

The previous passages were about God working miracles through Peter to heal a paralytic named Aeneas and raising from death a woman named Dorcas. In both cases, the towns in which they lived saw many turn to the Lord because of these miracles. Peter was moving into increasingly Gentile populations but the churches in these towns consisted of Jews and a few Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. Up to this point there was no effort to reach out to the Gentiles, though Jesus had commanded the disciples to go to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Philip's witness to the Ethiopian eunuch was as close as they had come to reaching out to a Gentile, but he was almost a Jewish convert, as he attended a Jewish feast and purchased the book of Isaiah. Our passage today is a milestone in church history for the revelation that Peter has clearly put the church in new territory with a realization of what Jesus and the prophets meant when they said the Messiah would be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6; John 8:12).

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. Acts 10:1-2 Caesarea Maritima was an amazing port city built by Herod the Great. It was one of the earliest uses of massive amounts of concrete underwater to form a manmade harbor. Pulling into the harbor you were greeted by an enormous statue of Emperor Augustus with a temple behind it to worship him. Fresh water swimming pools jutted out into the ocean in front of Herod's palace. Underneath were dungeons, which was probably where Paul was later held as a prisoner. To the south was an amphitheater that could seat 4,000 that can be seen to this day. To the north was a hippodrome where races were held for entertainment. The public restrooms for that stadium are still intact. The palace of Caesarea was Pilate's headquarters during the time of Jesus' ministry.

A centurion was a battle-hardened soldier who had command of eighty to one hundred soldiers. The position was held by men who had proven themselves in battle and could command the allegiance of those soldiers. If they survived twenty years to retirement, they were given land as a pension. Apparently, Cornelius had chosen land in Israel because of his respect for the God of Israel. That would mean he had forsaken the Roman gods and chosen to believe there was one God who is creator of all things and who had revealed His nature to the patriarchs and prophets of the Jewish people. The result of this belief was that he feared the one true God. In other words, he felt accountable to the Hebrew God to do what was right according to the laws of God. He taught his household to do the same. That would include immediate family and servants. He helped those in need by giving alms to the poor and needy in the Jewish belief that God blesses those who do so (James 2:14; 1:27). This was not at all a Roman concept, nor was continual prayer. Romans said their short prayers, offered incense, and then went about their business. This man continually sought God in prayer (Ruth 1:16). That is a lot more than we can say for many Christians.

Commented [PW1]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW3]: John 8:12 (ESV)

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Commented [PW4]: James 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

Commented [PW5]: James 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Commented [PW6]: Ruth 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God."⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." Acts 10:3-6 We are going to see several examples of how God speaks to people in this passage. An angel of God clearly appeared to Cornelius in a vision during the Jewish hour of prayer, three in the afternoon, the time of the afternoon sacrifice. It was so clear a vision that Cornelius was in terror. Remember, this man has faced warriors in battle. It takes a lot to frighten him, but he is terrified at the vision. Most accounts of angels appearing to men have a similar description (Daniel 8:17). They are not sweet beauties with flowing hair and a smile, nor are they chubby babies with little wings. They are huge warriors of another dimension. Most encounters with humans tell of the humans falling on their faces.

The messenger addressed him by name, just as God did with Samuel and Jesus did with Saul in the previous chapter. Saul had asked, "Who are you Lord?" Cornelius asked, "What is it Lord?" The messenger from God told him that his alms and prayers ascended as a memorial before God (Leviticus 2:2). Think what that means. A battle-hardened soldier who had worshiped other gods had been led to seek the one true God. We don't know how that happened. It will be interesting to hear his story in heaven. The Holy Spirit broke through and convicted him of sin and convinced him of the truth of the Scriptures. He is an example of Moses words to the Jews coming to pass for Gentiles. *²⁹ But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.* Deuteronomy 4:29 It has always been God's plan to reach the world. He chose the Jews to receive the revelations, and they were to bless the world with them (Genesis 22:18). Salvation has always been available to those who seek God and search for Him with all their heart and with all their soul (Joshua 6:25).

The angel was very specific. He gave Cornelius the town, the vicinity, the name of the home owner, and Simon Peter's name. Beware of "prophecies" that are generalizations. God can speak in that manner, but He knows the details. The details can help to confirm that it is God and not our own random thoughts.

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. Acts 10:7-8 Cornelius conveyed all that he heard from the angel to two servants and a bodyguard and sent them off. It was already three in the afternoon so they must have camped along the way or waited until early the next morning to leave by horseback as it was a thirty-mile journey.

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. Acts 10:9 The sixth hour is noon. Jewish homes were often built with a roof that served as a place to dry vegetables and as a sleeping area in the summer. It was a space in which Peter could get alone with the Lord. Jesus said when we pray we should enter our closet and pray in secret, not like

Commented [PW7]: Daniel 8:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

Commented [PW8]: Leviticus 2:2 (ESV)

² and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Commented [PW9]: Genesis 22:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Commented [PW10]: Joshua 6:25 (ESV)

²⁵ But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

the Pharisees who make a big show of their prayers. Peter had learned from Jesus' example that private prayer is a daily necessity (Matthew 6:6-7; 23:14; Mark 1:35).

¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. Acts 10:10-11 Cornelius vision came to him during prayer, and Peter's trance came to him in prayer. If you want to hear from God, your heart must be devoted to prayer (Colossians 4:2). A natural condition of hunger prompted the theme of a trance. A trance is not as clear as a vision, though later it was referred to as a vision (verse 17). A trance implies more of a mental state, but one in which one can see and hear things. The Greek for a great sheet is also the word for a sail. It came from above, indicating it is from God.

¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Acts 10:12-14 Peter ate only kosher food. The consumption of those unclean animals was forbidden in the laws of Moses. Peter was still an observant Jew, but one who believed Jesus is the Messiah. The thought of eating these animals was abhorrent to Jews.

¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Acts 10:15-16 He heard the voice again, and this time it told him that he shouldn't call something unclean if God had cleansed it (Mark 7:20-23). The whole episode was repeated three times. Three times is the number of wholeness or completion. We have the trinity, three days in the grave, three disciples in the inner circle, three cries of "Holy!" from the seraphim, etc. It has been said that when God repeats something two times it is very important. When it is repeated three times it is most important (1 Samuel 3:8-10).

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." Acts 10:17-20 God has no problem arranging the timing of circumstances. We call them coincidences which simply means two events coincided but does not tell you why they coincided. God is sovereign. He coordinates things to help us understand His will. Peter was trying to discern what God was trying to say to him when the three men called from the gate and asked for him. Meanwhile the Spirit spoke to him and told him of the three men and to not hesitate to go with them. Peter has heard from God again, this time through circumstances and the inner voice of the Spirit. Sometimes what God is trying to show us comes in stages, especially when it takes us out of our comfort zone. How gracious of God to be so gentle with us.

Commented [PW11]: Matthew 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Commented [PW12]: Matthew 23:14 (KJV)

¹⁴ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Commented [PW13]: Mark 1:35 (ESV)

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Commented [PW14]: Colossians 4:2 (ESV)

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Commented [PW15]: Mark 7:20-23 (ESV)

²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Commented [PW16]: 1 Samuel 3:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy.

⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" Acts 10:21 Peter would have recognized these men as Gentiles and been curious as to what God was doing. God is about to further reveal a truth to Peter through these circumstances arranged by God.

22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." Acts 10:22 Now that is a Holy Spirit opportunity if there ever was one. How I would love to have people say they've been seeking God and want to hear what I have to say! At that word, Peter must have known he was a part of something wonderful that was about to transpire.

23 So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. Acts 10:23 He already is starting to get the point, for he invited the Gentiles into the house as guests. That wasn't something a devout Jew would do. The guests had completed a long journey and needed to rest up for the return. Peter also wanted to gather some of the disciples from Joppa to witness what is about to happen. He knows it's big, and I think he may have already been figuring out God's message. Maybe he heard from Philip about the Ethiopian eunuch. He certainly remembered Jesus with the Samaritans and the outreach to the Gentiles at the feeding of the 4000 (John 4:39-41; Matthew 15:31).

24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. Acts 10:24 The following day means they must have spent the night somewhere, possibly Apollonia, a city about halfway between the two cities. Cornelius is as expectant as Peter. A generous man of prayer like Cornelius would influence many lives. He got them all together to hear the man the angel told him to call. There was a good-sized crowd of Gentiles in Cornelius home waiting to see the outcome of this mystery.

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." Acts 10:25, 26 Cornelius thought Peter must be a heavenly messenger. He is in one sense, but he is also a man. We worship God alone (Revelation 19:10). All glory to God alone. If God uses us as His instrument, it is because God is gracious and merciful. It is no credit to us. Peter had the profound humiliation of denying Jesus at His trial (Luke 22:60, 61). Peter knows that he has feet of clay. The only difference between these two men is that one has been blessed to spend three years with Jesus.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." Acts 10:27, 28 Caesarea was a town of Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles knew the Jewish customs as they often conflicted with their own. They knew how stubbornly obedient and uncompromising the Jews were. Tradition, not the law, taught the Jews not to enter a Gentile home.⁴ Sometimes Gentiles buried infants under

Commented [PW17]: John 4:39-41 (ESV)

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.

⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.

Commented [PW18]: Matthew 15:31 (ESV)

³¹ so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

I am of the opinion that this was a mostly Gentile crowd because of the location and the wording, "glorified the God of Israel."

Commented [PW19]: Revelation 19:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Commented [PW20]: Luke 22:60-61 (ESV)

⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."

Commented [PW21]: The word "unlawful" in Greek "athemitos" does not mean unlawful according to Jewish law, but rather something that is considered taboo, contrary to cultural norms. The Mishna declares, "The dwelling places of Gentiles [literally, "Canaanites," meaning Gentiles in the Land of Israel] are ritually unclean. Ohalot 18:7

the floors and Jews would consider themselves defiled if they walked on a grave. Perhaps just as importantly, they looked down on Gentiles as being unclean sinners and did not want to be defiled by being in their presence. For the most part, Gentiles were idol worshipers and Jews were to have nothing to do with idol worshipers. But God had been working in the hearts of these Gentiles.

Peter then declared the revelation that had come to him. "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean." The vision of the sail full of unclean animals was becoming clear. If God calls something clean, then it is clean. When did God call Gentiles clean? He declared that He made mankind in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). If a person is made in the image of God, there is incalculable value in each person. They may be fallen and on the wrong path, selfish, and unconcerned about God, but the value is still there. The possibility for the restoration of God's image is there for the worst of sinners. Peter had already met with Saul and heard his story of transformation. Saul wrote that he was the worst of sinners but God had mercy on him (1 Timothy 1:15, 16). What Peter was realizing is that God so loved the world, not just the Jews. Jesus died for Gentiles too (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15)! Jesus died to save every skin color, every nationality, every culture, anyone who will turn from their sin and accept the salvation He freely offers to us. Peter must have been excited to see what was next. ²⁹ *So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.* Acts 10:29 He is about to proclaim the gospel and see results that will affect the whole direction of the church.

There are those who attack Christianity as an exclusive religion. Generally they consider themselves pluralists. They would claim all roads lead to God and you can't say your way is the only way. In other words, pluralism is the only way. ☺ They would scold us, "You can't be so exclusive; you must be inclusive. We exclude your faith because it is too exclusive." All religions including pluralism have exclusive claims. What they are really objecting to is that fact that we recognize we are all sinners in need of a Savior and that we can't save ourselves. "Exclusivity" is just a smoke screen, as a little honest thought would reveal that their claims are excluding all who have a specific faith, which includes most or the world. That's very exclusive! Next week we will see the exciting conclusion of this double vision and a new direction for the church that was going to change the entire world.

Questions

- 1 How do we know God's heart was always to save the world?
- 2 Describe Cornelius.
- 3 What does God's dealing with Cornelius show us?
- 4 Why was the scene repeated three times?
- 5 Was the trance about food laws?
- 6 In what ways did Peter hear from God?
- 7 Why should Peter not be surprised that Jesus wants to save Gentiles?
- 8 For whom did Jesus die?
- 9 What did Peter realize?
- 10 Is the gospel exclusive?

Commented [PW22]: Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Commented [PW23]: 1 Timothy 1:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Commented [PW24]: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.