



### Time to Reflect

- When do we spend time with God during the day? Is there a location that enables us to retreat from the busyness of life to spend time with Him?
- Can we think of occasions when we followed the leading of God and were astonished by the blessings that we received?

Last week we spent some time looking at Peter and we saw how God used him to heal, teach and lead within the Early Church. We were challenged to reflect on how we need to experience God's touch in our own lives and then demonstrate His love to others. This week we will see how the ministry of the Early Church was extended and we are reminded of the importance of mission and vision within Christianity.

**“As the last chapter showed, a great shift is taking place in the book of Acts. The gospel is moving towards the Gentiles.”**

(Albert Mohler Jr, *Acts 1-12 For You*, p135).

### Passage Specifics

- Our passage begins by mentioning Caesarea. This was a major Roman city with a primarily Gentile population. We then encounter a centurion called Cornelius, a member of the Italian Regiment. He was an important man who sat “...at the very heart of the Roman military establishment, and a man who occupied a high station in life.<sup>1</sup>”
- (v2) tells us that he was devout, God-fearing, charitable and prayerful. Cornelius had a heart for God, he sought to please God, and he encouraged his household to do the same.
- The real drama of the passage begins in (v3) as Cornelius saw a vision of an angel. This was not a hallucination or dream. It was a message from God and the vision startled Cornelius (v4). His response “What is it, Lord” is not dissimilar to the cry of Saul on the Damascus road, “Who are you, Lord?”
- The angel indicated that Cornelius's prayers and charitable acts had risen before God as a memorial offering, and then an instruction was given. He was to bring Peter to Caesarea (v5-6). Without question or dispute Cornelius took action (v7-8).
- The passage now focuses on Peter. We are told that it was around lunchtime and Peter went up onto the roof of a house to pray. This was a private place, a quiet place, away from the busyness of everyday life.
- We are told that Peter started to get hungry (v10) and then the vision began. The first thing that Peter saw was the opening of heaven (v11). “In Scripture, the heavens open up only for divine activity, so Peter understands the significance of the sight.<sup>2</sup>”

<sup>1</sup> Albert Mohler Jr, *Acts 1-12 For You*, p137.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p139.

- What followed was a revelation, a teaching, directly from God. We must open ourselves to hear from God and to seek His guidance. Remember the words recorded earlier in Acts (2:17), “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”
- Peter saw all different kinds of animals displayed on a great descending sheet (v11-12). Some of the animals, though, Jews were not permitted to eat under Old Testament dietary laws (Leviticus 11:1-8).
- These laws were intended to safeguard physical health but also to ensure that the Israelites were set apart from the other peoples of the world. Following the Law was an act of commitment to God.
- Peter was shocked by the instruction that he heard (v13), to the extent that he protests (v14). In response, Peter was told that he had no right to “...call anything impure that God has made clean.” This is, in essence, the hinge and central teaching of the passage.
- Interestingly, (v16) indicates that the sequence of instruction / protest happened three times before the vision stopped. Remember how Peter also denied the Lord three times (Luke 22). “When something happens to Peter three times it is a fixed certainty. His denial was underlined by its repetition; his restoration and commissioning likewise. Now here, the repetition displays that this is no mistake or misunderstanding.<sup>3</sup>”
- Peter reflected on this vision (v17) and then proceeded to encounter Cornelius’s men (v18-21). He invited them into the house, to spend the evening as his guests. This was an unlikely action as a Jewish person would not bring ceremonially ‘unclean’ people into a home – this would render them unfit for temple worship.
- Something was changing in Peter. A radical transformation was happening following his experience on the rooftop. The vision was now being outworked and the impact would be profound.
- The vision taught Peter that there was to be no distinction between Jew or Gentile. There is an old saying, often associated with historical revivals, that “Everyone is equal at the foot of the Cross.”
- As Peter made his way to Caesarea, this would indeed prove to be the case. He was welcomed to Caesarea and Cornelius fell at his feet (v25). Peter requested him to stand up and highlighted that he himself was only a man. Once again, the humility of Peter resonates strongly,
- (v27-29) reveal that Peter understood the vision that God had given him, and he was now faithfully pursuing that vision. Cornelius, likewise, was following the leading of God without question. Isn’t it incredible that God moved ahead of both men, preparing the way, so that His mission would progress?
- (v34-48) indicate how Peter preached to the Gentiles. He began by highlighting that God welcomes everyone who hears His call to repentance. Once more Peter’s preaching is Christ-centred (v37-41) and it included a challenge to believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness (v43).
- As Peter concluded his message, the Gentiles responded and the Holy Spirit “...came on all who heard the message” (v44-48). God’s vision led to a widening of God’s mission.

### **POINTS OF CHALLENGE AND APPLICATION**

1. The Gospel message is truly for everyone.
2. God includes us in His mission. We all have a part to play and each of us need to play our part.
3. God’s command to Peter was undoubtedly challenging, yet Peter obeyed. God may ask us to move beyond our comfort zones.
4. “We are called to deny ourselves in the Christian life, and not pursue our own ease and pleasure. We are called to obey, even when we are perplexed...Wherever the Lord leads, we must follow.<sup>4</sup>”

<sup>3</sup> Albert Mohler Jr, *Acts 1-12 For You*, p140.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p141.