

The Power of Tearing Down Walls

God Uses Peter and Cornelius to Transform Prejudice

The Empowered Church Series - Part 19

Acts 10:1-33

6/3/23-6/4/23

Introduction

- **God's Progressive Revelation** – Have you heard this concept: Progressive Revelation. It means that more from God is revealed in time. Sometimes it alters the core message and sometimes it just more fully expresses what God intended in the first place. Just as God only gave Adam and Eve 2 commands at the beginning, but later gave 10 commandments. Then later gave a lot of rules and regulations and then Jesus redesigned a TON! We all understand the concept but where does that stop? We are not getting new 'scripture', right? Every new religious stream claims to have new revelation from God so when is it legit and when is it bogus? **Here's the situation:** God's allowed to continue talking. He is not bound. God reveals more and more of His heart, intent, and plan as we go along. However, God doesn't contradict Himself, which means that we don't get new revelation today that goes directly against what Jesus Christ revealed while He was here. At the beginning of the early Christian Church, the learning curve was steep. There were things that were once thought forbidden that were now going to be okay. It was not that God just changed His mind, but that God changed the scenario (by Jesus Christ coming here and dying on the cross for our sins). As I said, God doesn't contradict Himself, but He does change gears to the next phase of the plan.
- **How that matters in our lives** – Just as the early Christian Church wasn't supposed to ONLY go off the Old Testament truth, because Jesus changed the scenario on the cross, so too does the Holy Spirit coming upon the Church change the scenario. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit came in part to reveal more fully what Jesus Christ made possible and share more and more of the heart of God to us. This means we are always going to be in a learning curve. We can't go solely off of old information, nor can we solely go off old assumptions, traditions, and the way they always did it. God is progressively revealing the impacts, ramifications and results of coming to Earth and indwelling mankind.
 - **New Testament Revelation** – we now read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament and in the New Testament we get a clearer picture of where God was going.
 - **Early Church Ministry Revelation** – we now read the New Testament realizing that Jesus was setting new stuff in motion. We see it partially play out in the

lives of the Apostles and leaders, but they weren't able to fully breathe life into it in their short life spans. We have seen some things play out over the last 2,000 years AND there are still things getting sorted out.

- **Personal Holy Spirit Revelation** - the Bible says that when the Holy Spirit would be released to indwell believers, that meant that God was present in each heart. That means that God is able to personally disciple, guide, encourage, and teach every Christian. The Holy Spirit helps to illuminate Scripture, which means highlight what He wants you to know in each passage. The Holy Spirit directs our prayers so that we are praying more rightly. The Holy Spirit guides our paths so that we are walking into divine appointments and plans of God. The Holy Spirit is making revealing God's heart for us personally. That means one of the most important elements of Christianity is hearing the voice of the Lord. Only He knows what we should do...

Never ASSUME You Know God's PLANS

- **Recap of Last Week** - Last week we talked about miracles and healing. When Peter went out ministering he came across a paralyzed man whom he healed and then was brought to a Christian woman who had died, and he raised her back to life with the power of God. We even prayed for radical healing here in this place. If you missed that message you can always go back and listen for free online.
- **Prep of This Week** - today we are going read about how God was not just doing new things supernaturally, but that the whole concept of what the Christian Church was, was going to change in radical ways. The first thing God drops on Peter is breaking through racism and rejection.

Lesson

- **Righteous**
 - **Cornelius is a Godly Gentile**
 - **Ac 10:1-2** - *"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."*
 - **Where's Caesarea?** - The New Testament talks about two cities called Caesarea. It was a popular name because it had the term Caesar in it and each time they wanted to honor an emperor of Rome they would name a city Caesarea after him. For our purposes there are two to know:
 - 1.) **Caesarea Philippi** - it's in **Northern** Israel in the Galilee area where

Jesus grew up. It was a super pagan and religious city. That's the city where Peter made the great confession about Jesus being the Christ. 2.) **Caesarea Maritime/Palestine** - this is the one this story. It's in **Southern** Israel. It's on the coast and was the Roman capital of the whole region of what we now call Israel but was owned by Rome at the time. This location was a Roman military administration base. Most hardcore Jews didn't like it for that reason and considered it a pagan city.¹

- **Why this particular story and region matters (Gentiles and Apostles)²** - The territory that Peter is now walking into to do ministry is getting heavier and heavier Gentile. It's less Jews and the culture shifts away from the Jerusalem vibe to a more Hellenistic (Greek) vibe. This means that he's going to interact with more and more Gentiles. This is significant. We know that Paul the Apostle, whom we met briefly early in the book, is going to minister PRIMARILY to the Gentiles, but at this point the Jerusalem core of apostles have remained very JEWISH-centric. They were going off their prior instructions and ministry pattern with Jesus.
- **Traditional Divide of Gentiles/Jews** - let's go back a long ways into the Old Testament and look into where the divide started between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). BTW: Gentile simply means 'non Jewish' so it's a catch all phrase from everyone else.
- **Abraham: Holy & Blessing Others** - This whole issue began when God started the Hebrew people with Abraham. From the beginning there were two principles that God wanted to lock into His new people group: 1.) They needed to be unique, separate, and specific to Him. We call that concept: Holy.³ 2.) God would work THROUGH them to bless and reach the whole world. It was all there in the first covenant with Abraham. But early on we start to see God draw a very tight line around the Hebrew people to the extreme exclusion of other groups.⁴
- **Initial Abrahamic Covenant (Blessing)** - Ge 12:1-3⁵ - *"Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you*

¹ "Because Caesarea was the base for Roman military administration, loyal Jews in Jerusalem considered Caesarea a pagan city (Kee, *Good News*, 50–51)." Lexham Bible Dictionary

² "Already it has begun to cross the barrier which separated Jews from Gentiles; now the time has come for that barrier to be crossed authoritatively by an apostle." NICNT (New International Commentary on the New Testament – by F. F. Bruce)

³ Exod 19:5; Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18 talks about how special to God they were.

⁴ It started with Abraham not wanting a Gentile wife for his son Isaac (Gen 24). Then we see a focus on Isaac primarily (Gen 25) where Abraham sends all of his other wives and kids away and gives everything he has to Isaac (exclusivity). Upon Isaac's death the blessing upon his son was 'let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.' That's going to set a culture of us vs. them. Isaac tells Jacob he needs a family wife instead of a foreigner too.

⁵ Given again to Isaac – Genesis 26:4; Given to Jacob in Genesis 28;

will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- **Why Israel is so Hardcore about Rules** - They started with Abraham being called to sacrifice his promised child (Isaac) to show that NOTHING would be held back from God. That's a brutal way to begin, right? That ethos continued.
- **Egypt & Moses** - By the time we get to the Hebrew people becoming slaves for 400 years in Egypt and fusing as a people group separated from the dominant group⁶, we have a very inclusive identity. Once we get to Moses we start to see it all delineated out. First it's important to note that in Exodus 22:21 God tells the Hebrews to be nice to foreigners (because they were foreigners in Egypt and know how it feels).⁷
- **Canaan Conquest Plan** - But in chapter 23 we see the conquest of Canaan plan. This is where things get intense. God says that He is going to judge those nations and move them out before the Hebrews who will move in. Immediately there are strict rules to not engage with any of the gods of those people groups.⁸ Verse 32 says, 'don't make any covenants with them and don't let them live in your land.' In Exodus 33:16 the language of being 'distinct' people of God and special due to His presence among them, is highlighted. There was no intermarriage allowed with Canaanite nations.⁹
- **Tight Rules and Regulations of Holiness** - As God sets up the priesthood through Aaron and his sons, we see other people try to get in on the action and they are killed by God.¹⁰ This shows that God is serious about rules and roles. The kosher laws of unclean and clean animals reinforces the in and out categories with strong boundaries with penalties.¹¹ Ritual purification for diseases and extreme penalties for sinful actions reinforce it as well. But it's in Leviticus 19 that we begin to see a focus on the concept of HOLY.¹²
- **Living out the Conquest Plan** - It seems that the conquest of Canaan which was their whole initial identity remain a focus for the majority of their existence. When they didn't wipe them out completely it remained a sticking point. This meant that they were continually at war with their internal enemies. This kept them in an us vs. them mentality. Interestingly in Deuteronomy 20 we see that there were very clear rules of warfare on nations OUTSIDE of

⁶ The beginning of the book of Exodus tells this story well.

⁷ Repeated again and again. See Lev 19:33.

⁸ Exodus 23:23ff.

⁹ Deuteronomy 7 shows how intense this view was supposed to be.

¹⁰ Leviticus 10

¹¹ Leviticus 11; 26:14ff

¹² See Leviticus 20:22ff as well. Dt 7:6ff.

Canaan. Any nations they went up to fight they needed to extend peace to them first and offer forced labor. If they refused, then they would only kill the men in battle but keep the women and children. They could even take the women as wives and intermarry¹³ (as long as it wasn't a Canaanite person).

- **Constant War Mindset** - Unfortunately war with external nations or even civil war plagued their entire existence and war necessarily causes a certain mindset of animosity toward others. We saw that during the exile periods the half-Jewish, Samaritan people rose up and they were hated. When Israel finally came back to their land after exile they were focused on intense purity and that demanded separation. By the time we get to just before Jesus' day (63BC), the Roman Empire conquered Israel and occupied it governing the Jews. That created hatred with Rome and more intense nationalism in the Jewish people.
- **The Bottom Line** - *The result of ALL OF THIS, was that by the time Jesus' ministry launched, the Jews pretty much hated everyone else and were in safety preservation mode. That's the mindset that the Early Church rose up in.*
- **The Prophetic Ministry Focus of Jesus (Jew first)** - Jesus continued the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would come to the Jewish people first, as the chosen people of God. It was their reward of sorts, for remaining distinct and holy. God was going to let them have the Messiah first and then the rest of the world would get a shot at Him.¹⁴ Any ministry to Gentiles seemed an offshoot or impromptu.¹⁵
 - Mt 10:5-6 - *"These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*
 - **Gentiles Whispered At** - Interestingly a big piece of prophecy about the coming Jewish Messiah, whom Jesus stated He was, was that he would reach the Gentiles as well. So it was not that Gentiles were excluded from His mission, it was about process and order based on all the prophecy and plan.¹⁶
 - Mt 12:18-21 - *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud,*

¹³ Dt 21:10ff.

¹⁴ Romans 1:16; 2:9-10

¹⁵ For example Mark 7:26

¹⁶ Simeon's prophecy over the infant Jesus in Luke 2 mentions it clearly.

nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

- **The New Church Focus** - Suddenly with the new Christian Church being launched we have Paul specifically called to the Gentiles and Peter receiving a message that Gentiles were going to be part of the whole family.
- **Who is Cornelius?¹⁷** - He is only mentioned in the Book of Acts. We get most information about him here in the retelling of this story. He was a great man. He was Roman but very much a worshiper of God.
- **What's a centurion?¹⁸ Italian Cohort?¹⁹** - A centurion was normally a Roman officer who commanded a group of 100 men. We don't know anything deep about the Italian cohort. A cohort is a portion or group of the Roman army. So Cornelius, whether Italian himself or not, commanded a segment of the greater Italian group.
- **What's devout?²⁰** - It means reverent, respectful, adhering to, committed.²¹
- **What does it mean to 'fear God'²²** - God-fearing as a concept is about having high respect for the Lord. But this phrase here is a way of saying that Cornelius was religiously a Jew in almost every way but didn't go through the official process of becoming a 'proselyte' (Gentile convert).

¹⁷ "Cornelius was a specially common name in Rome ever since 82 B.C., when P. Cornelius Sulla emancipated 10,000 slaves who were enrolled in his own *gens Cornelia*." NICNT

¹⁸ "A centurion was nominally in command of a hundred men: although his status was that of a noncommissioned officer, his responsibilities were more like those of a modern army captain. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. The historian Polybius sums up their necessary qualifications thus: "Centurions are required not to be bold and adventurous so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive or start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their post." NICNT

¹⁹ "In the regular Roman army a cohort was the tenth part of a legion and had a paper strength of 600 men. But there were no legionary troops in Judaea between A.D. 6 and 66; the Roman governors of Judaea commanded auxiliary forces. An auxiliary cohort had a paper strength of 1,000 men. The "Italian cohort" was one of these; it was so called presumably because it was originally raised in Italy, but in due course it would have consisted increasingly of provincials. Indeed, the soldiers making up an auxiliary unit were usually provincials; they were, however, awarded Roman citizenship when their term of service had expired. There is inscriptional evidence (*ILS* 9168) for the presence in Syria c. A.D. 69 of the auxiliary *cohors II Italica civium Romanorum* ("second Italian cohort of Roman citizens"); but we have no direct evidence of the identity of the military units in Judaea between A.D. 6 and 41. See further on 27:1, "the Augustan cohort." NICNT

²⁰ "The centurions who make their appearance in the New Testament record make a favorable impression. It is noteworthy that the first Gentile with whom Jesus had dealings during his public ministry (so far as we are informed) was a centurion stationed in Capernaum (possibly seconded from the Roman army to the security forces of Herod Antipas); it was with reference to this man's faith that he is reported to have said, "many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). These words now began to find their fulfillment in another centurion." NICNT

²¹ "*eusebeis* can refer either to unbelievers or to Christian believers, the first characterized by piety but not spiritual enlightenment, and the second characterized by a holy life commitment within the Christian life." Complete Word Study Dictionary of the NT (WSNTDICT)

²² "It is further important to observe that Cornelius, though a Gentile, was a worshiper of the God of Israel. Such Gentiles are commonly called "God-fearers"; while this is not a technical term, it is a convenient one to use. Many Gentiles of those days, while not prepared to become full converts to Judaism⁸ (the requirement of circumcision being a special stumbling block for men), were attracted by the simple monotheism of Jewish synagogue worship and by the ethical standards of the Jewish way of life. Some of them attended synagogue and became tolerably conversant with the prayers and scripture lessons, which they heard read in the Greek version; some observed with more or less scrupulosity such distinctive Jewish practices as sabbath observance and abstention from certain kinds of food (notably pork). Cornelius's attachment to the Jewish religion appeared particularly in his regular prayer to the God of Israel and acts of charity to the people of Israel. One may say, indeed, that he had every qualification, short of circumcision, which could satisfy Jewish requirements." NICNT

If someone wanted to serve the God of the Jews they had two choices: 1.) remain slightly outside the group by not doing all the steps; 2.) go all in. All in meant circumcision for men regardless of age and adhering to all the kosher restrictions (as well as other things). It seems that Cornelius opted for #1 and those people were called 'God-fearers' by the Jews.

- **What are alms?** - Those are financial gifts to help the poor.
- **His prayer life was powerful** - This is one of the figures in the Bible that their prayer life is detailed as having significant effect. We know about super special guys like Daniel, but it also is guys like Cornelius. Notice that it says he 'prayed continually'. That meant he had a LIFESTYLE of prayer, which is different than throwing up a couple when you need something. We'll find out, from an angel, how important God took his prayers.
 - **Prayer Matters** - We've talked about it prior in this series and don't have time to talk about it here, but prayer really matters because God created a system of connection and communication called prayer and made it matter. There are major things that God triggers off of the prayers of His people.

- **Daydream Believer**

- **Cornelius Receives a Vision/Visitation From God**

- **Ac 10:3-8** - *"About 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 ascended²³ 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."*

- **When is the 9th hour?** - This is 3pm, the normal time of prayer for a Jew.
 - **Vision or Visitation?** - 'come in?' - What is a vision? **A Vision is when you are awake, and you see something that seems almost dreamlike. You see images visually (a word from God in image vs. impression,**

²³ "“Your prayers and your acts of charity have ascended” (Gk. ἀνέβησαν) like the smoke of a sacrifice (cf. the Hebrew word for a burnt-offering, ‘ôlāh, lit. “ascending”). For the sacrificial reference of the word “memorial” (Gk. μνημόσυνον) cf. Lev. 2:2 LXX, where this term is used of the part of the cereal offering which was burnt, i.e., presented to God. For the sacrificial efficacy of such religious acts as those of Cornelius cf. Ps. 141 (LXX 140):2; Tob. 12:12, and in the NT Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15–16.” NICNT

thought or word), but they are supernatural and beyond this dimension. A visitation is when a heavenly or supernatural being shows up literally or visionary to you and communicate with you. It's unclear which this is but it seems to be a visitation of an angel coming into his room DURING a vision. This seems to me that the vision was going, and the angel took advantage to walk into the vision. The angel was very real and showing up on the vision screen. Other people (19²⁴) in Scripture that saw visions (recorded) are: Ananias, Peter, Paul, Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, Samuel, Nathan, Iddo the Seer, Isaiah, Job, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jesus, James, John, Zechariah.

- **Visions were the normal way prophets received messages from God** - Nu 12:6-8 - *"Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD."*
- **There are periods in history when God makes visions rare**²⁵ - 1 Sa 3:1 - *"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision."*
- **Not all visions are trustworthy** - La 2:14 - *"Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions..."*
 - Col 2:18-19 - *"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head..."*
- **Visions are part of how the Holy Spirit operates today** - Ac 2:17-18 - *"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."*
- **Sometimes it's hard to tell if it's really happening or a vision** - Ac 12:8-9 - *"And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision."*
- **How Angels operate - Why they are so scary?** - Angels are the Bible's general way of describing supernatural beings. Angel means messenger

²⁴ Just because it doesn't say the word 'vision' doesn't mean it wasn't a vision nor that people saw visions and it wasn't recorded in Scripture. It's assumed that all 'prophets' likely saw visions whether explicitly mentioned or not.

²⁵ Micah 3:6

so sometimes they fulfill that role and sometimes they don't. Sometimes heavenly beings are called 'heavenly host' which is more military sounding but can be a broad category of multiple roles they play. They are so scary both because of their appearance (usually described as illuminated, shimmering, stunning, etc.) and because they show up suddenly and catches people off guard. Even if the angel was normal looking but just showed up in the room it's freaky. But there's something about them being with God directly that makes them emanate power, presence, glory and most people fall on their face.

- **'What is it, Lord?'** - why he calls an angel Lord, or is he looking past the angel? We have a couple of options on his usage of Lord. 1.) he was using 'lord' as in 'sir' and it could have been directed at a normal angel. Usually angels are pretty hesitant to receive honor but perhaps he knew what was intended. 2.) Cornelius knew that the angel was speaking on behalf of God whom is his LORD and that's who he was addressing. 3.) It was Jesus as The Angel of the LORD, one of His other roles. Cornelius never saw Jesus personally so he wouldn't recognize him nor his glorified form. I'm leaning toward the 'sir' option.
- **You were heard** - The angel says, *"Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God."* Can you imagine? How cool! Confirmation that God heard it. What an honor that God would do that. Not just the prayers but the offerings. It means that God was taking personal attention on this guy. The concept of memorial is powerful. It means God didn't forget. He took note and highlighted it. It's special to Him.
 - **Faith to Pray** - we need to believe that what God says is true whether or not we believe it or feel it. God says that He hears our prayers, that means He does. Usually when we pray it's hard to believe that they are going anywhere beyond the air around us, but it's true.
- **The rest of the message** - one of the maddening things about the Bible accounts is that you know there is so much more that happened but wasn't recorded. Usually just the gist is recorded which leaves out a LOT. It creates so many questions for us when we start studying. We, of course, want to know EVERYTHING, which wasn't the point of them writing. But SOMETIMES, the story is told multiple times (like the benefit of the 4 gospels) and we get extra information. This story as well was told multiple times. One of the important pieces that this account leaves out is the rest of the angel's message to Cornelius on WHY he needs to

get Peter and listen to him. Later in chapter 11 Peter is defending himself from the traditional Jewish leaders and in his explanation of the story he says the angel told Cornelius, *'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'* Now, that's a motivation and explains a lot more about why Cornelius does what he does.

- **Where's Joppa?** - It's in Southern Israel on the coast. It's the seaport of Jerusalem. It's where Jonah got on a ship to sail to Tarshish.
 - **Who is Simon Peter?** - He is the leader of the apostles.
 - **Who is Simon the tanner?** - Nothing is known about him beyond this, but he is a tanner so that means he worked with dead carcasses so it's an interesting choice for Peter to stay with him.
 - **The Party of 3** - two servants and a devout soldier
- **Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!**
 - **Peter Has a Troubling Vision**
 - **Ac 10:9-16** - *"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. ¹⁰ And he became hungry²⁶ 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. 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." 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."*
 - **What's on the housetop?²⁷** - how houses were constructed. Houses were made with flat roofs that were to be used. It was like a deck on the home.
 - **Power of going away to solitude with God** - It is in the uninterrupted time, the quiet and solitude that God seems to have an easier time getting our attention. If we are always busy and surrounded by noise, He may choose to remain silent and wait.

²⁶ "The word translated "hungry" in v. 10 (Gk. πρόσπεινος) occurs elsewhere, so far as is known, only in a first-century eye doctor named Demosthenes. F. W. Dillistone ("πρόσπεινος [Acts x. 10]," *ExT* 46 [1934-35], p. 380) suggests that Luke may have been a pupil of his. "Eat" is literally "taste" (γεύσασθαι); cf. 20:11 (p. 385, 30)." NICNT

²⁷ "About noon Peter went up on the flat roof of the tanner's house for quiet and prayer." NICNT

- **When is the 6th hour?** – This is noon (12pm). It's not the 'normal prayer time' but it's a common prayer time, if that makes any sense.²⁸ The normal time was the 9th hour.
- **Peter's Prayer Life** – Peter learned from Jesus the power of a prayer life. He consistently prayed.
- **Peter's hunger and why it matters** – Some suggest that Peter's hunger led to the theme of the vision. That God wanted to tell him something powerful and used the opportunity to make a point through eating. I disagree. I think that it was all a set up. I think that Peter was hungry and God orchestrated a specific situation in Peter and in the vision to tie together.
- **What's a trance?²⁹** – A trance means³⁰ you are teleported in your mind to somewhere else and see things outside of your normal experience. It's like a vision, but seems to be a bit more consuming and dominating. It's like an intense vision. It's almost like it's the process that allows the vision to occur. The only two people in the Bible said to be in a trance specifically are Peter and Paul. Paul describes in Acts 22 that he 'fell into one'. It seems that it's a different state of being.
- **How do heavens 'open'?** – ³¹ I could be wrong, but this seems to suggest that what was in front of their vision opened up and new images showed up. It seems it's a way of saying and God got them ready to see a vision. It's a very common phrase and description. It was used multiple times of what happened in Jesus' ministry, like at His baptism, when people would begin seeing things.
 - Eze 1:1 – *"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."*
- **What was the sheet with four corners that came down?³²** – the Greek word is 'linen sheet'. It was probably not a sheet but it's the closest thing

²⁸ "Noon was not one of the appointed times for public prayer, but pious Jews like Daniel (Dan. 6:10) who prayed three times a day probably prayed then (cf. Ps. 55:17)." NICNT

²⁹ Paul talks about being in a trance in Acts 22:17.

³⁰ "1611. ἔκστασις *ékstasis*; gen. *ekstáseōs*, from *existēmi* (1839), to remove out of its place or state. A putting away, removal of anything out of a place. (I) An ecstasy in which the mind is for a time carried, as it were, out of or beyond itself and lost. Great astonishment, amazement (Mark 5:42; 16:8; Luke 5:26; Acts 3:10; Sept.: Gen. 27:33; Deut. 28:28; 2 Chr. 14:14; Ezek. 27:35). (II) A trance, sacred ecstasy or rapture of the mind beyond itself when the use of the external senses are suspended and God reveals something in a peculiar manner (Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17 [cf. 2 Cor. 12:2; Ezek. 1:1 {cf. Sept.: Gen. 2:21}])." The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament.

³¹ "Perhaps, as he thought about the vision, he remembered hearing similar words on an earlier occasion, though he had not then grasped their import. No doubt he was present when his Master, in a debate with Pharisees and scribes, insisted that it is not what goes into someone's stomach that conveys defilement, but what comes out of one's heart (Mark 7:14–19a). This was in effect an abrogation of ceremonial food laws and much else of the same character, but it was not until later, as a result of his experience on the roof at Joppa, that Peter appreciated this. It may well be to Peter that we owe the comment appended by the evangelist to Jesus' pronouncement on this subject: "Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19b)." NICNT

³² "Whether it was the awning designed to give him shade on the housetop, or a sail on the western horizon, that assumed this form in his vision need not concern us." NICNT

that Peter could explain. It was likely some type of shelf or flat surface that seemed billowy on the edges. Since it's a vision, we don't need to press it. It was the holding thing for the images of the animals.

- **What was the meaning of the collection of animals, reptiles and birds?**³³ – This was the most common way of talking about the animal kingdom (those three categories) in the ancient world. It means lots of kinds with clean and unclean mixed in together.
- **Who's voice told Peter to kill and eat?** – we have to assume that a command of this sort (new revelation that seemed contrary to the old) would ONLY come from God. He gets to change gears not other people.
- **Why did Peter deny the voice?**³⁴ – Also...who is speaking to Him? Jesus or the Holy Spirit?³⁵ It's not clear. Peter was denying the voice, which he knew to be God, simply because prior revelation said not to eat it and he felt that this was a test from God. Additionally he had so been engrained with the prohibition, it was easy and natural to reject the command. He wasn't fighting with God, He was trying to honor God.
- **I have never (a life of discipline)** – I never think of Peter as disciplined. I think of him as a loose cannon. But we can see that he had a couple areas of his life that were fully sold out to the Jewish way of doing things and kosher laws were one of them. That's awesome. We can truly honor God with our discipline.
- **The meaning of 'what God has made clean do not call common'** – In the moment with the image it was clear that God was reworking the kosher laws of clean and unclean. He was declaring all of it clean. Some scholars believe that it was due to this experience that Peter had Mark include the phrase, 'Jesus declared all foods clean' in Mark 7:19. It ALL seemed to be about animals and eating. We are going to find out it was a LOT more than that. The word clean/unclean, meant ceremonially. The word 'common' meant unholy versus holy. It's saying, what God has

³³ "The animal world is classified under these three divisions in Gen. 6:20 ("birds ... cattle ... every creeping thing of the ground")... the sheet proved to be full of all sorts of quadrupeds, reptiles, and birds, both fit and unfit for food according to Jewish law and custom... The laws distinguishing clean from unclean animals are laid down in Lev. 11:2–47. Those quadrupeds were clean (and therefore fit for food) which both chewed the cud and had cloven hooves." NICNT

³⁴ "Unclean animals could not be used for food at all, and even "clean" animals had to be slaughtered with ritual propriety before their flesh could be eaten. Peter's protest against the divine injunction took verbal shape much as the prophet Ezekiel's protest had once taken when he was commanded to prepare and eat "abominable flesh" (Ezek. 4:14): "No, Lord; I have never eaten anything profane or unclean," said Peter (with the implication: "and I am not going to begin now")... Peter might no doubt have slaughtered and eaten one of the "clean" animals; but he was scandalized by the unholy mixture of clean animals with unclean. This is specially important in view of the practical way in which he had immediately to apply the lesson of the vision." NICNT

³⁵ "But whom did Peter consider that he was addressing as "Lord" when he declined the invitation to slaughter and eat the meat provided in his vision? On that occasion the voice seemed to come from without, one gathers, and it was probably a voice that Peter well remembered, and instantly recognized." NICNT

made good, right and holy, don't call it bad or wrong. God gets to make the rules.

- **New Wineskins get New Wine, Old Don't** – The parable that 3 gospels records of Jesus meant that if someone is hardened in tradition and God says fresh revelation, they can't handle it. Fresh moves of God and fresh revelation is for those who still have some give, some flexibility in their spirit to keep learning and listening. We want to be people who are fresh wineskins willing to receive what God is continually saying.

- Mk 2:22 – "...no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

- **Why did it happen 3 times?** – Usually something is repeated if God is trying to make a serious point. It's saying, 'don't miss this, this is important.' It's not like a quick fly by that someone could think is an anomaly. God wants to get the point across for certain.

- **Visitors**

- **Cornelius' Envoy Arrives at Peter's Place**

- **Ac 10:17-23a** – *"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." 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?" 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." ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests."*

- **Peter didn't know what it meant fully** – It says that Peter was perplexed. He's trying to figure it out. It's super random at this point. He needs more data to go off of to fully embrace whatever the Truth was.

- **Taking words of God seriously** – Notice that he tries to figure it out. He is spiritually minded enough to know that God communicates and there's nothing more important than hearing God, so he puts effort into it. Too many of us think that if God wants to tell us something He should cater to us and our environment, lifestyle. But that's not how this relationship works. He's God, we aren't.

- **Timing and Divine Appointments** – at the same time they were at the gate and Peter was trying to find out what’s happening. Not a coincidence. It’s God’s timing. That’s a main way that God confirms messages. They are backed up.
- **The Holy Spirit tells Peter they are there** – specifically 3 men are looking for you. God down and greet them. I sent them.’ That’s super specific. I don’t know how that was conveyed but it seems to be in an audible vision (meaning Peter could hear it but no one else could if they were there).
- **Receiving messages from the Holy Spirit** – We have talked in prior series about how to hear God’s voice. But the main point here is that Peter heard it. Regardless of what we need to do to dial into God’s voice, we must do that. It’s critical for the Christian life. Are we being sensitive to God’s leading?
- **Why would Peter not want to go down or hesitate?**³⁶ – We find out later in the book when this story is retold, that when Peter got back home in Jerusalem he was attacked by the orthodox Jewish group for this very incident. They heard about how he went into a Gentile’s house and had dinner with him. That was absolutely a no-no. It was one thing to have a Gentile come into your home (not great but somewhat understandable. So this means that Peter isn’t even okay with the lighter part of this much less where this whole thing is going to lead.
 - **Progressive Revelation** – as we talked about in the introduction, “God reveals more and more of His heart, intent, and plan as we go along. At the beginning of the early Christian Church, the learning curve was steep. There were things that were once thought forbidden that were now going to be okay. It was not that God just changed His mind, but that God changed the scenario (by Jesus Christ coming here and dying on the cross for our sins). God doesn’t contradict Himself, but He does change gears for all the right reasons.” This means there’s a lot to learn new and a lot to unlearn for the Apostles who grew up in a different culture.
 - **Progressive Understanding & Sanctification** – Just because Peter and the crew walked and lived with Jesus for 3 years doesn’t mean they understood everything that He was doing and

³⁶ “A God-fearing Gentile like Cornelius had no objection to the society of Jews, but even a moderately orthodox Jew would not willingly enter the dwelling of a Gentile, God-fearer though he might be. No doubt some of Peter’s inherited scruples were weighing less heavily with him by this time, but to make him accept an invitation to visit a Gentile a special revelation was necessary.” NICNT

how it was all going to work out when He was gone. They were still learning. Just because they saw Jesus interact with Gentiles and even heal them doesn't mean they knew that the whole Gentile Jewish divide was wiped out. And even if they did there's a process to sanctification (becoming more like Jesus) and their own flesh would create resistance. We all know that it's tough to grow up in the Lord. It's one thing to understand, it's another to do it.

- **Cornelius' tie to the Jewish people as a Roman)'well-spoken of by the Jews')** - fascinating man. It seems that he honored the Jewish people because of his love for God. It's likely that he funded Jewish movements like the synagogue. All the Jews knew that he was a good guy. He put his money and time where his mouth was. Do we?
 - **You need to come with us** - why not just have Cornelius come? At this point it isn't clear, but we learn quickly that the point was to break down Peter's prejudice and walls and one of those ways was to demand that he go into a Gentile's home.
 - **You have a message for us** - Peter is supposed to tell them something but he has nothing prepared. What is God expecting? To speak about his recent experience because there's a message in it. Also remember, there was more to the Cornelius vision. *"Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household."*
 - **Peter's hospitality impact**³⁷ - Peter is convinced that these guys are legit and the Holy Spirit had confirmed it, so his first wall falls and he invites Gentiles to stay the night in the home he is staying. It's a start.
- **Just a Man**
 - **Peter Sets the Record Straight**
 - **Ac 10:23b-26** - *"The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 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."*

³⁷ "By this time the meal which Peter had called for was ready, so he brought the men in to share it. Not only so, but he provided accommodation for them overnight, as it was too late to set out for Caesarea after he had entertained them. For Peter to entertain these Gentiles in his lodgings was a step in the right direction, although it did not expose him to such a risk of defilement as would a Jew's acceptance of hospitality in a Gentile's house." NICNT

- **Peter's obedience** - he went. That's where it begins, right? Too often we spend all our time battling in our mind when we should have an automatic yes.
 - **Why people went with Peter³⁸** - There were 6 men that went with Peter. God called Peter, why did these Joppa disciples tag along? There is a key importance of community and apprenticeship. We need to be TOGETHER and experience things TOGETHER. It's not just so we have a more full experience but because we need to share it with others so they can share it with others. Christianity is based on the apprentice concept. It's how things are supposed to be transferred.
 - **Cornelius gathering friends and family** - what was this for? God had already told Cornelius that Peter was going to have a message that would save him and his family so he was getting ready. He had the faith that God's word is solid.
 - **Power of Invitation and Hospitality** - Cornelius invites in. Inviting our friends and family to hear the truth. Do we do this? Or are we still keeping everything personal to us?
 - **Why Cornelius fell down to worship Peter³⁹** - Cornelius is a man ready to serve God at all costs. He is soft hearted and just wants to honor God. The minute he sees a representative of God he falls down in honor. He is a desperate man for more. Are we too selfish or hardhearted to do that?
 - **Peter's Response: Power of True Humility** - Peter knew that confusion on worship is terribly dangerous so he quickly corrected it. He wasn't trying to be a jerk. He wasn't one of those false humble folks who say, 'it's all the Lord,' but don't think that. This was a theological matter. Thankfully he had had enough failures to not believe that he was God.
- **Unfolding**
 - **Peter Begins to Understand God's Plan**
 - **Ac 10:27-33** - *"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 nation⁴⁰,*

³⁸ "In view of the novelty of his mission, he acted wisely in taking some fellow-believers from Joppa with him—six in number, as he himself reports in 11:12... [Acts 11:12] – 'And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.'" NICNT

³⁹ "When Peter arrived, Cornelius hurried out and paid him the respect which he judged fitting for a messenger of God, prostrating himself at the apostle's feet in an attitude of homage and supplication. A messenger of God was supposed to have some godlike quality himself, to be a *theios anēr*, as the technical term has it." NICNT

⁴⁰ "A suitable word to use here as the equivalent of Gk. ἀθέμιτος. The word for "Gentile" or "foreigner" in v. 28 is ἀλλόφυλος, which (significantly enough) is commonly used in LXX to denote an uncircumcised Philistine. Josephus (*BJ* 5.194) uses it (in place of the inscriptional ἀλλογενής) in paraphrasing the warning notice in the temple forbidding Gentiles to trespass into the inner courts (see on 21:28, p. 409, 48)." NICNT

but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.” ³⁰ And 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 ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³ So 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.”

- **The Jew/Gentile Divide** - As we mentioned earlier, there was a significant divide between Jews and non-Jews.
 - **Why it was ‘unlawful’ to associate or visit⁴¹** - Interestingly, the main issue about ‘hanging out’ together was about food issues. It was not that the people were gross to the Jews, it was that they did things that were unclean, and it usually centered around food. The food they ate, the food in their house, etc. They had a bunch of normal habits that Jews were forbidden to do (bread - leaven, milk - only certain types, meat - blood issues and no pork), so that’s why it was such a big deal.
- **Peter Understands the message more fully** - I should not call any PERSON common or unclean. It became clear at some point why God gave him the vision and that it wasn’t ONLY about food. He realized that it was breaking down the walls between PEOPLE. It was the Jew vs. Gentile thing. God was doing a new thing. We learn later, through Paul’s ministry that the Gentiles were being grafted into the Jewish family tree. But we aren’t there yet. Right now it’s just hanging out and seeing them through a fresh lens of acceptance.
 - **Power of being Open-Minded** - he changed his whole outlook. He could have stayed hard hearted and missed God’s revelation.
 - **Do your anti-prejudice work.** Clean up your biases. That’s not bad it’s just hard work. We all need to do that. God tears down walls. The Power of the Holy Spirit to become people who have His vision and view of other people.

⁴¹ “It was largely because of their lack of scruples in food matters that Gentiles were ritually unsafe people for a pious Jew to meet socially. Intercourse with Gentiles was not categorically forbidden; but it was liable to render a Jew ceremonially unclean, as was even the entering of a Gentile building or the handling of articles belonging to Gentiles. The most ordinary kinds of food, such as bread, milk, or olive oil, coming from Gentiles, might not be eaten by strict Jews, not to mention flesh, which might have come from a forbidden animal or from one that had been sacrificed to a pagan divinity, and which in any case contained blood. Hence, of all forms of intercourse with Gentiles, to accept their hospitality and sit at table with them was the most intolerable.” NICNT

- **Cornelius tells his story** - He is confirming what God did in prep for what God may have for him.
- **We are ready to listen, what's up?** - Notice the posture and eagerness. We should have this posture every time we go to church or read the Bible.

Conclusion

- **Next Week** - the message that God is trying to give to these men. It's not just for Cornelius' salvation but for Peter's transformation as well.