are we going to reach them?" Well, we should do all that we can. But I also know if we don't reach them, or we can't reach them, God will reach them. That's the way God works. And sometimes it's just through your life or mine. So that's the description of this man, forty miles away north of where Peter is staying in a tanner's house on the beach.

We read in verse 3, "About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, 'What is it, lord?' So he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.'" Luke points out that it was 3:00 in the afternoon (the ninth hour) which was, by the way, for Jews the third prayer time of the day (9:00, noon, and 3:00). So it does appear that Cornelius had adopted Jewish worship, if you will, in that regard. And on that particular day (and notice verse 2, he's always praying) God answers his prayer and appears to this very hungry soul. He gets the vision of an angel. The angel knows his name, he knows his spiritual commitment, he understands where his heart is coming from, and now he is going to meet the guy right where he's at. I love the picture. I think about that frustrated Ethiopian in his chariot, going home hundreds and hundreds of miles, just, "I'll never get home." We were talking about flying to Israel today. By the way, if you're going to go with us, you should sign up - at least get your

deposit in - because I think we're at fifty-some people signed up already. In any event, flying to Israel is fifteen hours long, but it passes really quickly because everybody's goin' to Israel. Everybody's excited. Flying home takes two hundred hours (Laughing) because you're just goin' home. "Come on." You watched every movie, you listened to every song, and 45 minutes have passed. You don't know. Right? It's frustrating. And I thought about that poor Ethiopian frustrated man who comes so far, spent so much, and yet God sends Philip to him; to a blind Saul who is just beside himself seeing what he is seeing, God sends Ananias. Here, to this Roman centurion so hungry, God is going to send Peter. God always has a solution to the hungry and those that are seeking Him. You might be the solution. Maybe God will use you to be the one that speaks up.

Well, he's a soldier - Cornelius. And he's terrified of what he sees. These are usually tough guys. But this kind of moves him, doesn't it, in his heart. And notice that he sees the angel, and he, "What do you want me to do?" And the angel said, "Here's what you do. Send for Peter," and he gives him the address and the place and said, "You go get him. He'll tell you what to do. Go get a guy forty miles away. Bring him back forty miles - that's eighty miles - and then he'll tell you what to do." And I always read the Bible with questions in my head, and my first question is - why doesn't the angel just tell him? He's there anyway. He'll save everyone a trip. And you know he's going to do a better job than Peter. He's not gonna mess things up. Why don't we just let the angel preach? And the answer is - that's not the way God works. It's just not the way God works. God wants to use human instruments to share in His work of salvation.

What happens here because the angel doesn't work? Peter gets to learn not to be a prejudiced guy. He gets to learn the heart of God. He gets to see that the Lord's intention is to save everyone. The council who sits in Jerusalem in judgment of these things is going to have to learn the same lesson. And Cornelius is going to have to learn that God loves him, and He's going to send and provide for him. I mean, everyone learns if you let the Lord do it His way - the church learns (chapter 11), Cornelius learns. And there's something else - there's a great joy that God would want you to have for being His co-laborer. Right? He can do it without you. Let's face it. He can teach you better than I can. In fact, my prayer every week when I come to teach is that I can be clear enough to when you walk away singing His praises, not mine. Right? You want to depend upon the Lord. But yet He uses human instruments. That's His choice. That's His prerogative. That's the method that He has chosen. So the Lord honors us to let us be used, but then He says,

"Look, you can have this treasure as foolish things in these earthen vessels so that no one gets credit but Me." And we all stand around going, "The Lord used you? You're a goof! Isn't the Lord good!" And we all get to learn and participate in what He's doing. So we get to bear this treasure in earthen vessels. The best you and I can be, ever, are instruments in the hands of God. The best you will ever be is an instrument that God can fill and pour out. If that's your goal in life, you're going to be blessed. If your goal is beyond that, you're probably going to be disappointed. But here's where Peter is Peter. Peter can't save Cornelius, Peter can't save his household, Peter can't pour the Holy Spirit out upon his family or upon his friends. The Lord does all of that. But what Peter can do is listen to God's leading, go there and proclaim God's Word, and then stand back and marvel. That's us, too. Right? That takes all the pressure off of you, puts all the pressure where it belongs - on Him - and yet pushes you out the door with a message to preach and a confidence in Him to step. And by doing that, revival follows. I think it was Leonard Ravenhill, who was kind of a Pentecostal - he was an interesting man, who said one time, "The reason we don't have many revivals is that the church chooses to live without them." In other words, we don't need them, we don't care. Right? We need the Holy Spirit until we know stuff, and then we don't need the Holy Spirit anymore. The book of Acts would say the church works better when the Holy Spirit's running the show, and we're just kind of being available as vessels for Him to use.

So, Peter's going to learn the love of God for everyone. He's going to be blessed as a vessel that God would use. And Cornelius is going to be given an opportunity to be faithful, and so is Peter. There're a lot of good things going on here. But to the question - why doesn't the angel preach? God has other ideas. Right? God has other ideas.

You might say of yourself, "Well, I don't want to tell them. I'll let Greg Laurie tell them because he's so much better at evangelism." Is he? Is he really? Not if God's going to use you, he's not. You're as good as he is if you're both plugged in to the same God. So, don't sell yourself short. If you're a vessel that - I know you have holes and stuff leaks out all over. But God uses cracked pots, you know? (Laughing) And you can be a cracked pot ..... like Greg Laurie. (Laughing)

So here's the direction. Verse 7, "And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them" (the forty miles) "to Joppa." So Cornelius is very

quick to obey. "Let me get my two servants I trust, a soldier that can go with them to be a protecting agent - they've got a long way to travel." And I think verse 8 is interesting because he knows the Jewish prejudice, he wants the ones that he is sending to do this extraordinary circumstance to understand what they're headed for. Right? Peter's a Jew. He knew and understood what they were getting into. He wanted them to understand that the Lord had sent them. And so he lays it out before them, and they head out (which is a two-day trip) forty miles on foot. Changed location.

Verse 9, "The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city," (so this is their second day of travel) "Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance." So switch places from Caesarea to Joppa, back to the beach house of Simon the tanner. It's noon - it's the noon prayer time for the Jews, if you will. Peter is still keeping those prayer times. He is hungry, but it's prayer time. The food isn't ready, so he goes up on the rooftop to pray. Rooftops - and you'll see them in Israel a lot - are flat, many of them, almost like patios for recreation or for rest. And Peter went up to pray. It was prayer time. He spent some time with the Lord, but he was fighting what you and I fight - that grumbling stomach. Some of you that come here on Wednesdays right from work, haven't eaten, I can see your pain. (Laughing) I mean, you're making good choices, but the flesh isn't agreeing with you at all. So, he has this battle in his mind. He's hungry, and yet he knows he's got to be praying. And God would use his hunger, his circumstance, if you will, to speak to the heart of His willing servant. God is good at setting up meetings. It's almost like the Lord said, "Hey, Peter, you hungry? Man, have I got a good example for you." And He gives him a lesson with food, and the lesson is down the road of, "I'm going to make My servant a prejudice-free servant." Right? Education, instruction. Peter falls into a trance. Interesting word. I think the word between trance, vision and dream in the Bible are pretty much interchangeable sometimes. We'll see that in a couple of weeks in Acts as well. Peter's awake, but his mind is drawn somewhere else, and he's kind of detached from the reality of where he's at. God has captured his attention, however you'd like to explain that.

We are told in verse 11 that "Peter saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'" Now, the

word for "sheet" is the Greek word for "sail." So maybe you can picture it that way, like a sail. On this sail that was let down from heaven to Peter's feet was a collection of animals. They were both clean animals and apparently unclean ones, according to Jewish law. There were wild beasts, there were creeping things, there were birds of the air. And calculated to disgust, I think, any Orthodox Jew came the suggestion from the voice from heaven in the vision, "Peter, arise and kill and eat." And you can tell by the horrified response of this devout Jewish Christian saint that he was bewildered at the inconsistency of His response. How could God possibly ask me to do that?

We read in verse 14, "But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' This was done three times. And the object" (or the sheet or the sail) "was taken up into heaven again." Now, God's will by this vision challenged Peter's prejudice of the Gentiles. I mean, that's where the big battle is. Right? He was going to need God's heart to be able to go to Caesarea and stand before a whole room full of Gentile hungry hearts to preach the gospel. Peter's initial response to what he saw was that he had never broken a dietary law of the Jews. "I've never eaten something that's unclean or common." But understand that the dietary laws were established by God to separate His people onto Him through obedience. It wasn't the food, it was the devotion. In fact, even in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:3), he said, "There're people running around now that are forbidding others to get married, and they are commanding that you abstain from food which God has not only created but created to be received with thanksgiving. Every creature of God is good. You shouldn't refuse anything you can eat as long as you can pray and be thankful for it." The dietary law was really a symbol of separation more than anything else. So it was a perfect thing to say, "Hey, Peter, it's all about Me, and I'm tellin' ya it's not unclean. If you're following Me, if I'm your Lord, first of all, don't say, 'Not so!' to Me. Then I'm not the Lord, you are. And second of all, don't call unclean or common that which I call clean." Peter initially responds like Ananias did when he was told to go talk to Saul. "Not so, Lord!" Very much a contradiction in terms. But I think he's horrified, "Oh, man, this is a test!" He had been diligent to not eat animals that offended the Lord. But you can't use, "Not so" and "Lord" in the same sentence. That's a contradiction. Now you see a lot of Christians doing it. They will come to church, raise their hands, sing songs about the Lord, read the Bible where the Lord tells us to do something, and then they will leave the church and live their life any way they choose. It's almost the same contradiction. Right?

"You're the Lord, but I'm not obeying every rule of Yours. Hey, You're the Lord, but You've got to be kidding if You want me to do that. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Lord! Not so, Lord!" It sounds as bad today as it did then. Right? But they never even consider what the Lord might want. Jesus said (in Matthew 7:21), "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven," those who will listen to what He says, those for whom I'm really the Lord.

So here's Peter, now. He loves the Lord. Honestly. But this is part of his education process. Right? He's got to be confronted with his own kind of demons, if you will, that are residing in his heart. So for Peter, it was an instant and an immediate struggle of his heart. He had ingrained religious ways reinforced by years of practice and preaching and tradition, which made it hard for him to embrace the grace of God. He loved God. He wanted to obey God. Sometimes God gets ahold of us, and He has to shake loose a lot of chains. Right? And that's, I think, what Peter is going through here. And so the Lord, three times, says to Peter, "Get up and eat! Kill!" "Not so, Lord!" And the second time and the third time, and then that was it. That was the lesson. And Peter was kind of just left there in the dark or in the middle of the light, if you will. "Don't call what the Lord calls clean - don't you call it common." So, it happens three times (verse 16) for Peter. He doesn't really know what's going on. He doesn't understand. It has to be somethin', but he doesn't get it. But here's the way God's timing works. As he is pondering this, downstairs there's a knock at the door, and these three guys from two days ago - sent out by Cornelius to go find Peter - are now knocking at the door.

We read in verse 17, "Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant," (remember, it was called a trance a minute ago, called a vision now, you can almost put the word "dream" in there as well) "behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate." So, I love how God works on both sides of the equation. The men had come to town. They went, "Hey, is there a Simon that lives here, a tanner?" "Yeah, he's down the block and to the right. He's right there on the beach. You can't miss him." And they come, and as Peter is watching this thing on the roof, God's amazing timing, there's a knock at the door. (Pastor Jack makes a knocking sound). In the midst of all of that, verse 18 tells us "they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking

you.' " Three times, this thing happened - three men. " 'Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.' " So, not leaving it to chance or to Peter's dullness, God clearly instructs Peter as to what He wanted. "There are three guys. They're looking for you. They're going to ask you to go with them. I want you to go with them and doubt nothing." And the words "doubt nothing" literally, in Greek, translate "make no distinction." Or don't make a decision based because they're different than you are. Because they were - they were Gentiles. At the door were some Gentiles. And one of them was a soldier. And they wanted Peter to come forty miles. "Can you go with us forty miles away?" And Peter might very well have had a hesitation. But what they would tell Peter, and the association between the vision and their conversation, would make it clear to Peter that God had a plan. Now it may not have completely come clear, but by the time he gets there in a few days, boy, it's going to become clear all at once. So (verse 20), just "Arise and go with them."

Verse 21, "Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, 'Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?' And they said, 'Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.' Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him." So, Peter does this. "Come in the house. You guys have been traveling. We'll go tomorrow." He talks to Simon, gets them a room. "You can stay with us." And he now has the whole day to hear them out and a whole night to pray about this and to try to put this together.

From verse 12 of chapter 11 we know that Peter would eventually, before the morning, talk six guys into going with them from Joppa, six witnesses. "I know this is going to be trouble either way. I need a bunch of guys to go with me." And he surrounds himself with guys that he trusts, if you will. He is obedient to the Lord, but he's careful. He's open, yet he's guarded. He's wondering, and yet he believes he has to go. So he invites these three Gentiles to now stay with him. You see where Peter's goin' here? First he's got the tanner, now he's got three Gentiles in his house. He offers them dinner. He hears them out. They arrive at about noon, remember, 12:00 prayer time. Peter feels, "We'll just wait till the morning, and off we go." Now he's being prepared for this by the Lord for years. Right? This is a big deal. The door of salvation is about to swing wide open to everyone. That isn't true of the early church yet. They're still in their little bubble of "It's just us" for

the most part. So the next morning, Peter will set off on his journey with six men, friends of his in ministry, to what had to be a very exciting, nerve-wracking, forty-mile walk to a *Gentile's* house - of all, a soldier's house - in the middle of Caesarea, Roman-controlled and occupied by soldiers. This is not an easy move. Politically dangerous. As a Jew, as a Christian, he's not sure what to do. But Peter is just the guy to drag down these kinds of roads.

Whenever God wants to do something new or special or out of the ordinary, in the Bible, He always begins by finding an individual. And there is no new work of God in groups. Oh, eventually it takes a group, but you always find the individual first. When someone like Hannah has a son whom God would use greatly, He first gets Hannah's heart, then He gets Samuel's heart, and then God can do a work. The same thing when we went through the book of Nehemiah. One man becomes the mover. Daniel becomes the leader in captivity, if you will. And now Peter. Peter. When it became time for the Lord to bring Israel out of bondage from Egypt, God would raise Moses up by a vision at a burning bush in the back of the desert. God always has someone to use. I think the cool thing would be if you were that someone - at your job, at your school, with your family. You're like the mover and the shaker. You're going to take the steps of faith. You're going to listen to what the Lord has to say, and God's going to do this great work through your life. When God wanted the gospel to go to Europe, Paul had a vision of a guy in Philippi going, "Hey, come over here and minister to us," and God used Paul to go. The time had come for the gospel to go to the *Gentiles*, and God was going to use Peter and a very unlikely guy, an unbeliever but a God fearer, named Cornelius who both are given visions from the Lord.

It's exciting to be a Christian, don't you think? Because this is the way God has a way of moving. There's a verse in Proverbs 29:18 that says, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint." Or, if you will, just by definition, the word "restraint," "*para*," means to run aimlessly around. If you don't have a direction from God, you're just going to waste your energy going in circles but really going nowhere. No restraint. There's no direction that's being given. And I love the fact that, as this work of God moves through the world, there aren't chickens with their heads cut off. It is God's will to give vision to His people, and they're not spinning aimlessly; they're moving forward.

Look at Peter for a minute. He is in a position where he's learned a lot, and he's willing to live it out. He puts himself in a position to receive a vision, and I find

that very interesting. If you look around in the Bible, visions from the Lord are given mostly to people who are alone with God. Very rarely do you get a vision on the freeway because you're going to get in a crash. Or in a busy room of talking people. Visions come when you're able to hear and listen to what God has to say. Visions are borne in quiet fellowship with God, not in the busyness of the crowd. I mean, we can make plans and alliances, and we can go for counseling and depend on the wisdom of others. But there's nothing better than getting a vision from the Lord, where you just know that you know that you know. You're heading in the right direction. For Peter, the vision that he got wasn't initially so clear. It took some time and some explanation from the Lord to take Peter progressively to the place where he began to say, "Well, yeah, this is working, this is right." And here's a third part of the vision that you should never forget - in the Bible, when God gives a vision, He confirms it. I think that's important. You don't run around, "Oh, the Lord spoke to me." "How do we know?" "Well, I just feel it." No, it's bad. You want it to be confirmed. Right? It's vital. There's a great Scripture in Jeremiah 32:6, where Jeremiah said, " 'The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you, saying, 'Buy my field which is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption is yours to buy it.' " ' " And then he said this, " 'Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Please buy my field that is in Anathoth." ' " And then there's a real insightful word in the Scriptures, and it says, " 'Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.' " He says, "Buy the field when this guy offers it," and he goes, "Then he showed up, and he offered it to me, and then I knew it was the LORD." There's something good about confirmation, right? And there's confirmation here with Peter and with Cornelius. God was replacing prejudice with holiness. And, as the three visitors came, Peter began to realize that this was, indeed, what God had to say.

Well, we'll stop there tonight because I want to save the punchline for next week. So the meeting at the house of Cornelius - as the gospel of Jesus is brought to the Gentiles - you don't want to miss this. Invite your friends. Tell your family. You're gonna love this story as the door gets swung open. And because of this story, you're saved. Because of this story, you're saved. The gospel came to the likes of you Gentiles, and you few Jews that are here as well.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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