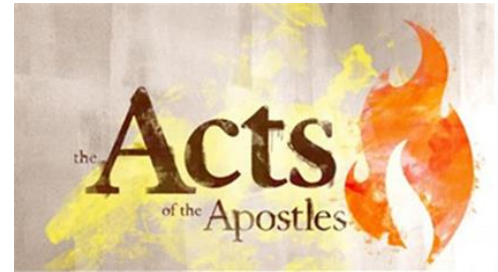


ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – Part 12

Swinging the Door Open (Thanks to Two Dreams)

Acts 10

Acts Chapter 10 is in one way a tale of two dreams and in another, a vivid and indisputable demonstration of God's love for all people. Well, there's also that sticky issue of Peter's dream/vision telling him that heretofore forbidden food is O.K. to eat... or is it? We will leave the heavy lifting on that topic for another day, although we will assume it was done to make sure Peter knew it was time for the inclusion of Gentiles. Honestly, it would've been nice if pork had been freed that day but...



Vision One

An angel visited Cornelius at 3:00 to instruct him to request a visit from Peter. We can see from Luke's narrative that Cornelius was a very spiritual Gentile who honored the Hebrew practice of caring for the poor. He was a follower of the Hebrew God and was one Messiah/Savior short of being complete:

Cornelius Has a Vision

¹Now in Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He was a devout man who feared God, as did everyone in his home. He gave many gifts to the poor among the people and always prayed to God.

³One day, about three in the afternoon, he had a vision and clearly saw an angel of God coming to him and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

⁴He stared at the angel in terror and asked, "What is it, Lord?"

The angel answered him, “Your prayers and your gifts to the poor have arisen as a reminder to God. ⁵ Send men now to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. ⁶ He is a guest of Simon, a leatherworker, whose house is by the sea.”

⁷ When the angel who had spoken to him had gone, Cornelius summoned two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of those who served him regularly. ⁸ He explained everything to them and sent them to Joppa.

Vision Two

The following day Peter went to a roof top to pray at noon (both 3:00 and noon were times to pray and sacrifice in Judaism). Like most Baptists he was hungry, so while the covered-dish meal was being prepared he fell asleep, or into a trance, or into a dream state (take your pick) and he witnessed some unusual things:

Peter Has a Vision

⁹ Around noon the next day, while they were on their way and coming close to the town, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became very hungry and wanted to eat, and while the food was being prepared, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven open and something like a large linen sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the ground. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds of the air.

¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter! Kill something and eat it.”

¹⁴ But Peter said, “Absolutely not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean!”

¹⁵ Again the voice came to him a second time, “You must stop calling unclean what God has made clean.” ¹⁶ This happened three times. Then the sheet was quickly taken back into heaven.

Most people eat, fall asleep, dream strange things if dill pickles and ice cream was their last meal, but most likely not like Peter’s snooze experience.

Peter saw a sheet filled with birds and animals that were off-limits for Jews following the Mosaic Law. He was told to eat. He countered with his devotion to the law. He was told to eat two additional times before he woke up. Doors were opening and the world was changing. “Nothing is unclean with God if God declares it to be clean” is code for, “no one is outside my love and offer of reconciliation.” Jews, Samaritans, Italians who worshipped the Empire, Gentiles like Cornelius and even Ethiopian eunuchs are all prized by God.

The Meeting

¹⁷While Peter was still at a loss to know what the vision he had seen could mean, the men sent by Cornelius asked for Simon’s house and went to the gate. ¹⁸They called out and asked if Simon who was called Peter was staying there. ¹⁹Peter was still thinking about the vision when the Spirit told him, “Look! Three men are looking for you. ²⁰Get up, go downstairs, and don’t hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

²¹So Peter went to the men and said, “I’m the man you’re looking for. Why are you here?”

²²The men replied, “Cornelius, a centurion and an upright and God-fearing man who is respected by the whole Jewish nation, was instructed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his home to hear what you have to say.”

²³So Peter welcomed them as his guests. The next day, he got up and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along with him.

Peter Speaks with Cornelius

²⁴The next day, they arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called his relatives and close friends together. ²⁵When Peter was about to enter, Cornelius met him, bowed down at his feet, and began to worship him. ²⁶But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up! I, too, am only a man.”

²⁷As Peter talked with him, he went in and found that many people had gathered. ²⁸He told them, “You understand how wrong it is for a Jew to associate or visit with unbelievers. But God has shown me that I should

stop calling anyone common or unclean,²⁹ and that is why I didn't hesitate when I was sent for. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, three o'clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my home. All at once a man in radiant clothes stood in front of me³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard. God has remembered your gifts to the poor,³² so send messengers to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, to come to you. He is a guest in the home of Simon, a leatherworker, by the sea.'³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. All of us are here now in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has ordered you to say."

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "Now I understand that God shows no partiality.³⁵ Indeed, whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him in any nation.³⁶ He has sent his word to the descendants of Israel and brought them the good news of peace through Jesus the Messiah. This man is the Lord of everyone.³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached.³⁸ God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, he went around doing good and healing everyone who was oppressed by the Devil.³⁹ We are witnesses of everything Jesus^[a] did in the land of the Jews, including Jerusalem.

"They hung him on a tree and killed him,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear—⁴¹ not to all the people, but to us who were chosen by God to be witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He also ordered us to preach to the people and to testify solemnly that this is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify to this: everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

⁴⁴ While Peter was still making this statement, the Holy Spirit fell on all the people who were listening to his message.⁴⁵ Then the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles, too,⁴⁶ because they heard them speaking in foreign languages^[s] and praising God. Then Peter said,⁴⁷ "No one can

stop us from using water to baptize these people who have received the Holy Spirit in the same way that we did, can they?" ⁴⁸ So Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Then they asked him to stay there for several days.

Peter goes to Cornelius and in so doing broke the law. In telling Cornelius the law prohibits him entering his house while he is going into his house sets the table for these words: "God has shown me that I should never view anyone as inferior or unclean." Favoritism implied or actual gave way to full inclusion. Cornelius and his entire household found Jesus as savior that day. They didn't become complete Jews as they were Gentiles. They became complete believers.

Takeaways:

1. Pay attention. God is in motion. God is progressive. God is expanding our options for serving the Kingdom. God is expanding our options for understanding our beliefs, but we have to pay attention. God is in prep mode with and for us IF... if we are open, aware, and attentive.

If, however, we are stuck in the "canonized" past, still in love with procedure and practice rather than a dynamic and progressive God... we won't be effective. We will be kept behind.

Food laws needed to give way to holy relationships; exclusivity needed to give way to holy inclusivity; Peter made the turn (with some prodding). Have we?

2. Go. If we are paying attention and God says to go, go. We tend to over think such things and that is a slippery slope that leads to doubting the merits of our calling. If we doubt the need we will soon focus on the personal impact and safety concerns. Soon we will talk ourselves out of even considering the call.

Jonah took too much time and over thought God's calling. Soon he feared for his safety and chose to say no to God. So just go.

3. If we have issues with God's calling us to take the reality of the Gospel to all people... we should stop. All people means just that, all people. People who

don't look like us; live like us; speak our preferred language; vote like we do; believe like we do, and the list could go on.

If we are O.K. with a homogenized faith and church we stand zero chance of impacting the whole world with the Gospel. Inclusivity is God's plan. It might not be comfortable, but it is the plan.

4. God sees only two types of people in the world – the redeemed and the not-yet-redeemed. We should too.

Amen and Amen.

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