

Acts 10:9-23 'The Sovereignty Of God: One Vision Leads To Another!'

Last week we were introduced to Cornelius in Acts 10:1-8 in a sermon I entitled 'The Power Of A Godly Character'. Cornelius was that Roman soldier in authority of over 100 men, who were the worst of the worst with unbridled passions of wickedness, known as the Italian regiment! And yet though he lived every day surrounded by such evil, Cornelius was a non-Jew who had cast aside the evil idols of Rome, and had embraced and followed the One True and Living God of the Hebrews. V2: "he and all his family were devout and God fearing. He gave generously to those in need and he prayed continuously." Yes, he was a man of godly character whose faith was lived out, not only in word, but in deed!

We learn in v7 that his devotion to God had influenced all of his family and even one of those wicked soldiers. In v3, while praying he gets a "distinct vision of an angel" who tells him in verse 4 that "his prayers and gifts to the poor have risen up to God as a memorial offering." Yes his prayers were heard and his ministry in God's Name had not gone unnoticed. Matthew 13:12 "to him who has, more will be given." God had given of Himself to Cornelius by opening up his heart, and Cornelius had been faithful with that. And now, God would give him more through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as the Almighty has more work for him to do!

That work begins in v5-6 with a mission to "send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner whose house is by the sea." So in verse 8 Cornelius chooses "two servants and a devout soldier, having told them everything that had happened."

This is where we pick up the account this morning with the three men on their way to Caesarea. Acts 10:9-23 'The Sovereignty Of God; One Vision Leads To Another!' V9 "About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray." Brothers and sisters, I've said in the past that God leaves nothing to chance. Indeed, the Christian must understand that there is no such thing as chance, as the world believes. We are even made to believe that the entire universe has come into being by chance. Yes, we are fed to believe as fact, that out of nothing, (because remember in the beginning there was nothing), we are forced to believe as fact, that out of nothing there was some kind of cataclysmic explosion and then 'hey presto', galaxies and stars and planets and suns come into being, and we as humanity, have descended from apes! As an old Presbyterian preacher put it many years ago, we are fed to believe that man is not only like an animal, but that man is an animal!! Yes it has all come about by some cosmic chance.

Well as we learn as we look at this text, none of this is true. Because if we as Christians believing in and hold to the idea of chance, then we are actually saying that there are some things which are beyond the power, reach, and care of God! And yet when we look at this passage of Acts chapter 10, we see that one vision has been sent so that God's servant would send his servants to yet another servant. God has another role for Cornelius to play in the future of His church. In this vision Cornelius is not only instructed to send for Peter, he is also prepared to receive him!

Well, the men are sent and while they are approaching the city, at that very moment, Peter is up on the roof praying. Because God is also preparing Peter to receive the men in such a way that he will acquiesce to Cornelius's request. Friends can you see? That the sovereignty of God (yes the all-knowing, all powerful sovereignty of God is always overshadowing and bringing about His Plan and Purpose.

Brothers and sisters, all things happen to us at just the right time, God's time. We may not always feel that way, we may never feel that way, but it is always the right time because it is God's time! Nothing happens within our lives which is out of His Sovereignty and Will. He leaves no thing to chance. What we need to be always prayerfully asking ourselves is: 'What is God teaching me?'

Well as the men are approaching the city Peter is "up on the roof praying". He gets hungry and while someone is preparing some food for him, (v11) he falls into this Holy Spirit induced trance, and we see our second vision of Acts 10! But Beloved, before I explain Peter's vision, (and we really will only get to that next week), I want to briefly touch upon how these two men received these messages from God, because that's what they are: God speaking to them through His sent Word via The Holy Spirit!

Friends, the simple and obvious thing that I wanted to point out is that both of the men were praying! You know, I think in just about all of my recent messages the importance of prayer has leapt to us out from the passages. Last week I mentioned that our prayer meetings should be our most well attended gatherings, because through prayer we acknowledge that we are not the ones who are upon the throne, and are in control. In this account we can see that it is also while praying that God can speak to us! Now I'm not suggesting that it be in this extraordinary way which we see here, but while we pray, God does speak! Our thoughts, our words, our actions, our inactions, flood through our minds while we pray and while we listen to others pray. God will lay things upon our hearts while we pray. People come to mind who we should pray for. Ministry which we can put our hands up for or contribute toward. Sin which we haven't dealt with before God. Our hearts are laid bare before Him when we pray.

Yes friends, God speaks to us while we pray. It is part of us expressing our relationship with Him. It's our communication with God. Sunday mornings at 9:30 before worship services. 5:00 o'clock at Gary's place on Thursday, the 2nd Saturday morning of each month at 9:30 at Allan and Heather's place, and there is a Men's prayer meeting at Burrill Pines the first Monday night of each month at 7.30. Beloved, we need to get together to pray. And The thing is, the more that we pray, the more God shows us how much we need to pray and how much we need to pray for!

V11-13 "he saw heaven open and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Now for us to grasp the gravity and significance of this vision, we need to understand a bit about Hebrew life. They had a very particular and limited diet which had been prescribed by God Himself. The book of Leviticus is full of those things which the people were and were not permitted to do. With Chapter 11 dealing with what they were and were not permitted to eat! They were allowed to eat "any animal which had a split hoof and chewed the cud" or grass. Cows, sheep and goats for example. But if they "had a split hoof and did not chew the cud", like pigs, they were not allowed to eat them. If they "chewed the cud but did not have a split hoof", like camels and rabbits, they were not allowed to eat them! If animals had paws like cats and dogs etc, they were not allowed to eat them. Anything in the seas and rivers as long as they had "fins and scales", they could eat. But sharks and eels and shellfish etc, they were not allowed to eat. Birds such as chickens and doves and pigeons and ducks they were allowed to eat, but birds of prey and bats they were not allowed to eat. Snakes and lizards and reptiles they were not allowed to eat. Some insects, like grasshoppers and locusts they were allowed to eat. but any insects that walked on all fours or more legs and walked along the ground, they were not allowed to eat.

So now I'm sure you get the picture! Jewish life was very regulated and regimented by God! Because the whole of the way which that society worked, (well *was supposed* to work at least), distinguish them from the rest of the world with its practises of Idol worship, sacrifices to objects and sexual immorality with its` idolatrous living! So, with a history of around 1500 years of being bound by God's Own given regulations of how they were to live and what they were to eat, and what they were not allowed to eat, (and I've only given a very brief breakdown of those things), the Lord now tells Peter, who is hungry, through the voice of the Spirit of God, in this vision to "get up Peter, kill. and eat."

This highlights a real dilemma which many people face. Their traditions and regulations are telling them one thing, but the Lord is telling them something else! Some months ago I spoke about being beware of religion. Well, in a real sense, that is what is happening here with Peter. Those dietary rules and regulations played a very important role within the people of God in former times. His traditions, (which were important in the past), were now holding him back! Jesus had come and had done away with all of those things.

Indeed, there are those who even today, still hold that there are things which they claim that we as Christians should not eat. But these are religious practises and have nothing to do with Jesus! Do you remember the Lord's Own Words to his apostles in Matt28:18-19 known as the Great Commission? "All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me. Go you therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

But it does seem that at this point, Peter was very reluctant to give his whole heart to the Gentle, (the non- Jewish) work! Yes it does appear that something was holding him back. He and John had followed Philip into Samaria as we saw two weeks ago when looking at Simon the sorcerer, and yet there does seem to be some kind of invisible wall which was keeping him from going to the rest of the world, as it were.

Yes friends, it is often times that the greatest impediment to people coming to know and serving Jesus, is their religion, with its rules and regulations. Those idolatrous practises which Satan uses to tie their hands and bind their souls. The so called Jehovah witnesses, (and I say so called because they are not true witnesses) of Jehovah of the Bible; Rome with its heresies of Popes, dead Saints, and idols; The many state governed religions and orthodoxies around the world, the list is endless! It is those imaginations of men's minds which had kept their devotees in bondage and chains for so long, which in many ways continue to bind them even when they have come to know the Lord!

Well for Peter, it does appear that this was the particular chain that was in a sense, holding him back. Notice his reply to the Lord's voice: V14 "surely not, Lord", Peter replied, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean". Yes, I've always kept the rules Lord. I have only ever eaten food which has been sanctioned by You. I'm not going to start eating snakes and geckos and lizards now at this stage of the game. Far be it from me, I'm a righteous man doing God's Work and living God's way! V15 "the voice spoke to him a second time do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

And what I find really interesting is v16 "this happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken up into heaven." And the reason I find it interesting is because things have happened to Peter in threes before, haven't they? How many times did Peter deny knowing Jesus when he was before the Sanhedrin? Three. In John 21 on the beach, how many times did Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him? Three. With Peter answering the first 2 times "yes Lord you know that I love you", then on the third occasion he says, "Lord, you know all things you know that I love you." Well, as proof of Peter's love,

Jesus instructs Peter to “feed my lambs” “take care of my sheep” and “feed my sheep,” or in other words, love for Jesus is expressed in love toward His People!

Here before us we have this third three. The vision of the sheet filled with the animals of the world coming down three times. The voice of the Lord telling him to “kill and Eat” three times. Peter declaring his uprightness three times, and then really, what is God’s instructive rebuke to him three times! Friends, surely his head must have been spinning by now. What was that all about? He must have been thinking.

Under the sovereignty of God during all of this vision stuff, the men from Cornelius have been on their way, and have now arrived. V17-18 “while Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.”

Brothers and sisters, can you see how God has orchestrated the whole thing under the sovereignty of his power? No chance meetings here. All things happening for the blessing of His People and the fulfilling of His Plan of Salvation! It's no different for us. If you reflect back upon the years of your life, you will be able to pinpoint moments when God has guided you through this person or that person. Or perhaps spoken to you through this blessing or that hardship or tragedy. We don't know it at the time, but with ‘spiritual hindsight’, as I like to call it, we can look back and see how God had His Hand upon us throughout our whole life! Psalm139:16 “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

This doesn't mean that God gives us a certain amount of years and then He lets go of the strings and hopes that we arrive in the right place, no. It means that He oversees our life, and unbeknownst to us, guides us to our ultimate destination, of Himself! Barbara saw our sign on the road after not worshipping regularly for seven years, and brings a friend to a ladies craft morning so Marj comes along. Tom and Sue come along one morning and Sue declares ‘I've found my spiritual home!’ Allen Dougherty sees our sign, Patricia pushes her billy cart up the road, Heather walks in off the street and Allan picks her up. The Lord metaphorically burned my brother’s house down in bringing Ted to Himself. For me, it was loneliness and the suicide of a friend and the emptiness and meaninglessness of life which Jesus used. For you it is a different story.

But whatever it was Beloved, God's Hand has been upon you since before you were even born! Psalm 139:13: “for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.” Verse 15: “my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place; when I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.” No, there are no chance meetings or happenings. There is no ‘chance’ in the sovereignty of God!

Well, v19-20 “while Peter was still thinking about the meaning of the vision the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them.” Beloved, Peter still doesn't know what this vision was all about. It will only be when he arrives at Cornelius’ house that the penny will fully drop.

In Acts 1:8 we read “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria had now been touched by Christ’s Gospel. It was time for Peter to begin to reach the rest of the world. And that would begin at Cornelius’ house! By now, Saul had been converted at Damascus and he preached fearlessly there until the Jews tried to kill him. He did the same in Jerusalem until the Grecian Jews tried to kill him. So the brothers took him down to Caesarea, then they sent him to his home town of Tarsus. He would remain there in relative obscurity for 10 years

preaching the gospel. He would become God's Apostle to the Gentiles. But the work must begin with Peter! V21 "Peter went down and said to the men, I'm the one you're looking for."

Beloved, you are the one whom God is looking for. You have heard me say it many times, God has work for each of us to do in whatever capacity that may be. Testifying to your unsaved family and friends. Spending hours on your knees praying that God's Kingdom would come upon those same people. Or some kind of provision for others in some other way. Whatever it is, there are none in God's Kingdom for whom Jesus died that have no work to do. Let out prayer be, as with Peter's words under the sovereignty of God, "Lord I'm the one you are looking for; send me".

Let's pray!