

Ministry of Grace Church

The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 10

Preface:

In the last couple of chapters in the book of Acts we learned about the persecution that resulted from the arrest of Stephen. His speech before the Sanhedrin had so enraged them that they ignored the fact that the Jews were prohibited from any criminal executions and they took him out and stoned him.

As they went out, they laid their coats at the feet of Saul of Tarsus, a young Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. He had been in agreement with the decision of the Sanhedrin. So, as a result, he had taken it upon himself to persecute the members of the church and did whatever he could to find these new Christians so they could be put in prison.

Last week we learned about Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus where he had gone to arrest Christians. Instead, God arrested him and he became the persecuted one instead of the persecutor. He spent some time in Arabia, then returned to Damascus where the Hellenist Jews eventually decided to kill Saul to get rid of him. After fleeing Damascus, Saul eventually met with the apostles in Jerusalem after Barnabas convinced them that Saul was truly a Christian. However, because Saul's witness of Jesus Christ was so powerful, he was once again pursued and he fled to his home town of Tarsus.

Meanwhile, the Apostle Peter, realizing that the Gospel had been delivered to the Samaritans and that they had received the Holy Spirit, began travelling around Judea and Samaria. He openly proclaimed the message of salvation, healing people as he went. He healed a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bed ridden for eight years. He was also called to Joppa where he raised a woman named Tabitha from the dead. Then he remained at Joppa for a while.

Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10:1-8

¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ²a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴And 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. ⁵And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Notes:

Having told us about Peter's miracles in Lydda and Joppa, Dr. Luke now tells us about a Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea which is about 30 miles north of Joppa. A Roman

Centurion was in charge of 80 Roman soldiers (referred to as a century). Although he was a Roman (a Gentile), he had been at least somewhat instructed in the religion of the Jews and he worshipped the God of the Jews, giving alms to the poor and praying continually. The English word “devout” which is used to describe Cornelius is the Greek word *eusebēs*, meaning “well respected.” You could say that he was a “religious man,” but – he wasn’t saved. So, what is a “religious man?”

The dictionary says that a religion is:

belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this belief, such as praying or worshipping in a building such as a church or temple.

So, I guess you could say that a religious person is someone who performs all of the rituals, rites, and practices prescribed by a particular religion. For a Christian, that would be someone who goes to church regularly, reads his or her Bible daily, prays continually, volunteers his or her time to work at the church, and donates 10% of his or her income to the church. But, how is that any different than a Pharisee? Remember that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their outward practice of religion, calling them whitewashed sepulchers.

Or, is a religious person someone who actually lives out the two greatest commands? Here’s what Jesus said:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40)

That’s the kind of religious person Cornelius was. Luke tells us that Cornelius had a vision of an angel of God who told him to send to the town of Joppa for Peter. Was this “The Angel of The Lord?”

A little later in the text, in Peter’s vision, the Holy Spirit says, “**go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them**” So, was this angel who appeared to Cornelius actually the Holy Spirit? Or, was this simply an ordinary angel (a messenger) sent by God, the Holy Spirit?

This angel told Cornelius to go find Peter. The angel didn’t tell Cornelius *why* he should invite Peter to his home, but the Centurion immediately called a couple of his servants and a Roman soldier to bring Peter to him. Notice that this was not just any soldier. This was “a devout soldier,” according to verse seven.

Peter's Vision

Acts 10:9-20

⁹The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹²In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. ¹⁷Now 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 ¹⁸and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

Notes:

Isn't this just the way our God works? As the group sent from Caesarea was approaching the house where Peter was staying, Peter had his own vision. He had gone up on the housetop to pray. It was around noon (the 6th hour) and Peter was very hungry. Apparently, someone was already preparing some food for Peter, but before it arrived, he was so focused on his prayers that he fell into a trance.

Peter had a vision of a great sheet being lowered down to the earth. It was filled with all kinds of animals. Some of them were clean according to the Law, but some of them were unclean. As Peter observed the sheet being lowered, he heard a voice speaking to him. Peter recognized it as the voice of God and he was instructed to eat from the animals in the sheet.

Think about this. Peter was deep in prayer with God and he was given very specific instructions as to what to do. And – what was his answer? “No, Lord!” It seems that Peter had a bad habit of saying “no” to God. Here are a couple of other examples:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matthew 16:21-23)

And, in the Gospel according to John, as Jesus humbled Himself to wash the disciples' feet:

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” (John 13:5-8)

Fortunately for Peter (and for us), our God is gracious and merciful. Regarding the animals in the sheet, He simply responded to Peter, “**What God has made clean, do not call common.**” This happened three times and the sheet was taken back up into heaven. Peter was left perplexed, and while he thought about the vision he had seen, the men sent from Cornelius arrived at the front gate, and the Holy Spirit said to him,

“Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

Before we go on. Let me point out the obvious. Peter was having a conversation with God. But – it was not with God the Father. It was with God, the Holy Spirit.

Was this vision from God really about food, or was it about declaring some things clean and other things unclean? Remember what we learned from Jesus in Matthew's gospel?

Judge not, that you be not judged. (Matthew 7:1)

God was trying to teach Peter to look at people with a godly perspective, not a human perspective. Later, we will see that as Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius and began speaking to the people there, he realized that the vision was not about food, but about people. So, while he was thinking about this, the Holy Spirit informed him that three men had just arrived, looking for him. God, the Holy Spirit, told him to go down and meet the men. He also told him that he should go with the men without hesitation. In other words, these men, even though they were Gentiles, were not unclean.

Peter's Vision

Acts 10:21-33

²¹And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” ²²And 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.” ²³So 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. ²⁴And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸And 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. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.” ³⁰And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Notes:

With God’s vision fresh in his mind, Peter went down to talk to the three men. They told him about Cornelius and the angelic vision that he had had. So, Peter invited the men in to spend the night and the next day they all headed for Caesarea along with several members of the church in Joppa. It was a journey of about a day and a half. When they arrived at the home of Cornelius, Peter did not hesitate to go inside, a thing he would not have done even two days earlier.

As soon as Cornelius met Peter he fell at his feet and worshipped him. Peter gently informed Cornelius that he was no one special, certainly no one who deserved to be worshipped. Such activity was reserved for God alone. As Peter entered the house, he found all of Cornelius’ friends and family members who had been invited to hear the message from Peter.

Peter started out by explaining to these people that Jews are not allowed to visit or associate with Gentiles. However, he said that God had told him that nobody was to be considered unclean, so he had come as requested. Cornelius then explained about the vision he had and that he had been instructed to invite Peter to come here. Then Cornelius said,

we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

Gentiles Hear the Good News

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Notes:

Peter responded by restating that he now believes that God shows no partiality. He then proceeded to explain the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He testified that throughout Judea Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Then, the leaders of the Jews put Him to death, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and He appeared to His disciples. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach and testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. All the Jewish prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Notes:

While Peter was proclaiming the Gospel Message to Cornelius along with his family and friends, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. As a result, these Gentiles were speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God. They were then baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and Peter remained with them for a while. This was most likely so that Peter could teach them the basics of the Christian life.

So What?

As we learned earlier, Cornelius was a well-respected person, who feared God, gave generously to the poor, and prayed continually. The word translated “prayed” in verse 2 indicates someone who begs God. You might say that he was an “earnest” prayer. Our translation here (ESV) also says that he was a “devout” man, a person devoted to God.

The word “devoted” is one of those that has changed through the years. We think that being devoted to someone means that we feel strongly for them and would be supportive and protective of them in any and all situations. In the Bible, it has a distinctly different meaning. It means to be completely given over to someone, relinquishing all personal rights.

Consider the sin of Achan in Joshua chapter 6. Before the Israelites defeated the city of Jericho, these were God’s instructions:

And the city shall be devoted to Jehovah, it and all in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And you surely shall keep clear of the cursed thing, lest you make yourselves cursed when you take of the cursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are devoted to Jehovah. They shall come into the treasury of Jehovah.
(Joshua 6:17-19)

But Achan saw a beautiful robe, a wedge of gold, and some silver. He wanted them, and he took them. But, because they were devoted to God, Achan was judged by God and Achan forfeit his life.

Devotion to someone else does not mean that we think they are more important than we are, it means that we think they are “all important.” So, when we say that Cornelius was devoted to God, it means not just that God’s will was more important than Cornelius’ will, it means that God’s will was everything.

Jesus Christ paid the price for your sins and mine. He purchased us with His blood. He is not just our Savior; He is also our Lord. He owns us and we are to be His devoted followers.

Our God wants devoted followers, not just followers. The Pharisees were religious men who were followers of Jahweh. That was not good enough for God.

Now What?

Are we religious followers of God? Or are we devoted to Him as our Lord and master.

Let’s pray.

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