

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER / Sunday, October 18, 2015

Unifying Topic: PETER TAKES A RISK

I. Peter Goes To Caesarea (Acts 10:24-29)

II. Cornelius' Vision (Acts 10:30-33)

III. Peter Proclaims The Good News (Acts 10:34-38)

The Main Thought: Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (Acts 10:34-35, KJV).

Unifying Principle: It is very natural for humans to show partiality to some and not to others. What are some possibilities when a person risks being open and welcoming to all? Peter's recognition that God shows no partiality allowed him to tell the Good News to the Gentiles.

Lesson Aim: To understand how risky this episode was to both Peter and Cornelius yet how willing both men were to take the risk.

Life Aim: To make a personal commitment to allow God to lead us out of our own personal comfort zone in order to bear witness to our faith.

HISTORY:

¹The **tenth chapter of Acts** tells a story that is one of the great turning points in the history of the Church. For the first time a Gentile is to be admitted into its fellowship. Up the sea coast about thirty miles from Joppa was a town by the name of Caesarea. A soldier, who was captain over one hundred men, lived there. He was a Gentile, however, instead of worshiping many gods as most Gentiles did, Cornelius had learned of the One true God. He also taught his family in the knowledge which he himself had received, though he was not saved (**v.1**). He was also a generous religious man who gave much money to help others (**v.2**). One day, as he was praying, an angel appeared and spoke his name (**v.3**). Cornelius was afraid and said, "What is it, Lord (**v.4**)?" Perhaps "Lord" here means "Sir." The angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who was at Simon the Tanner's house, by the sea side in Joppa (**vv.5-6**). He would tell Cornelius what to do. When the angel had gone, the centurion called two of his trusted servants and a soldier, and explained to them everything that had happened (**vv.7-8**). Then he told them to go to Joppa and bring Peter back to him (**vv.1-8**).

²Before Cornelius could be welcomed into the Church, Peter had to learn a lesson. Strict Jews believed that God had no use for the Gentiles. Sometimes they even said that help must not be given to a Gentile woman in childbirth, because that would only bring another Gentile into the world. The next day after Cornelius' *vision*, while the three men were getting near Joppa, Peter went up on the flat roof of Simon's house to pray (**v.9**). While he waited for the noon meal to be served, he saw the heavens opened and a great sheet let down by four corners. In this sheet were all sorts of ceremonially unclean animals being let down from heaven (**vv.10-12**). Suddenly a voice commanded: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (**v.13**). Facing a choice, Peter responded, "No Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean" (**v.14**). The Lord spoke to him again and said, "Do not call what God has cleansed unclean" (**v.15**). The sheet was taken up toward heaven, and let down again three times; then it was taken up (**v.16**). Peter had lived as an orthodox Jew all of his life. The "clean and unclean foods" belief was a major problem between Jews and Gentiles in that day. God was not just changing Peter's diet, but his entire program. The Jew was not "clean," and the Gentile "unclean," but both Jew and Gentile were "unclean before God." God's timing is perfect, and the three men at the door arrived just when Peter was thinking about the meaning of the *vision* (**vv.17-22**). He was used, to open the door of faith for the Jews in Acts 2; he was used, to open the door

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/cornelius--a-religious-man-on-a-mission-for-god/>

² <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/gods-gentile-message-to-peter-through-visions/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

of faith to the Samaritans in Acts 8; and now he was used, to open the door to the Gentiles in Acts 10. The Gospel of Christ was to include everyone. Peter invited the men to stay as guests for the night. Normally Jews did not provide hospitality for Gentiles. The next day he accompanied them and some other believers from Joppa to Caesarea (v.23) (vv.9-23).

LESSON:

Acts 10:24-29 Peter Goes To Caesarea

10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends. Cornelius was waiting on them as they entered Caesarea the next day. So, he called together his relatives and intimate friends, so they might receive Peter's message.

10:25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. Cornelius fell at Peter's feet, worshipping him as he came in. Probably his reaction was evoked from the unusual character of vision which instructed Cornelius to seek Peter's counsel. He didn't know who Peter was, only knowing that God said send for Peter.

10:26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. Being a strict Jew, Peter could not allow Cornelius to behave in such a manner, and commanded him to stand up; and letting him know that he himself was only a man.

10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. When Peter was invited into Cornelius's house he undoubtedly did not expect to find a great company of kinsmen and friends of the centurion.

10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Peter's immediate thought was to justify his presence among them and give adequate explanation for this apparent breach of Jewish law. Jew and Gentile had no ordinary social intercourse between each other. Thus it would be highly unlikely for Peter to enter the house of a Roman centurion. Because of the Levitical dietary restrictions, a Jew would least likely find himself eating at the table of a Gentile, "*or come unto one of another nation.*" Thus, Peter is saying that it is highly unlikely that he would dine in the household of an "*uncircumcised Philistine.*" What then was his reason for doing so? "*God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*" Hence, Peter immediately began to tell Cornelius what God had showed him in his vision. God was teaching Peter that Gentiles represented by the unclean animals were acceptable to Him and were to be as much a part of His church as were Jews.

10:29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?— Therefore, without objection, Peter came as the Lord sent for him. Now, Peter wants to know from Cornelius his reason for sending for him.

Acts 10:30-33 Cornelius' Vision

10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,— In answer to the apostle's question,

Cornelius goes on to explain that four days ago he was fasting until this hour. At the ninth hour he prayed in his house, and, behold, a man stood before him in bright clothing. It was an angel of the Lord who spoke unto him.

10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. The angel of the Lord let him know that during his fasting and praying, his prayer was heard. Not only because of the fasting and praying, but also his giving; his offerings; his donations; his contributions; his assistance; his charities has been remembered before the sight of God; God has taken notice. Hallelujah! The heart of a good man is not unnoticed.

10:32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. The angel of the Lord gives instructions to Cornelius: "*Send to the house of one Simon a tanner in Joppa and request a man named Simon, whose surname is Peter, and when he comes to Caesarea he will speak unto you.*"

10:33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Cornelius did not hesitate, but immediately dispatched his representatives to bring Peter to his house. Cornelius still does not understand exactly why this has happened, but he shows a complete readiness to receive whatever Peter has to say. Peter now has a captive audience to hear what the Lord has commanded by the power of the Holy Spirit to speak.

- It is evident that God has led both Peter and Cornelius to this very hour.
- It is evident in this transitional Book of Acts that He has also led both the Jews and Gentiles to this very hour.
- It is evident that the Gentile writer Luke recognized the importance of this hour because of the space he dedicated to it in his narrative.

For the first time Jew and Gentile could sit down with some measure of commonality.

Acts 10:34-38 Peter Proclaims The Good News

10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:— Peter, now, realizes that God has no respecter of persons. It probably took him off his feet to even say this. It showed how big God is and how little he was. It showed how racial the Jews were. The point is that God has no favorites and no prejudice against anyone. He shows no partiality or discrimination whatsoever. He does not accept a person because of nationality, race, social standing, or class—appearance, possessions or positions, abilities or works, health or stature.

10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. Also God has no respecter of nations. Two things make a person acceptable to God, as Peter covered them both in this verse. **1) Fearing God** and **2) Working righteousness** (to be right and to do right). There are those who stress *being righteous* and neglect *doing righteousness*. This leads to two serious errors.

1. False security. It causes a person to stress that he is saved and acceptable to God because he has believed in Jesus Christ. But he neglects doing good and living as he should. He neglects obeying God and serving man.
2. Loose living. It allows one to go out and do pretty much as he desires. He feels secure and comfortable in his faith in Christ. He knows that what he does may affect his fellowship with God and other believers,

but he thinks his behavior will not affect his salvation. He thinks that no matter what he does he is still acceptable to God.

The problem with this is that it is a false righteousness. Righteousness in the Bible means *being righteous* and *doing righteousness*. The Bible knows nothing of being acceptable to God without living righteously.

There are those who stress *doing righteousness* and neglect *being righteous*. Thus, this also leads to two serious errors.

1. Self-righteousness and legalism. It causes a person to stress that he is saved and acceptable to God because he does good. He works and behaves morally and keeps certain rules and regulations. He does the things a Christian should do by obeying the main laws of God. But he neglects the basic law: the law of love and acceptance—that God loves him and accepts him not because he does good, but because he loves and trusts the righteousness of Christ.
2. Being judgmental and censorious. A person who stresses that he is righteous (acceptable to God) because he keeps certain laws often judges and censors others. He feels that rules and regulations can be kept, for He keeps them. Therefore, anyone who fails to keep them is judged, criticized, and censored.

The problem with this is that it, too, is a false righteousness. Again, righteousness in the Bible is both *being righteous* and *doing righteousness*. The Bible knows nothing of being acceptable to God without being made righteous in Christ Jesus.

10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of

all:)— Peter goes on to say that 1) God sent His Word to Israel. Israel was the first nation to receive God's Word. Salvation is of the Jews. 2) God sent His Word to Israel by Jesus Christ, God's very own Son preaching peace. However, Peter lets Cornelius know that God's Word was not meant for Israel alone. Jesus Christ did not come just for Israel's salvation. Now, he knows that God is no respecter of persons. God accepts people from every nation; all those who fear Him and work righteousness. Therefore, in summary...

1. Christ is Lord of all

What was once impossible is now possible. What was once unacceptable is now, by the grace of God, acceptable. What was once unheard of is now being boldly spoken by Peter. Gentiles may actually be saved in the same way that Jews have been saved.

10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;—

2. Peter declared that Jesus Christ had been talking about the Word throughout all Judea.
3. Peter said that Jesus Christ began to preach God's Word in Galilee right after John's ministry of baptism.

Peter told Cornelius, "*You know you have heard the Word.*" Think how many hear and sit under the gospel today and pay little if any attention to it. Jesus Christ had travelled and preached the gospel everywhere, and He was the topic of conversation upon everyone's lips. They were without excuse. So it is today with those who have heard the gospel—they are without excuse.

10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power in a way no other person has ever been anointed. The Holy Spirit was given without measure to Christ. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel...*" Lk.4:18-19. "*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power...*" Acts10:38. Jesus Christ did not come nor was He anointed to debate theories and theology with the ministers and priests

of His day. He was anointed to *"go about doing good and helping people by delivering them from the oppressions of the devil."* Why? For God was with Him. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit approved His ministry Lk.3:22; Jh.9:1-38.

I have to put this in: How did Peter know these things? Well verse 39 says *"And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree."* Peter and the earliest believers saw and knew Him. Therefore, as a witness, he knew all things because he was there with Jesus.

SUMMARY:

Peter, a Jew lived in Joppa, but, the next day he entered Caesarea by invitation of Cornelius, a Gentile. Cornelius called together all his relatives and friends upon Peter's arrival. He fell at Peter's feet and worshipped him, but Peter told him to stand up, for he was only a man. And Peter began to talk with them about the Jewish law which didn't allow them to keep company or visit Gentiles. But God has shown him that he must not consider anyone as unclean, common or unsuitable. He agreed without objection to come as the Lord revealed and now he needs to know why he came (**vv.24-29**).

Cornelius reveals his story to Peter: Four days ago he had been fasting and praying in his house when an angel of the Lord appeared unto him and told him that his prayers and alms have come up before the Lord. He was to send for Peter and he would speak to him. So Cornelius tells Peter that whom he sought is here with him as God commanded (**vv.30-33**).

Peter opened his message up with *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."* He accepts every nation that fears him, and works righteousness. God's very own Son was sent to the children of Israel to preach peace. But, because He is Lord of all, Peter lets Cornelius know that God's Word was not meant for Israel alone. Jesus Christ did not come just for Israel's salvation. Jesus Christ began to preach God's Word after John's ministry of baptism in Galilee and throughout all Judea. Jesus went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil for God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost; for God was with Him (**vv.34-38**).