

The Salvation of the Gentiles, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 10:1-20

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This morning in our study of the Book of Acts in which we are continuing to study week by week, we come to chapter 10; and chapter 10 of the Book of Acts would certainly be a primary consideration in a missions emphasis; because Acts chapter 10 deals with a great missionary principle and a great missionary historical fact. The Gospel had been committed, first of all, to the people in Jerusalem; and then the Gospel had been taken to Judea and Samaria; and, finally, the design of God was to take the Gospel to the uttermost part of the earth. And our Lord Christ had laid out this master plan of evangelism in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8.

You'll remember the...the end of the Book of Matthew is recorded the great commission, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." And they were to start where they were in Jerusalem and then go to Judea and Samaria. Then go to the Gentiles. And, initially, the church was Jewish. Those who came to Christ at first in Jerusalem, obviously, were Jews; and it was a great stretching of them to be able to reach Samaritans, whom they despised; and it would even be a greater step to reach Gentiles, whom, if they despised Samaritans, they doubly despised; and so as we come to chapter 10 of Acts, we find that most monumental account in the record of the Word of God which tells us how God began to open the church to the Gentiles; and He did it through Jewish vehicles, which is a great, great truth.

Now, the key to these days in the early church is Peter. The church had been founded on the Day of Pentecost. It had exploded in Jerusalem, and then it exploded all throughout Judea and Samaria, and people were being saved everywhere along the way. Great revivals were breaking out, particularly in Samaria under the ministry of Philip and, as well, Peter and John and the other apostles. Peter was moving around. He was the preacher to the unsaved. He was also the teacher to the saints. He was the dominant figure in the early church, and he was available to God, and he moved about from place to place. In the course of his journey, as we saw in chapter 9, preaching and teaching, he came across a little town called Lydda, going from Jerusalem to the coast, to the Mediterranean Sea. And there he met a man named Aeneas who eight years had been a paralytic, and he healed him. And in response to that healing, verse 35 of 9 says, "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord." So great results occurred there.

He stayed there for some time until he heard word from some disciples that there was an individual by the name of Dorcas, a beloved Christian lady in Joppa some ten miles away, and Dorcas had died, and the folks there, knowing Peter was near, had not buried her, but only set her in an upper chamber, and they went to fetch Peter to see if Peter might not heal her, raising her from the dead. He arrived in Joppa and did precisely that; and in response to that marvelous miracle of God, verse 42 says, "It was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

So Peter is this most dominant individual. He is most effective in the service of the Lord. He is busy turning people to Jesus Christ. He is God's catalyst in the explosion of the church. He is the...he is the real reactor in what's going on. But more than that, Peter had a very special commission. More than just his general ministry and general availability, he had a very specific calling. For in the Gospel of Matthew, our Lord Christ had said to him, "I give unto you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven." And what He meant by that is that, "Peter, you will be the guy who will unlock the next door in the expansion of the church. You're the one who is the point of contact between the Spirit of God and the church."

And, on the Day of Pentecost, you remember, he was in Jerusalem; and the church began there, and it was he who preached, and it was he who they...who was there when the Spirit came. It was he who was there when they were baptized and added to the body. And then the Gospel went to Samaria as they were scattered under the persecution led by Saul of Tarsus; and as they went into Samaria, they began to preach, and people were saved. But they had not yet been added to the body by the baptizing work of the Spirit until Peter and John arrived, and Peter laid his hands on them, and they received the Spirit. And, again, Peter was the point of contact for the opening of the church to the half-breed Samaritans.

And there was one other dimension. There's one key left in Peter's hand that hasn't yet been put in a door and turned, and that's the...the key that opens the church to include the Gentiles. And so Peter is about to unlock that last door, and that's gonna be a tough key for Peter to turn, because he has been raised a whole lifetime engrained with Jewish traditions, engrained with legalism, and super-nationalism. And it's an almost intolerant kind of engraining, so that there isn't any room for Samaritans, and there isn't any room for Gentiles, who were considered to be unclean.

But it's beautiful to see, even as we are just kind of getting into chapter 10, that already the Spirit of God has begun to do some preparation. Peter has accepted the Samaritans, and that's a monumental step for him. The Samaritans were a despised people. They were really, from the very time of the separation of the kingdom, disliked by the...by the southern kingdom; and then when they were taken into captivity and intermarried and when...when nations like Assyria sent people into the northern kingdom, and they intermarried with them, they became despised to Jews who maintained that their national existence was a...was a gift of God and should never be polluted. And so they were a hated people because they were half-breeds.

The Assyrians had planted some people in the land called the Cuthites, or the Cuthians, and the Jews had intermarried with those people, and the rabbis even went so far as to say, "Let no man, no Jew, eat of the bread of the Cuthians, the Samaritans, for he who eats their bread is as if he was eating swine's flesh." So they were despised, to put it mildly.

But Peter had been able to let that kind of go by, and he had been able to accept them, and he'd been there, and he'd seen what Philip had accomplished through the Spirit of God, and he laid his hands and the Spirit had come upon them, and he was shocked, but it happened, and they received the same gift that the Jews had received at Pentecost. They were in one body together, and Peter was beginning to accept that.

Then in addition, another tradition that was breaking down is apparent because he stayed, it says in verse 43, in the house of Simon, the tanner; and a tanner was a despised trade to a Jew, because he dealt with the flesh of dead animals; and no self-respecting Jew would have anything to do with such a man. But Peter stayed in his house maybe as long as a couple of years and, consequently, he shows that his prejudices are being melted down by our Lord. But there's still a tough, tough barrier to knock over, and that's the barrier between the Jew and the Gentile, but it has to come, because, you see, in the new covenant, the design of God is to take of two and make, as Paul says, "one new man." And this is Paul's great message when he defines the church in Ephesians 2. I read you from verse 11 these words. "Wherefore, remember that ye, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh," and then he goes on to discuss what that means. "You were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." He says, "You were a mess. You were cut off from everything God was involved in."

And he says in verse 13 of Ephesians 2, "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who once were far off are made near. You who were separated are brought together in Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Then he goes on to say, "He made one new man, reconciling both into one body." In chapter 3, he says, "This is the mystery, that the Jews and the Gentiles would be one body." Well, this was just a difficult thing for the Jew to understand. Extremely hard, after centuries and centuries of exclusiveness, and especially from the Gentiles, to be then thrown together as equals like Paul says in Galatians 3:8, 3:28, "From now on there's neither bond nor free, male nor female, Jew or Gentile. You're all one in Christ." That's a whole new concept for the Jew.

And so Peter is gonna have to have a little bit of preparation before he's gonna be able to stick this key in and turn it. A strict Jew wouldn't have anything to do with a Gentile. In fact, a strict Jew wouldn't even be the guest in a Gentile's house, nor would he have a guest in his house, since Gentiles were unclean. The scribal law said, "The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean." And, in fact, here's an interesting footnote just to kinda...to get a thought on this that is perhaps specific. It

was considered that the dust or the dirt from a Gentile country was defiled and, if anybody happened to have some Gentile country dirt on their feet and tracked it into Israel, it remained defiled. It never mingled with Israel soil. It just stayed there continuously defiling the land. Consequently, whenever they left the Gentile country, they would always do what became a very famous phrase in the Bible. They would always shake off the dust off their feet so as not to track any Gentile pollution back into Israel; and I think it's interesting, too, that in Matthew 10:14, you remember that Jesus sent out the 70; and He said, "You go two by two, and if anybody doesn't hear your Gospel, shake off the dust from off your feet." In other words, treat them as though they were Gentile, unclean. That's what he meant.

And this is exactly how the Jews felt, that the Gentiles were unclean. In fact, milk that was drawn out of a cow by Gentile hands was not allowed to be consumed by Jews, so you had to make sure you checked on who provided your milk. Bread and oil, for example, prepared by a Gentile, could be sold to a stranger, but could never be used by a Jew...No Jew would eat with a Gentile at all; and, in fact, if a Gentile was invited to a Jewish house, you couldn't leave him in the room unless...lest he would defile all the food in the room. If cooking utensils, for example, were bought from a Gentile, they had to be purified by fire and water. Any article that was in the hands of a Gentile at any time was unclean. If you had, for example, a weaving shuttle, and that weaving shuttle was made out of wood that was grown in a grove where Gentiles worshipped false god, you had to burn up the shuttle. Not only that, you had to find every piece of cloth ever produced on it, burn it, too. There was a true separation, believe me.

Now, the Gentiles retaliated. They had their own thing going, too, believe me. The Jews were a...were a scorn to them. They were a constant theater of laughter for them. The circumcision, the Sabbath day rest, the worship of an invisible God, the...the abstinence from certain foods, the dietary laws and all of the things the Jews went through, that was a mockery...a point of mockery for the Gentile. So for centuries, they had been butting heads, you see; and all of a sudden, Christ came along and said, "Now, I'm gonna take Jews and Gentile. I'm gonna make one new man." And, in theory, it was great; and in theology, it was great; and by His power He could do it; but it was a tough thing for the Jew to swallow and to practically really make it happen. And Peter, even though he got going here in chapter 10, had a few relapses in his life...

Well, in order for God to get this...this dichotomous situation into unity, He's gonna have to do a little preparation. So in this chapter, chapter 10 verses 1 to 20, which is all we'll have time to consider this morning, in these verses that introduce to us this confrontation that finally results in the Gentiles being brought into the church. We find that God prepares two people. First He prepares the Gentile, and then He prepares the Jew. The Gentile is Cornelius, and the Jew is Peter. It has to start somewhere, so it starts with two guys. It's gotta be more than theory. It's gotta happen, so He picks out two people, Cornelius and Peter, and He gives each one a special vision, which is like sort of training in preparation. Before they'll ever come together, there's gonna have to be a lot of soil tilled up, and so

He begins with a vision here in the first eight verses or so to Cornelius, and then from verse 9 on, He gives a vision to Peter; and this, then, is the beginning of the Gentile inclusion in the church. By the time you hit chapter 11, the Gospel's gone to Antioch and Gentiles are getting saved. By the time you come from there and you start moving ahead, you hit chapter 13, and all of a sudden Paul's going full blast to the Gentiles, and the problem is...is moving out, and it's becoming sublimated. The thing is really going, and Jews and Gentiles are coming together in Christ. Peter runs back to Jerusalem. Says, "You'll never believe it. People, you'll never believe it. They got the same gift we got." See. And then the report comes, and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, which finally comes to the conclusion that they will accept them fully as those who belong to Jesus Christ. So it all begins here in chapter 10, and I'm glad it did, aren't you? I'm a Gentile...so this is a great chapter. I love this one.

Now, to begin with, let's look at the vision that Cornelius got; and he got a really interesting one, believe me. God, and I wanna give you some footnotes here. I always study narrative passages, and principles keep jumping out of 'em at me; and I think they're principles that can just be really meaningful today in the 20th century, and this is what I want you to see.

As we watch what God does with Cornelius, and as we watch what God does with Peter, you're gonna see principles of what God does with everybody in this situation, because you have here a receiver, Cornelius, and you have a messenger, Peter; and you're gonna see how God prepares the receiver who is gonna get the Gospel and how God prepares the messenger who's gonna give it. And then in God's absolute, perfect moment of time, He brings the two together. I want you to catch these principles, because they're fantastically important principles for our own understanding of how God's gonna use us as Christians to be prepared messengers, to hit the prepared receiver at the...at the divine moment; and this is important.

All right, let's look at the vision of Cornelius. Now it says in verse 1, "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius." We'll stop there. The first thing we learn about God's preparation of the receiver - Cornelius is the guy who's gonna hear about Christ and get saved. He's gonna be the Gentile convert. The first thing we learn is God chooses the receiver. "There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius." God singled this guy out. There were a lotta Gentiles around. There were a lotta possible guys that coulda been saved. There were a lotta them who could possibly have been the initial introduction into the church, but God chose Cornelius. God picks the receiver. God is involved in choosing the one who receives the Gospel, watch this, as well as the one who brings it...

In John 6:37, Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I'll in no wise cast out," but before that He said, "The only ones who'd come would be those that the Father drew. No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him." God is in the business of choosing. Book of Ephesians says, "We were elect, chosen in Him before the foundation of the world," and you can believe that God had Cornelius all singled out. In Acts chapter 13 verse 48, it's an interesting thing to...to hear what that says. "And when the Gentiles heard this...they were glad and glorified the Word of the Lord." Here's some

Gentiles. Watch this. "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." God had already determined who would be redeemed. God did the selecting at that point.

Over in chapter 15 verse 14, "Simeon hath declared how God first did visit the nations to take out of them a people for His name." God moved to take out a people. Did you know that in John chapter 10 in verse 16, Jesus said in the...in the record there about the good shepherd and the sheep, He says, "I have some sheep of another fold, and soon I am going to call them." And He knows His sheep. In Romans chapter 10 there's an interesting thing. He's kind of chastising Israel there for their failure to believe, and He says, "The amazing thing is this...chapter 10 verse 20, listen...But Isaiah is very bold and saith, 'I was found by them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me.'" And there He's speaking specifically about Gentiles and saying, "I sought them out before they ever asked for Me."

Now, God initially does the choosing of the receiver. That's His plan. That's His design. He is building His body. He is calling out His sheep, His people, and He chooses. Now, I don't wanna say that without also saying that that is never against the volition or the will of the one chosen; and here you have added to the sovereignty of God and predestination an election, the choice of man. As I've taught many times, the two go together in Scripture. They just don't go together in my brain or in yours, and I just let it not go together and say, "That means God is smarter than me, and that's the way I want it."

All right, notice verse 1 about Cornelius. He lived in a place called Caesarea, which has to be one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. Oh, just a glorious little place on the...kinda juts out on the blue Mediterranean, and the waves roll in. It's just a beautiful, beautiful spot. Nothing left much now but ruins, but the ruins are...are...are obvious enough to really determine that there was a city there and so forth. But Caesarea was the place, and it was a...it was a military garrison, because it was there at Caesarea that the home of Pilate existed, or any other procurator for that matter of Palestine, because the Roman government had their headquarters there. There were soldiers there. It was a military outpost, and also it was populated dominantly by Gentiles with only a minimum of Jewish populace. It was about 30 miles north of Joppa, and today would be about 30 miles or so north of Tel Aviv.

Now, Augustus has given this...had given this city to Herod as a gift. So, consequently, it had been made into a beautiful, beautiful city. They'd spent immense fortunes on...on this one city. Now, Cornelius, it says, was "a centurion of the band called the Italian cohort." He was an Italian. He was of extraction from Italy, maybe Rome. The word Italian Band is interesting. It's really...the word band is cohort. A centurion commanded 100 men. A Roman legion had 6,000, and it was divided into ten cohorts, and each cohort would have 600 men. Each cohort had 6 centurions, and so Cornelius was one of these guys who handled 100 men.

In fact, Josephus, I think it is, tells us that there were five cohorts stationed in Caesarea, so they had a lotta Roman soldiers in that place...Make it a little study. It's interesting. Sometime study centurions in the New Testament. You'll find that they always appear to be good men. In fact, Jesus had some most interesting conversations with centurions.

But Jesus had selected this one centurion by the name of Cornelius, and this was His man. The second thing that hits me is not just that Jesus chose him out of the blue and was against his will, but rather that the man also had a mind to know God, that he was a seeking heart, that he had lived up to the light that he had, and so God moved in to give him more light, and here you have volition brought into sovereignty. Look at verse 2. "Cornelius was a devout man and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always."

Now another thing we learn about God's preparation of the receiver is that God responds to the willing heart. God responds to the open heart. Election never violates volition or choice. They always go together. I don't know how. God knows how. But Cornelius was sovereignly chosen by God, but he also had a searching heart. God reached down and gave him, really, the disposition to turn and seek God, even when he was dead in trespasses and sins.

Now, it's an interesting thing that I wanna point out to you here that always come up when people question those who teach the Bible; and they inevitably will say this. "Well, what about the heathen? Are all the heathen gonna die and go to hell without ever having heard?" And we hear this incessantly. This is almost a...a straw man that people forever and ever throw up to Christians. The...the point is I think graphically illustrated here. That if a...if an individual lives up to the light that he has, God will give him more light. Here's Cornelius. He's a devout man. He fears God. He gives his money to the people, and the term people is used in Acts, this term, laous, is used in Acts to speak of the Jews, so he was actually giving money to the Jews. He also prayed all the time. Here is a man who, in his own heart, in his own mind, has come to the understanding of the true God. He'd have certain amount of light, and he's living to the full capacity of that light, and God moves in and really shows him the full light, the light of the world, Jesus Christ.

I do not believe for one moment, beloved, that God ever, under any circumstances, will hinder the truth from somebody who wants to know it. I don't care where he lives. In John 7:17, Jesus said, "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." If anybody really wants to do what God wants him to do, God will give him sufficient light to be able to fulfill what God desires and demands. In Jeremiah 29:13, it simply says, "If you seek Me with all your heart, you shall surely...what?... find Me." Believe me, God never frustrates a truly seeking heart. The sad thing is that men in our world don't seek God, but when God moves down and touches a life and turns that life around, then God will fulfill the seeking that takes place in that heart, and God does that in the case of Cornelius.

Remember in Matthew 7:7 where Jesus said, "Ask and ye shall receive. Seek and you...what?...shall find. For everyone that asks shall be given. Everyone that seeketh, he shall find. For everyone that knocks, it shall be open to him." God never restricts His full light from the one who seeks it, so don't ever worry about the heathen. God is just, too just to ever make a mistake. He is loving, too loving to ever be unnecessarily judgmental. God always gives the light to the one who lives up to the light that he has.

All right, he was a devout man. That means he was pious, and he was religious. Honestly religious, and he feared God. Now, the term feared God became a technical term for Gentiles. There were three kinds of Gentiles in the mind of a Jew. One kind was just the plain, old, run-of-the-mill Gentile. The other kind, and this is getting better on the scale, the other kind was a God-fearer quote. This was a Gentile who had been sick of his own religion, the immoralities and the idolatries of his own faith, and he was sick of the whole polytheistic thing, and he had come to the conclusion in his mind that the God of Israel was the true God. He actually began to pray to that God. He perhaps become involved in the worship in certain synagogues or temple, or the temple itself. Much like, you remember, the eunuch, chapter 8, whom Philip met. But he was...he was involved in the Jewish ethic. He believed in the ethics of the Old Testament, but he had never been circumcised. He was not then a full proselyte. He was what they called a God-fearer.

The third level of Gentile would be the proselyte who had come all the way to Judaism, actually gone through the act of circumcision, and fully identified himself with Israel and was considered to be a Jew in a spiritual sense. Now you have all three. Well, Cornelius is the guy in the middle. He's the God-fearer. He is not a full Jew, so he is to be considered a Gentile...but he did fear God. He was sick of the immorality and the emptiness of his own religion. He had attached himself to the Jewish religion. He didn't accept the ceremonial laws, perhaps, and the circumcision, etc., but he often attended worship, no doubt. He believed in one God and in the ethics of the Old Testament.

It's interesting, too, as you study Book of Acts, you'll find that these are the people that Paul usually hit when he went to these Gentile cities. He went into the synagogue and, usually, he would lead the God-fearers to Christ. They were the people living up to the light they had, who then, when Paul arrived, got the rest of the light and were saved; and so what you had in the movement of Paul was a whole lot of little groups of God-fearers getting saved, and they became, of course, a terrible threat to all the Jews in the synagogues.

All right, so here's a picture of a man who is a very religious man. Also a footnote we oughta add here. You can be a very religious man and not be saved. You know that? In 11:14, chapter 11 verse 14, says, "Who shall tell thee words by which thou and all thy house...here comes three words...shall be saved." See, he was not saved. He was not a Christian. He would not have...he did not know Jesus Christ. He was not one of the body of Christ. He was living up to the light he had, but God was

moving to give him more light. Up until the time that he heard from Peter, he did not have enough to be fully saved.

It's an interesting thing to see there are many religious people, active in many religious activities, who are not saved. But, praise God, Cornelius' religion was very honest, and he was seeking the true God with a true heart, and God always honors that.

Now, in order for God to deal with this guy, he'd had not only to choose him, first of all, but, secondly, to respond to his searching heart. Thirdly, he had to prepare him, and so He comes to him in a vision. This is great. Verse 3. "He saw in a vision." Notice verse 2 says that he "prayed to God always." You know, it seems to me that as I study the Bible, great things always happen when people are in prayer. God moved on Cornelius when he was in prayer. You're gonna see in a minute that it was Peter, when he was praying, that God moved on, as well. Prayer's a great place to be, on your knees before God, for God to speak, and here it happens.

"He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day," which would be 3:00 in the afternoon, which was the normal time for the evening prayers for the Jews, and since he was a God-fearer, he may have followed that custom and spent that 3:00 time praying; and, at that time, he saw a vision. "An angel of God coming in to him, saying unto him, 'Cornelius.'" And here appears clear, crystal clear, an angel who says, "Cornelius." God moves in response to prayer. You say, "What was Cornelius praying about?" I don't know what he was praying about, but I can take a good guess. I think he was saying, "God, I wanna know more about You. I want the fullness." He was searching for more light and God was about to invade him with light, and here came the angel, the angelic appearance.

Verse 4, soldiers aren't supposed to be afraid of anything, but he was kind of afraid of this; and even the bravest heart would've quaked at this experience. "When he looked on him, he was afraid and said, 'What is it, Lord?'...And he said unto him, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'" Do you know something? You know that anywhere in the world, in the darkest spot of the world, in the bushiest of the bush country, God sees and reads the heart of every single individual. Do you know that? Don't you ever believe for a minute that God doesn't know what's going on in the breast of every man; and if that man is truly living up to the light he has, God will move him...move on him with true information.

Here's a case. He says to him, "You know what's happened? Like smoke ascending from a fire, your prayers and the deeds that you have done have risen up to the nostrils of God, and He considers it a sweet-smelling savor, and God is moving in response to you." Cornelius had accepted the belief in God, and God had accepted Cornelius' honest heart, but notice He couldn't save him still, apart from the true information, and so God had to move, not only in response, but He had to give him the right information, and so his prayers and his devotion, his faith, and the goodness of the man had risen to

heaven like some sweet-smelling offering, and it had entered the nostrils of God, and God had said, "Cornelius is living up to the light he has. I'm gonna move in his behalf."

Because forever, to ever that...whoever that man is who lives up to that light, God responds. And then the angel gives him specific instructions. God is always very specific. Verse 5, "And now...says the angel...send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter." Now, he says, "You go to Joppa." Now here we come across another principle. God not only chooses the receiver and responds to the searching heart of the receiver and prepares the receiver, but God gives the receiver the opportunity to respond actively. Now God could've said through this angel, "Cornelius, all you have to do is these steps. Do you know that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life or whatever?" And he could've gone through the Gospel, see. He could've simply gone right to the Gospel, said, "Cornelius, do you believe." _____ "I believe." "It's over, Cornelius, great." But, no, He didn't do that.

No, you see, Paul said that we were sent to the world for the obedience of faith, Romans 1. You see, God always wants to tie with faith an act of obedience, because that's what the Christian life is all about. You might as well learn it at the beginning. That's why the Bible says, "If you believe in your heart...Romans 10:9 and 10, and do what else?...confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be saved." God wants some kind of act of obedience tied in with that salvation. So He gives to...to Cornelius the opportunity to be obedient; and isn't it interesting that if I were Cornelius, here would've been my reaction. "Uh, can I go myself? Why do I have to send guys. That means they'll go there, and they'll get him, and he'll have to come here, and that's a lot of time. I wanna get there."

I don't read that in the text. Praise the Lord, he was obedient. He was believing God, and he was obedient. You say, "Well, why would God take this time?" I think there's two reasons. No. 1, I think was the fact that God wanted Peter also to act on faith, 'cause Peter was gonna have to pack up and head for Cornelius' house strictly on faith. I mean to have a bunch of Roman soldiers arrive at his door and say, "Come on, we're taking you to a man who wants to see ya." That's a little scary. Roman soldiers.

Secondly, I think, in order to break the barriers down, that the Lord wanted Peter to lead Cornelius to Christ in Cornelius' own house, which no Jew would ever enter, and so God had the plan laid out, and Cornelius didn't hassle God. He believed and obeyed. He says, "Just send some men," and so He says, "Now send men to Joppa, call for Simon, whose name is Peter. He lodges with Simon, a tanner." So He makes a distinction, so he could find out which one, "whose house is by the seaside." Tanners had their house by the seaside, because they needed the salt water for the tanning processes. "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." He said, "Now, I've got My man over. Now, you go. Send your men, and you wait here. They'll come back with him."

Now, this...boy, that old Cornelius must have been on pins and needles waiting for all this to unfold, but he obeyed immediately. "When the angel who spoke unto Cornelius...verse 7...was departed, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of those that waited on him continually. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa." Now, immediately after he sees the vision, he fires these guys out to Joppa. I love this immediate obedience.

You know, a man of less faith than that would've said, "Now, come on, angel, is this for real? Are you really from God?" See. "And what's all this about going to Joppa? I mean if this is for real, why can't you just tell me? Don't you have a guy here? Isn't there somebody in Caesarea who knows this stuff? And then why can't I go? Why do I have to wait here just suspended while this is all going on, and how do I know that he's gonna believe this message?" and so forth. You see, but here was a man of true faith, and God gave him the opportunity to prove the obedience of faith.

God is forever and ever doing that, people. I hope you're learning that in your life. Never to be impatient, impatient with God when He's trying to teach you how to be obedient. And so immediately he does exactly what God told him to do, and this is exciting, because it helps us to see again that God uses human instruments. God just coulda come down and said, "Okay, Cornelius, zap, you're saved." But God uses human instruments. God wanted to use Peter. You see? Remember Acts 1:8? "But ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses, My witnesses. Ye shall be." That's our job.

All right, so Cornelius is getting prepared. What have we seen in the preparation of the receiver over here? We've seen 1) God chose him. 2) God responded to his open heart. 3) God prepared the soil with the proper information and instruction. 4) God promises more light. "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." 5) God asks for the obedience of faith. Meanwhile, He prepares the messenger, Peter, down in Joppa.

Verse 9, here's the second vision. "On the next day, as they went on their journey...this is the two servants and the soldier...and drew near unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." That's noon. It's time for prayer then, too, and so Peter was going up on the roof to pray. They did a lotta things on the roof, and very many times, the houses were close together, and the roof was kinda the area of recreation and...and rest and suntan or whatever else and meditation; and so they went...he went up on the roof. It's time for Peter to get ready.

Now, God had a lotta work to do. Peter was, you know, he began his career as a very sincere bigot, and God had to sorta tear him down, you know, piece by piece by piece; and he was coming apart very well so far. He had, oh, he had been troublesome to the Lord periodically during the days of the Lord's tenure on earth, but the shift was coming about. The gears in his brain were beginning to turn, and things were beginning to come into focus as God had designed 'em, but he needed one other super kind of vision to try to get him over the hump of dealing with Gentiles; and here we're gonna

see...watch this, beloved, we're gonna see that the...the work of the Holy Spirit on the messenger is identical to that on the receiver.

First of all, He chooses the messenger that He wants, just like He chose the receiver. Verse 9, "On the next day, as they went on their journey and drew near to the city, Peter..." Here's the guy God wants. Now, you know that if you study the Bible at all, you know that God is in the business of calling out special people for special jobs. How many times in the Bible have you said...have you read of the prophets of old, "The Word of the Lord came unto me and said, 'Boom, go do this.'" Or the Apostle Paul says, "I am an apostle, not of the will of men, but of the will of God." Or "Christ hath called me as His apostle," you know. This is part and parcel of it. You can go back to Abraham. God said to Abraham, "You live in Ur. Get up, get out, go to the land that I'll show you. You're My man."

And I love the...the conversation that we find with Isaiah and Jeremiah which shows how directly God calls. Listen to this. If you think God isn't sovereign, and you think God isn't carrying about His own purposes, if you think everything is just up to everybody's decision, look at this. Isaiah 49 verse 1, "Listen, O coasts, unto me, and hearken, ye peoples from far! Listen, the Lord hath called me from the womb; from the body of my mother hath He made mention of my name. And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He hath hidden me, and made Me a polished shaft. In His quiver hath He hidden me."

Boy, He says, "God has had me on His list from the womb. I am a chosen prophet." And He goes on to talk about it in the chapter. Then there's dear, old Jeremiah. Poor, old guy, no one ever listened to anything he said. Yet he was faithful his whole life. How would you like that for a commission? "Go preach, and all your life you'll spend preaching, and no one will ever listen." That was his commission, and he did it. Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed thee," this is God talking to him. He says, "Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee." Oho. "Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee, Jeremiah. You're one of the ones I've had on My list from before conception. And before you came out of the womb I sanctified you and ordained you a prophet unto the nations." Can you imagine that? When Jeremiah's mother was still great with child, she didn't know it, but God knew it. She was carrying a prophet. That was already determined in eternity past.

"Then said I, 'Ah, Lord God!...he says....this is hard to handle. Behold, I can't speak. I'm a child. I'm ignorant. I'm...but I can't be Your prophet.' And the Lord said unto me, 'Say not, 'I am a child,' for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Don't be afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee,' saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord unto me, 'Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth.'"

Now, God is in the business of choosing His messengers, isn't He? The Spirit of the Lord moves upon people and leads them in the way that God wants 'em to go. You know, this is one of the things we're gonna talk about tonight. If you feel God leading you strongly, be obedient. God has placed His hand

upon you as a messenger for a specific mission. Remember in Luke 1, that old priest, Zechariah, and his fairly old wife, Elizabeth? And God said, through an angel, "I wanna announce something. You're gonna have a son, and he shall be great...and he shall turn many of the hearts of his people to the Lord their God, and he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." He went on and on and on, "His name shall be called that wonderful name, you know, John." He went down all through these things. Beloved of God, see. He went all down through this thing. Is it...and old Zechariah says, "You...have You looked at me lately, God? I am old...very old." And the Lord says, "Nevertheless, so shall it be. You know, you're gonna have a son." And it says in there he's gonna be a prophet. He just lays it all out, and the guy isn't even conceived yet.

God is in the business of choosing. I like John 15:16, where Jesus says this. He says to His disciples, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go forth and bring fruit...bring forth fruit. You didn't choose Me. I chose you. You weren't wandering around the seashore one day and saying, 'Oh, Messiah, Messiah.' I came down, and I said, 'Hey, follow Me, fishers of men.' I chose you."

You see, God is in the business, not only of choosing the receivers, but He's also in the business of choosing the messengers. I'll tell you, there's no greater thrill in the world than to know you're His chosen messenger. It's a mystery, but it's a joy. Well, old Peter's His chosen messenger, and all the rough edges on Peter, He's been working on him long enough, He's sure not gonna give up now, and He's got a job for Peter to do. Well, Peter went up to pray, and verse 10 says, "And he became hungry." Now, Cornelius was fasting at this time, verse 30 says, when he was spoken to by...by his vision. But maybe Peter was doing the same thing. Anyway, he went up there, and he was hungry, and "He would have eaten; but while they made ready," he was gonna go down and eat. They were getting, you know, lunch ready. He was gonna go down and eat it, but he...but he "fell into a trance." The Greek word is ecstasy. He has...his senses were suspended is what it means. He just...he was in sense... sensual suspension. That is, he could not really comprehend sensually what was going on; and, at that point, God invaded his consciousness with a vision. And it's interesting how that it's...it's a vision of involving eating, so God accompanied it to his hunger.

Verse 11, here it comes, this is interesting. "And in his vision, he saw heaven opened. He looks up and there's heaven. He sees it open, and a vessel descending unto him as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth." Here comes a big sheet. Now that isn't a sheet literally, but it's as it had been a sheet, which means it was some kind of a large tarp-like thing. Four corners, all probably pulled together and tied with a rope, and the rope extending into heaven. This thing is lowered down, this big tarp with four corners tied.

Now, that's interesting. Verse 12 is even more interesting. "In which were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air." Now, it's full of all conglomeration of animals, this big tarp that he sees in his vision. Now, the animals in this thing, and

here's the key point that you must get, the animals in it were clean and unclean. You see, back in Leviticus chapter 11, God laid down some absolutes in terms of the diet of Israel. Don't turn to it. Let me just pinpoint a couple of statements out of it. In Leviticus 11, you need to read that chapter sometime just to see what this was. He says, in verse 2, "These are the beasts which you shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof and is cloven-footed and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that you shall eat. Nevertheless, these shall you not eat of them that chew the cud or of them that divide the hoof, the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof. He is unclean unto you; and you can't eat the rock badger, and you can't eat the hare...and that's not the...the rabbit as we know it. That's a...a Hebrew word, arnab, which is translated hare, but shouldn't be...and then they...you shouldn't eat pigs," and so forth, so forth, "and you can't eat snakes, and if you eat anything out of the sea that doesn't have scales or fins, that's an abomination." He goes all the way down. Certain birds you can eat and can't eat, and so forth and so on.

And all of these dietary laws were given to Israel, and so, consequently, in the mind of a Jew, there was a division between clean animals and unclean animals; and no self-respecting kosher Jew would ever eat anything but clean animals; and Peter was this. He never touched anything but the clean, because that was the tradition. And you say, "Well, why did God make this distinction? Why did God make clean and unclean animals?" Well, No. 1, it is true, I think, that there are some animals who are perhaps more liable to carry epidemic-type diseases; and because of the fact that the preparation of food in those days wasn't anything to what it became, God was kind of purifying Israel from at least the dominant threat of epidemic. Because, you see, they lived in a...in a community that was always close together. They moved in the wilderness in like a little garrison of people all jammed together. If an epidemic ever broke out, it could wipe 'em all out, and so God preserved their existence this way, although I think that's only a minor point, because He coulda kept the diseases from them by His sovereign power.

The major point is this. God had them eating certain animals and not certain other animals for this primary reason. To distinguish them from other Gentile peoples. Now, in those days, social intercourse occurred at banquets. They didn't have any of the entertainment we have today. What was the big deal was feasts. You read about 'em all the time in the Bible. Feasts, they were forever and ever having feasts, and you always see, you know, lying around on couches and then the Roman feasts where they would throw up and then go back and eat more, those horrible things. But they...they're feasting was how they had common relationships, so God just did this. God gave the Jews such distinct dietary laws that they couldn't get together socially with Gentiles. Do you see? That was the point, because, as they went into the land of Canaan, it was so...so easy for them to get intermingled. Look what happened to 'em anyway. But God drew lines so that they would not be able, were they obedient to His standards, to be able to have a social kind of relationship with Gentiles, and that's the point.

These were idolatrous neighbors. You say, "Did you just make that up, MacArthur?" No, that's what the Bible says, Leviticus chapter 20 verse 25. You knew I'd have a verse for that. Says this, "You shall put the difference between clean beasts and unclean, between unclean fowls and clean. You shall not make your souls abominable by beast or fowl, by any manner of living thing that creeps on the ground which I have separated from you as unclean." Why? "And be holy unto Me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from other people that you should be Mine." God says, "I don't want you getting involved with Gentiles. I don't want you acting like they act and doing what they do," and, of course, those banquets turned into orgies incessantly, and so he just drew these lines, and so Peter, all his life had been strictly kosher. And, you know, this thing, seeing this whole bag full of all these mixed up animals was a terrible thing for him to have to look at.

And verse 13 is interesting. "And there came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'" Wow, that is hard to swallow. Hum...Sorry about that...Verse...verse 14, it says this. "But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord.'" You remember when the Lord was on earth, Peter made a career out of rebuking Him, and now he's no different. He says, "Not so, Lord...he says...now I have never done that. I have never eaten anything unclean." He was zealous for the standards that God had set up. He had never touched anything common. The word common means defiled. "I have never eaten any of that stuff. I cannot do it." Well, the Lord knows you learn line upon line, precept upon precept, so "The voice spoke unto him a second time, 'What God hath cleansed, call thou not unclean or defiled or common.'" God has...and his mind was like, "God has cleansed all those animals."

Well, that's a hard message to get, so verse 16 says that He told him three times..."and then the vessel was received up into heaven." Now you say, "What's this specific meaning of the vision?" Lemme give you two things: the specific meaning and the general meaning. Specifically, He's saying this. Now hang on. He is abolishing, I believe, the Old Testament Jewish dietary laws. Why? They were designed to separate the Jew from the Gentile. What is the body of Christ designed to do? Unite them. Therefore, this one social line barrier had to be removed for them to come together. You see, they had to learn to be able to socialize around the tables together, because they were now one. And, you know, in the early years of the church, you know, this was the problem that kept popping up. The Jews and the Gentiles who were both in the church wouldn't eat together, and this is what Paul dealt with in Romans 14. That's the whole reason Roman 14 is written, because the...you know what would happen? The Gentiles were abusing their privileges. They'd have Jewish converts over and serve ham. See? And Paul says, "Now, you don't need to do that. Sure, you're free, and there's nothing unclean, but you don't need to do that, because that's purposely offending that Jew who doesn't yet understand his liberties."

But he also says to the Jew, "Don't you try to make the Gentile conform to dietary laws that God has set aside." See, God wanted to remove the barrier that had been built to keep from being impure. He wanted to take it down so they could be one in Christ, and so I believe that statement there is the

statement that abolishes the Old Testament dietary laws. Now that doesn't mean you're supposed to eat everything. I...that's obvious. You know, there's supposed to be a sensibility in terms of what we eat, but, nevertheless, there are no ceremonial dietary laws to keep people apart, because He wants us together; and this was the beauty of what the early church finally found. That what they called the agapay or the love feast, they came together to eat. Beautiful.

Now, just to show you that this is exactly what our Lord meant, Mark chapter 7 verse 14 records the words of Jesus. He called the people together and said, 'Hearken unto Me, every one of you, and understand. There is nothing from outside of a man that entering into him can defile him.' Well, that's a shocking statement to those Jews, 'cause they thought if you ever put pork in your mouth, that was it. But He says, "That's not it anymore. The things which come out of you, they are the ones that defile you." What's He saying? He's saying, "I'm through with ceremonial things. I'm talking about spiritual things." This is a new age and down in verse 19, He says, "Because it entereth...no verse 18...Are you so without understanding? Do you not perceive that whatever thing from outside enters into the man, it can't defile him. Why? It enters into his...not his heart. Doesn't go into his heart. It goes into his stomach, goes out into the draft," and the literal Greek here is making all meats clean. You eat something, goes through the bodily processes, and is eliminated.

But He says, "The thing I'm concerned about is what's on the inside spiritually." Verse 21, "Evil thoughts, murder, fornication, adultery, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, evil eye, blasphemy, pride, all these evil things come from within and defile the man." Jesus is simply saying, "I'm not concerned anymore about what you're putting in your mouth. I'm concerned about what's coming out of it." It's a whole new thing.

And then Timothy is very, very clear on this; and just to finalize this point, lemme read you this. "There will be false teachers...in 1 Timothy 4...who will come and they will teach you to abstain from foods which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving." Listen to this. Verse 4, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving." You see, even then, Paul knew that there were Judaizers who were trying to push off dietary laws on Gentiles, and he's simply saying, "They're false teachers. There are no dietary laws anymore. Get together." And, again, I say that's the message of Romans 14. That's the specific significance.

The general significance, look back there at the vision again, is this. That those clean and unclean animals represent Jew and Gentile. The Jew is represented by the clean animal. The Gentile by the unclean. And what's He saying? He's saying, "Jew and Gentile are gonna be mixed in the church." Now watch, here's the vision. The tarp or the sheet is the church. The church was born in heaven, right? The mind of God. The church came down to earth. It includes Jew and Gentile, and the significant part of the vision is that it says, "And the sheet, when it was finished, was received up into heaven." How is the church gonna be leaving this world? By the Rapture. And if the church mixed of common and uncommon, Jew and Gentile, is acceptable to God, acceptable enough to enter back

into heaven, then it oughta be acceptable to us to allow Gentiles to come in. Now, you see, Peter has then learned no more barrier on dietary stuff, and, in a general sense, God accepts both in His church, which He will receive to Himself. And if God can receive the mixture, you oughta be able to, as well. So you see how his heart is being prepared for his work?

Now, having done all that preparation, verse 17 says that Peter acts. "Now while Peter was perplexed what this vision which had seen should mean, behold, the men who were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate, called and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, was lodged there." Before he has a chance to act, just look at this. You sit down sometime like I did and just ran through my mind the mathematical probability that those guys would knock on that door just after he got the vision but before he woke up. Now, you figure the split second in there in the interval when the door was banged on and some guy said, "Is there a guy here named Simon Peter?" God not only prepares the receiver and prepares the messenger, but He ordains the divine timing for just the moment, and old Peter had his vision, the thoughts were there. Before he could wake up, bang on the door, there the guys were.

I always think of what Kenny Port told me one time. He said that he was walking across the street in LA, and he saw a policeman, and he said...something said to him, "I oughta witness to the policeman," but the signal was green. He had to hurry. The guy was in the traffic pattern and all this. He thought to himself, "No, that must be me thinking that. God would never dream up something like that. I couldn't get my mouth open. I have to hurry." Then he thought to himself, "No, I would never think of that myself. That must be God." And he walked out in the street, and he just said to the guy something to the effect of, "Do you know Jesus Christ is your Savior?" and handed him a tract, and the guy looked down on him, big policeman, and said, "How did you know I had been thinking about that?" See, that's divine timing, and that happens very often. That's happened in my life many, many times, where you're all prepared. The receiver's all prepared, and in God's perfect timing, you come together. That's how God operates. It's exciting to be a part of His plan, isn't it, and to know you're not running around like a chicken with his head cut off at random. You're moving along a planned path that God has that intersects with prepared receivers all through your life, if you're really available to Him. Perfect timing.

Well, verse 19, "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, 'Behold, three men are knocking. You better get down there. Arise therefore, and get thee down and go with them...here comes the key, next two words, what are they?...doubting nothing." He wanted an act of faith out of Peter, just like He did out of Cornelius. You know, it could've been Cornelius at the door, but God wanted to exercise Peter's faith a little bit, so He says, "Peter, pack up and go, for I have sent them."...God has planned this whole thing. Now, one of the most fantastic meetings that ever took place in history takes place. Have to come back next time to find out about it...

I wanna close by just reading this to you. The Apostle Paul operated on this principle. It says in Acts 18:9, don't look it up, just listen, Acts 18:9 to 11, "Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.'" God says, "You're My prepared messenger." Then He says this to him, "For I have many people in this city. I've got many prepared receivers." In the next verse, "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them." Here came the prepared messenger, the prepared receiver. God said, "Now is the time." God is in the business of doing this. I pray we're available for the intersecting of those divine times. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we have again been instructed from Your Word both in terms of the history and the practicality of that which You have left us. We thank You for the most wonderful availability of Peter, for the tremendous theology we have learned today about how You prepare and how You choose and how You respond to the seeking heart; and we know that, even as Peter prayed, he must have been praying, "God, use me," and You used him. And then, God, You moved in divine timing at the right moment of intercourse for two lives, to bring about redemption and open the church to the Gentiles. God, thank You for being a great God who can handle all things. Oh, Father, may we put our lives in Your greatness. May we put our plans in Your hands, that we may be moving on that path that You have ordained. We pray in the name of our blessed Christ. Amen.

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