***“Jesus Christ Heals You”***

**Summer 2021, Acts 9:32-35 August 29, 2021**

***Peter said to [Aeneas], “Jesus Christ heals you.  
Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.  
All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*Acts 9:34-35**

**Introduction: Getting the gospel to the Gentiles**

*4 Peter began and explained everything . . . .  18 When they heard this, they had no further objec­tions and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”*

Acts 11:4-18 (confirming the “everyone” of 2:38-38 and 10:43)

**Snapshot of a church living in the fear of the Lord**

*32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. 34 “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*

*36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”*

*39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.*

*40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.*

Acts 9:31-43 (see Mark 2:1-12, 5:37-43)

1) Luke intentionally points us to how the gospel (especially in Mark’s story!) gets traction

2) Peter is doing what he saw his Lord doing, how he saw Jesus doing it

3) Peter is already inviting the scorn of the Judaizers as he “abides along side of” Simon the tanner

**Peter and the Church**

1) It’s about what Jesus is still doing  
 How a I seeing Jesus at work (especially the scattering!) around me?

31 *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day that he was taken up into heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen . . . .*

Acts 1:1

2) Godward, inward, then outward – the church living in the fear of the Lord must honor its widows

With all the outside needs we see, what inside needs are still unmet?

31 *Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.*

Acts 9:31

3) The perfecting of Peter  
 What “I now realize” moment is God preparing for me?

*34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

Acts 10:34-43

4) Where Jesus is still healing  
What is my “healing” grace story?

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

Ephesians 2:1-5



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_ac.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm) *.* His “Behold, He Prays” is especially good at  
[*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0016.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0016.htm)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermon on this text is at  
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048*](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048)

George Whitefield has a sermon on Saul’s conversion at [*https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion*](https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Carl Trueman has a good analysis of the world’s opposition in his recent essay “Dogma Drives the Christian Life” at [*https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life*](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life)

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

# Table Description automatically generated

### Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Acts: at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

### COPIES OF CHRIST'S MANNER

'And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed…. 40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and, turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise.—ACTS ix. 34, 40.

I have put these two miracles together, not only because they were closely connected in time and place, but because they have a very remarkable and instructive feature in common. They are both evidently moulded upon Christ's miracles; are distinct imitations of what Peter had seen Him do. And their likenesses to and differences from our Lord's manner of working are equally noteworthy. It is to the lessons from these two aspects, common to both miracles, that I desire to turn now.

I. First, notice the similarities and the lesson which they teach.

The two cases before us are alike, in that both of them find parallels in our Lord's miracles. The one is the cure of a paralytic, which pairs off with the well-known story in the Gospels concerning the man that was borne by four, and let down through the roof into Christ's presence. The other of them, the raising of Dorcas, or Tabitha, of course corresponds with the three resurrections of dead people which are recorded in the Gospels.

And now, note the likenesses. Jesus Christ said to the paralysed man, 'Arise, take up thy bed.' Peter says to Aeneas, 'Arise, and make thy bed.' The one command was appropriate to the circumstances of a man who was not in his own house, and whose control over his long-disused muscles in obeying Christ's word was a confirmation to himself of the reality and completeness of his cure. The other was appropriate to a man bedridden in his own house; and it had precisely the same purpose as the analogous injunction from our Lord, 'Take up thy bed and walk.' Aeneas was lying at home, and so Peter, remembering how Jesus Christ had demonstrated to others, and affirmed to the man himself, the reality of the miraculous blessing given to him, copies his Master's method, 'Aeneas, make thy bed.' It is an echo and resemblance of the former incident, and is a distinct piece of imitation of it.

And then, if we turn to the other narrative, the intentional moulding of the manner of the miracle, consecrated in the eyes of the loving disciple, because it was Christ's manner, is still more obvious. When Jesus Christ went into the house of Jairus there was the usual hubbub, the noise of the loud Eastern mourning, and He put them all forth, taking with Him only the father and mother of the damsel, and Peter with James and John. When Peter goes into the upper room, where Tabitha is lying, there are the usual noise of lamentation and the clack of many tongues, extolling the virtues of the dead woman. He remembers how Christ had gone about His miracle, and he, in his turn, 'put them all forth.' Mark, who was Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, gives us the very Aramaic words which our Lord employed when He raised the little girl, *Talitha*, the Aramaic word for 'a damsel,' or young girl; *cumi*, which means in that language 'arise.' Is it not singular and beautiful that Peter's word by the bedside of the dead Dorcas is, with the exception of one letter, absolutely identical? Christ says, *Talitha cumi*. Peter remembered the formula by which the blessing was conveyed, and he copied it. 'Tabitha cumi!' Is it not clear that he is posing after his Master's attitude; that he is, consciously or unconsciously, doing what he remembered so well had been done in that other upper room, and that the miracles are both of them shaped after the pattern of the miraculous working of Jesus Christ?

Well, now, although we are no miracle-workers, the very same principle which underlay these two works of supernatural power is to be applied to all our work, and to our lives as Christian people. I do not know whether Peter *meant* to do like Jesus Christ or not; I think rather that he was unconsciously and instinctively dropping into the fashion that to him was so sacred. Love always delights in imitation; and the disciples of a great teacher will unconsciously catch the trick of his intonation, even the awkwardness of his attitudes or the peculiarities of his way of looking at things—only, unfortunately, outsides are a good deal more easily imitated than insides. And many a disciple copies such external trifles, and talks in the tones that have, first of all, brought blessed truths to him, whose resemblance to his teacher goes very little further. The principle that underlies these miracles is just this—get near Jesus Christ, and you will catch His manner. Dwell in fellowship with Him, and whether you are thinking about it or not, there will come some faint resemblance to that Lord into your characters and your way of doing things, so that men will 'take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.' The poor bit of cloth which has held some precious piece of solid perfume will retain fragrance for many a day afterwards, and will bless the scentless air by giving it forth. The man who keeps close to Christ, and has folded Him in his heart, will, like the poor cloth, give forth a sweetness not his own that will gladden and refresh many nostrils. Live in the light, and you will become light. Keep near Christ, and you will be Christlike. Love Him, and love will do to you what it does to many a wedded pair, and to many kindred hearts: it will transfuse into you something of the characteristics of the object of your love. It is impossible to trust Christ, to obey Christ, to hold communion with Him, and to live beside Him, without becoming like Him. And if such be our inward experience, so will be our outward appearance.

But there may be a specific point given to this lesson in regard to Christian people's ways of doing their work in the world and helping and blessing other folk. Although, as I say, we have no miraculous power at our disposal, we do not need it in order to manifest Jesus Christ and His way of working in our work. And if we dwell beside Him, then, depend upon it, all the characteristics—far more precious than the accidents of manner, or tone, or attitude in working a miracle—all the characteristics so deeply and blessedly stamped upon His life of self-sacrifice and man-helping devotion will be reproduced in us. Jesus Christ, when He went through the wards of the hospital of the world, was overflowing with quick sympathy for every sorrow that met His eye. If you and I are living near Him, we shall never steel our hearts nor lock up our sensibilities against any suffering that it is within our power to stanch or to alleviate. Jesus Christ never grudged trouble, never thought of Himself, never was impatient of interruption, never repelled importunity, never sent away empty any outstretched hand. And if we live near Him, self-oblivious willingness to spend and be spent will mark our lives, and we shall not consider that we have the right of possession or of sole enjoyment of any of the blessings that are given to us. Jesus Christ, according to the beautiful and significant words of one of the Gospels, 'healed them that had need of healing.' Why that singular designation for the people that were standing around Him but to teach us that wide as men's necessity was His sympathy, and that broad as the sympathy of Christ were the help and healing which He brought? And so, with like width of compassion, with like perfectness of self-oblivion, with equal remoteness from consciousness of superiority or display of condescension, Christian men should go amongst the sorrowful and the sad and the outcast and do their miracles—'greater works' than those which Christ did, as He Himself has told us—after the manner in which He did His. If they did, the world would be a different place, and the Church would be a different Church, and you would not have people writing in the newspapers to demonstrate that Christianity was 'played out.'

II. Further, note the differences and the lessons from them.

Take the first of the two miracles. 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.' That first clause points to the great difference. Take the second miracle, 'Jesus Christ put them all forth, and stretched out His hand, and said, Damsel, arise!' 'Peter put them all forth, … and said, Tabitha, arise!' but between the putting forth and the miracle he did something which Christ did not do, and he did not do something which Christ did do. 'He kneeled down and prayed.' Jesus Christ did not do that. 'And Jesus put forth His hand, and said, Arise!' Peter did not do that. But he put forth his hand *after* the miracle was wrought; not to communicate life, but to help the living woman to get to her feet; and so, both by what he did in his prayer and by what he did not do after Christ's pattern, the extension of the hand that was the channel of the vitality, he drew a broad distinction between the servant's copy and the Master's original.

The lessons from the differences are such as the following.

Christ works miracles by His inherent power; His servants do their works only as His instruments and organs. I need not dwell upon the former thought; but it is the latter at which I wish to look for a moment. The lesson, then, of the difference is that Christian men, in all their work for the Master and for the world, are ever to keep clear before themselves, and to make very obvious to other people, that they are nothing more than channels and instruments. The less the preacher, the teacher, the Christian benefactor of any sort puts himself in the foreground, or in evidence at all, the more likely are his words and works to be successful. If you hear a man, for instance, preaching a sermon, and you see that he is thinking about himself, he may talk with the tongues of men and of angels, but he will do no good to anybody. The first condition of work for the Lord is—hide yourself behind your message, behind your Master, and make it very plain that His is the power, and that you are but a tool in the Workman's hand.

And then, further, another lesson is, Be very sure of the power that will work in you. What a piece of audacity it was for Peter to go and stand by the paralytic man's couch and say, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' Yes, audacity; unless he had been in such constant and close touch with his Master that he was sure that his Master was working through him. And is it not beautiful to see how absolutely confident he is that Jesus Christ's work was not ended when He went up into heaven; but that there, in that little stuffy room, where the man had lain motionless for eight long years, Jesus Christ was present, and working? O brethren, the Christian Church does not half enough believe in the actual presence and operation of Jesus Christ, here and now, in and through all His servants! We are ready enough to believe that He worked when He was in the world long ago, that He is going to work when He comes back to the world, at some far-off future period. But do we believe that He is verily putting forth His power, in no metaphor, but in simple reality, at present and here, and, if we will, through us?

'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' Be sure that if you keep near Christ, if you will try to mould yourselves after His likeness, if you expect Him to work through you, and do not hinder His work by self-conceit and self-consciousness of any sort, then it will be no presumption, but simple faith which He delights in and will vindicate, if you, too, go and stand by a paralytic and say, 'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,' or go and stand by people dead in trespasses and sins and say, after you have prayed, 'Arise.'

We are here for the very purpose for which Peter was in Lydda and  
Joppa—to carry on and copy the healing and the quickening work of  
Christ, by His present power, and after His blessed example.

### WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED

'There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'—ACTS x. 1-20.

The Church was at first in appearance only a Jewish sect; but the great stride is now to be taken which carries it over the border into the Gentile world, and begins its universal aspect. If we consider the magnitude of the change, and the difficulties of training and prejudice which it had to encounter in the Church itself, we shall not wonder at the abundance of supernatural occurrences which attended it. Without some such impulse, it is difficult to conceive of its having been accomplished.

In this narrative we see the supernatural preparation on both sides. God, as it were, lays His right hand on Cornelius, and His left on Peter, and impels them towards each other. Philip had already preached to the Ethiopian, and probably the anonymous brethren in Acts xi. 20 had already spoken the word to pure Greeks at Antioch; but the importance of Peter's action here is that by reason of his Apostleship, his recognition of Gentile Christians becomes the act of the whole community. His entrance into Cornelius's house ended the Jewish phase of the Church. The epoch was worthy of divine intervention, and the step needed divine warrant. Therefore the abundance of miracle at this point is not superfluous.

I. We have the vision which guided the seeker to the light. Caesarea, as the seat of government, was the focus of Gentilism, and that the Gospel should effect a lodgment there was significant. Still more so was the person whom it first won,—an officer of the Roman army, the very emblem of worldly power, loathed by every true Jew. A centurion was not an officer of high rank, but Cornelius's name suggests the possibility of his connection with a famous Roman family, and the name of the 'band' or 'cohort,' of which his troop was part, suggests that it was raised in Italy, and therefore properly officered by Romans. His residence in Judaea had touched his spirit with some knowledge of, and reverence for, the Jehovah whom this strange people worshipped. He was one of a class numerous in these times of religious unrest, who had been more or less affected by the pure monotheism of the Jew.

It is remarkable that the centurions of the New Testament are all more or less favourably inclined towards Christ and Christianity, and the fact has been laid hold of to throw doubt on the narratives; but it is very natural that similarity of position and training should have produced similarity of thought; and that three or four such persons should have come in contact with Jesus and His Apostles makes no violent demands on probability, while there was no occasion to mention others who were not like-minded. Quartered for considerable periods in the country, and brought into close contact with its religion, and profoundly sceptical of their own, as all but the lowest minds then were, Cornelius and his brother in arms and spirit whose faith drew wondering praise from Jesus, are bright examples of the possibility of earnest religious life being nourished amid grave disadvantages, and preach a lesson, often neglected, that we should be slow to form unfavourable opinions of classes of men, or to decide that those of such and such a profession, or in such and such circumstances, must be of such and such a character.

It would have seemed that the last place to look for the first Gentile Christian would have been in the barracks at Caesarea; and yet there God's angel went for him, and found him. It has often been discussed whether Cornelius was a 'proselyte' or not. It matters very little. He was drawn to the Jews' religion, had adopted their hours of prayer, reverenced their God, had therefore cast off idolatry, gave alms to the people as acknowledgment that their God was his God, and cultivated habitual devotion, which he had diffused among his household, both of slaves and soldiers. It is a beautiful picture of a soul feeling after a deeper knowledge of God, as a plant turns its half-opened flowers to the sun.

Such seekers do not grope without touching. It is not only 'unto the seed of Jacob' that God has never said, 'Seek ye Me in vain.' The story has a message of hope to all such seekers, and sheds precious light on dark problems in regard to the relation of such souls in heathen lands to the light and love of God, The vision appeared to Cornelius in the manner corresponding to his spiritual susceptibility, and it came at the hour of prayer. God's angels ever draw near to hearts opened by desire to receive them. Not in visible form, but in reality, 'bright-harnessed angels stand' all around the chamber where prayer is made. Our hours of supplication are God's hours of communication.

The vision to Cornelius is not to be whittled down to a mental impression. It was an objective, supernatural appearance,—whether to sense or soul matters little. The story gives most graphically the fixed gaze of terror which Cornelius fastened on the angel, and very characteristically the immediate recovery and quick question to which his courage and military promptitude helped him. 'What is it, Lord?' does not speak of terror, but of readiness to take orders and obey. 'Lord' seems to be but a title of reverence here.

In the angel's answer, the order in which prayers and alms are named is the reverse of that in verse 2. Luke speaks as a man, beginning with the visible manifestation, and passing thence to the inward devotion which animated the external beneficence. The angel speaks as God sees, beginning with the inward, and descending to the outward. The strong 'anthropomorphism' of the representation that man's prayer and alms keep God in mind of him needs no vindication and little explanation. It substitutes the mental state which in us originates certain acts for the acts themselves. God's 'remembrance' is in Scripture frequently used to express His loving deeds, which show that their recipient is not forgotten of Him.

But the all-important truth in the words is that the prayers and alms (coming from a devout heart) of a man who had never heard of Jesus Christ were acceptable to God. None the less Cornelius needed Jesus, and the recompense made to him was the knowledge of the Saviour. The belief that in many a heathen heart such yearning after a dimly known God has stretched itself towards light, and been accepted of God, does not in the least conflict with the truth that 'there is none other Name given among men, whereby we must be saved,' but it sheds a bright and most welcome light of hope into that awful darkness. Christ is the only Saviour, but it is not for us to say how far off from the channel in which it flows the water of life may percolate, and feed the roots of distant trees. Cornelius's religion was not a substitute for Christ, but was the occasion of his being led to Christ, and finding full, conscious salvation there. God leads seeking souls by His own wonderful ways; and we may leave all such in His hand, assured that no heart ever hungered after righteousness and was not filled.

The instruction to send for Peter tested Cornelius's willingness to be taught by an unknown Jew, and his belief in the divine origin of the vision. The direction given by which to find this teacher was not promising. A lodger in a tan-yard by the seaside was certainly not a man of position or wealth. But military discipline helped religious reverence; and without delay, as soon as the angel 'was departed' (an expression which gives the outward reality of the appearance strongly), Cornelius's confidential servants, sympathisers with him in his religion, were told all the story, and before nightfall were on their march to Joppa. Swift obedience to whatever God points out as our path towards the light, even if it seem somewhat unattractive, will always mark our conduct if we really long for the light, and believe that He is pointing our way.

II. The vision which guided the light-bearer to the seeker.—All through the night the messengers marched along the maritime plain in which both Caesarea and Joppa lay, much discussing, no doubt, their strange errand, and wondering what they would find. The preparation of Peter, which was as needful as that of Cornelius, was so timed as to be completed just as the messengers stood at the tanner's door.

The first point to note in regard to it is its scene. It is of subordinate importance, but it can scarcely have been entirely unmeaning, that the flashing waters of the Mediterranean, blazing in midday sunshine, stretched before Peter's eyes as he sat on the housetop 'by the seaside.' His thoughts may have travelled across the sea, and he may have wondered what lay beyond the horizon, and whether there were men there to whom Christ's commission extended. 'The isles' of which prophecy had told that they should 'wait for His law' were away out in the mysterious distance. Some expansion of spirit towards regions beyond may have accompanied his gaze. At all events, it was by the shore of the great highway of nations and of truth that the vision which revealed that all men were 'cleansed' filled the eye and heart of the Apostle, and told him that, in his calling as 'fisher of men,' a wider water than the land-locked Sea of Galilee was his.

We may also note the connection of the form of the vision with his circumstances. His hunger determined its shape. The natural bodily sensations coloured his state of mind even in trance, and afforded the point of contact for God's message. It does not follow that the vision was only the consequence of his hunger, as has been suggested by critics who wish to get rid of the supernatural. But the form which it took teaches us how mercifully God is wont to mould His communications according to our needs, and how wisely He shapes them, so as to find entrance through even the lower wants. The commonest bodily needs may become avenues for His truth, if our prayer accompanies our hunger.

The significance of the vision is plain to us, though Peter was 'much perplexed' about it. In the light of the event, we understand that the 'great sheet let down from heaven by four corners,' and containing all manner of creatures, is the symbol of universal humanity (to use modern language). The four corners correspond to the four points of the compass,—north, south, east, and west,—the contents to the swarming millions of men. Peter would perceive no more in the command to 'kill and eat' than the abrogation of Mosaic restrictions. Meditation was needful to disclose the full extent of the revolution shadowed by the vision and its accompanying words. The old nature of Peter was not so completely changed but that a flash of it breaks out still. The same self-confidence which had led him to 'rebuke' Jesus, and to say, 'This shall not be unto Thee,' speaks in his unhesitating and irreverent 'Not so, Lord!'

The naive reason he gives for not obeying—namely, his never having done as he was now bid to do—is charmingly illogical and human. God tells him to do a new thing, and his reason for not doing it is that it is new. Use and wont are set up by us all against the fresh disclosures of God's will. The command to kill and eat was not repeated. It was but the introduction to the truth which was repeated thrice, the same number of times as Peter had denied his Master and had received his charge to feed His sheep.

That great truth has manifold applications, but its direct purpose as regards Peter is to teach that all restrictions which differentiated Jew from Gentile are abolished. 'Cleansing' does not here apply to moral purifying, but to the admission of all mankind to the same standing as the Jew. Therefore the Gospel is to be preached to all men, and the Jewish Christian has no pre-eminence.

Peter's perplexity as to the meaning of the vision is very intelligible. It was not so plain as to carry its own interpretation, but, like most other of God's teachings, was explained by circumstances. What was next done made the best commentary on what had just been beheld. While patient reflection is necessary to do due honour to God's teachings and to discover their bearing on events, it is generally true that events unfold their significance as meditation alone never can. Life is the best commentator on God's word. The three men down at the door poured light on the vision on the housetop. But the explanation was not left to circumstances. The Spirit directed Peter to go with the messengers, and thus taught him the meaning of the enigmatical words which he had heard from heaven.

It is to be remembered that the Apostle had no need of fresh illumination as to the world-wide preaching of the Gospel. Christ's commission to 'the uttermost parts of the earth' ever rang in his ears, as we may be sure. But what he did need was the lesson that the Gentiles could come into the Church without going through the gate of Judaism. If all peculiar sanctity was gone from the Jew, and all men shared in the 'cleansing,' there was no need for keeping up any of the old restrictions, or insisting on Gentiles being first received into the Israelitish community as a stage in their progress towards Christianity.

It took Peter and the others years to digest the lesson given on the housetop, but he began to put it in practice that day. How little he knew the sweep of the truth then declared to him! How little we have learned it yet! All exclusiveness which looks down on classes or races, all monkish asceticism which taboos natural appetites and tastes, all morbid scrupulosity which shuts out from religious men large fields of life, all Pharisaism which says 'The temple of the Lord are we,' are smitten to dust by the great words which gather all men into the same ample, impartial divine love, and, in another aspect, give Christian culture and life the charter of freest use of all God's fair world, and place the distinction between clean and unclean in the spirit of the user rather than in the thing used. 'Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled… is nothing pure.'

### 'GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS'

'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, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 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. 83. 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 art commanded thee of God. 34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. 35. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) 37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 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. 39. 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: 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. 42. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. 44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.'—ACTS x. 30-44.

This passage falls into three parts: Cornelius's explanation, Peter's sermon, and the descent of the Spirit on the new converts. The last is the most important, and yet is told most briefly. We may surely recognise the influence of Peter's personal reminiscences in the scale of the narrative, and may remember that Luke and Mark were thrown together in later days.

I. Cornelius repeats what his messengers had already told Peter, but in fuller detail. He tells how he was occupied when the angel appeared. He was keeping the Jewish hour of prayer, and the fact that the vision came to him as he prayed had attested to him its heavenly origin. If we would see angels, the most likely place to behold them is in the secret place of prayer. He tells, too, that the command to send for Peter was a consequence of God's remembrance of his prayer ('therefore,' verse 32). His prayers and alms showed that he was 'of the light,' and therefore he was directed to what would yield further light.

The command to send for Peter is noteworthy in two respects. It was, first, a test of humility and obedience. Cornelius, as a Roman officer, would be tempted to feel the usual contempt for one of the subject race, and, unless his eagerness to know more of God's will overbore his pride, to kick at the idea of sending to beg the favour of the presence and instruction of a Jew, and of one, too, who could find no better quarters than a tanner's house. The angel's voice commanded, but it did not compel. Cornelius bore the test, and neither waived aside the vision as a hallucination to which it was absurd for a practical man to attend, nor recoiled from the lowliness of the proposed teacher. He pocketed official and racial loftiness, and, as he emphasises, 'forthwith' despatched his message. It was as if an English official in the Punjab had been sent to a Sikh 'Guru' for teaching.

The other remarkable point about the command is that Philip was probably in Caesarea at the time. Why should Peter have been brought, then, by two visions and two long journeys? The subsequent history explains why. For the storm of criticism in the Jerusalem church provoked by Cornelius's baptism would have raged with tenfold fury if so revolutionary an act had been done by any less authoritative person than the leader of the Apostles. The Lord would stamp His own approval on the deed which marked so great an expansion of the Church, and therefore He makes the first of the Apostles His agent, and that by a double vision.

'Thou hast well done that thou art come,'—a courteous welcome, with just a trace of the doubt which had occupied Cornelius during the 'four days,' whether this unknown Jew would obey so strange an invitation. Courtesy and preparedness to receive the unknown message beautifully blend in Cornelius's closing words, which do not directly ask Peter to speak, but declare the auditors' eagerness to hear, as well as their confidence that what he says will be God's voice.

A variant reading in verse 33 gives 'in thy sight' for 'in the sight of God,' and has much to recommend it. But in any case we have here the right attitude for us all in the presence of the uttered will and mind of God. Where such open-eared and open-hearted preparedness marks the listeners, feebler teachers than Peter will win converts. The reason why much earnest Christian teaching is vain is the indifference and non-expectant attitude of the hearers, who are not hearkeners. Seed thrown on the wayside is picked up by the birds.

II. Peter's sermon is, on the whole, much like his other addresses which are abundantly reported in the early part of the Acts. The great business of the preachers then was to tell the history of Jesus. Christianity is, first, a recital of historical events, from which, no doubt, principles are deduced, and which necessarily lead on to doctrines; but the facts are first.

But the familiar story is told to Cornelius with some variation of tone. And it is prefaced by a great word, which crystallises the large truth that had sprung into consciousness and startling power in Peter, as the result of his own and Cornelius's experience. He had not previously thought of God as 'a respecter of persons,' but the conviction that He was not had never blazed with such sun-clearness before him as it did now. Jewish narrowness had, unconsciously to himself, somewhat clouded it; but these four days had burned in on him, as if it were a new truth, that 'in every nation' there may be men accepted of God, because they 'fear Him and work righteousness.'

That great saying is twisted from its right meaning when it is interpreted as discouraging the efforts of Christians to carry the Gospel to the heathen; for, if the 'light of nature' is sufficient, what was Peter sent to Caesarea for? But it is no less maltreated when evangelical Christians fail to grasp its world-wide significance, or doubt that in lands where Christ's name has not been proclaimed there are souls groping for the light, and seeking to obey the law written on their hearts. That there are such, and that such are 'accepted of Him,' and led by His own ways to the fuller light, is obviously taught in these words, and should be a welcome thought to us all.

The tangled utterances which immediately follow, sound as if speech staggered under the weight of the thoughts opening before the speaker. Whatever difficulty attends the construction, the intention is clear,—to contrast the limited scope of the message, as confined to the children of Israel, with its universal destination as now made clear. The statement which in the Authorised and Revised Versions is thrown into a parenthesis is really the very centre of the Apostle's thought. Jesus, who has hitherto been preached to Israel, is 'Lord of all,' and the message concerning Him is now to be proclaimed, not in vague outline and at second hand, as it had hitherto reached Cornelius, but in full detail, and as a message in which he was concerned.

Contrast the beginning and the ending of the discourse,—'the word sent unto the children of Israel' and 'every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.' A remarkable variation in the text is suggested by Blass in his striking commentary, who would omit 'Lord' and read, 'The word which He sent to the children of Israel, bringing the good tidings of peace through Jesus Christ,—this [word] belongs to all.' That reading does away with the chief difficulties, and brings out clearly the thought which is more obscurely expressed in a contorted sentence by the present reading.

The subsequent *resume* of the life of Jesus is substantially the same as is found in Peter's other sermons. But we may note that the highest conceptions of our Lord's nature are not stated. It is hard to suppose that Peter after Pentecost had not the same conviction as burned in his confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But in these early discourses neither the Divinity and Incarnation nor the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is set forth. He is the Christ, 'anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.' God is with Him (Nicodemus had got as far as that). He is 'ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.'

We note, too, that His teaching is not touched upon, nor any of the profounder aspects of His work as the Revealer of God, but His beneficence and miraculous deliverances of devil-ridden men. His death is declared, but without any of the accusations of His murderers, which, like lance-thrusts, 'pricked' Jewish hearers. Nor is the efficacy of that death as the sacrifice for the world's sin touched upon, but it is simply told as a fact, and set in contrast with the Resurrection. These were the plain facts which had first to be accepted.

The only way of establishing facts is by evidence of eye-witnesses. So Peter twice (verses 39, 41) adduces his own and his colleagues' evidence. But the facts are not yet a gospel, unless they are further explained as well as established. Did such things happen? The answer is, 'We saw them.' What did they mean? The answer begins by adducing the 'witness' of the Apostles to a different order of truths, which requires a different sort of witness. Jesus had bidden them 'testify' that He is to be Judge of living and dead; that is, of all mankind. Their witness to that can only rest on His word.

Nor is that all. There is yet another body of 'witnesses' to yet another class of truths. 'All the prophets' bear witness to the great truth which makes the biography of the Man the gospel for all men,—that the deepest want of all men is satisfied through the name which Peter ever rang out as all-powerful to heal and bless. The forgiveness of sins through the manifested character and work of Jesus Christ is given on condition of faith to any and every one who believes, be he Jew or Gentile, Galilean fisherman or Roman centurion. Cornelius may have known little of the prophets, but he knew the burden of sin. He did not know all that we know of Jesus, and of the way in which forgiveness is connected with His work, but he did know now that it was connected, and that this Jesus was risen from the dead, and was to be the Judge. His faith went out to that Saviour, and as he heard he believed.

III. Therefore the great gift, attesting the divine acceptance of him and the rest of the hearers, came at once. There had been no confession of their faith, much less had there been baptism, or laying on of Apostolic hands. The sole qualification and condition for the reception of the Spirit which John lays down in his Gospel when he speaks of the 'Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive,' was present here, and it was enough. Peter and his brethren might have hesitated about baptizing an uncircumcised believer. The Lord of the Church showed Peter that He did not hesitate.

So, like a true disciple, Peter followed Christ's lead, and though 'they of the circumcision' were struck with amazement, he said to himself, 'Who am I, that I should withstand God?' and opened his heart to welcome these new converts as possessors of 'like precious faith' as was demonstrated by their possession of the same Spirit. Would that Peter's willingness to recognise all who manifest the Spirit of Christ, whatever their relation to ecclesiastical regulations, had continued the law and practice of the Church!

### PETER'S APOLOGIA

'And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay, and eat. 8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'—ACTS xi. 1-18.

Peter's action in regard to Cornelius precipitated a controversy which was bound to come if the Church was to be anything more than a Jewish sect. It brought to light the first tendency to form a party in the Church. 'They… of the circumcision' were probably 'certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,' and were especially zealous for all the separating prescriptions of the ceremonial law. They were scarcely a party as yet, but the little rift was destined to grow, and they became Paul's bitterest opponents through all his life, dogging him with calumnies and counterworking his toil. It is a black day for a Church when differences of opinion lead to the formation of cliques. Zeal for truth is sadly apt to enlist spite, malice, and blindness to a manifest work of God, as its allies.

Poor Peter, no doubt, expected that the brethren would rejoice with him in the extension of the Gospel to 'the Gentiles,' but his reception in Jerusalem was very unlike his hopes. The critics did not venture to cavil at his preaching to Gentiles. Probably none of them had any objection to such being welcomed into the Church, for they can scarcely have wished to make the door into it narrower than that into the synagogue, but they insisted that there was no way in but through the synagogue. By all means, said they, let Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews, by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do. Thus they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men, but for eating with them. That eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company into the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness. We condemn such narrowness, but do many of us not practise it in other forms? Wherever Christians demand adoption of external usages, over and above exercise of penitent faith, as a condition of brotherly recognition, they are walking in the steps of them 'of the circumcision.'

Peter's answer to the critics is the true answer to all similar hedging up of the Church, for he contents himself with showing that he was only following God's action in every step of the way which he took, and that God, by the gift of the divine Spirit, had shown that He had taken these uncircumcised men into His fellowship, before Peter dared to 'eat with them.' He points to four facts which show God's hand in the matter, and thinks that he has done enough to vindicate himself thereby. The first is his vision on the housetop. He tells that he was praying when it came, and what God shows to a praying spirit is not likely to mislead. He tells that he was 'in a trance,'—a condition in which prophets had of old received their commands. That again was a guarantee for the divine origin of the vision in the eyes of every Jew, though nowadays it is taken by anti-supernaturalists as a demonstration of its morbidness and unreliableness. He tells of his reluctance to obey the command to 'kill and eat.' A flash of the old brusque spirit impelled his flat refusal, 'Not so, Lord!' and his daring to argue with his Lord still, as he had done with Him on earth. He tells of the interpreting and revolutionary word, evoked by his audacious objection, and then he tells how 'this was done thrice,' so that there could be no mistake in his remembrance of it, and then that the whole was drawn up into heaven,—a sign that the purpose of the vision was accomplished when that word was spoken. What, then, was the meaning of it?

Clearly it swept away at once the legal distinction of clean and unclean meats, and of it, too, may be spoken what Mark, Peter's mouthpiece, writes of earthly words of Christ's: 'This He said, making all meats clean.' But with the sweeping away of that distinction much else goes, for it necessarily involves the abrogation of the whole separating ordinances of the law, and of the distinction between clean and unclean persons. Its wider application was not seen at the moment, but it flashed on him, no doubt, when face to face with Cornelius. God had cleansed him, in that his prayers had 'gone up for a memorial before God,' and so Peter saw that 'in every nation,' and not among Jews only, there might be men cleansed by God. What was true of Cornelius must be true of many others. So the whole distinction between Jew and Gentile was cut up by the roots. Little did Peter know the width of the principle revealed to him then, as all of us know but little of the full application of many truths which we believe. But he obeyed so much of the command as he understood, and more of it gradually dawned on his mind, as will always be the case if we obey what we know.

The second fact was the coincident arrival of the messengers and the distinct command to accompany them. Peter could distinguish quite assuredly his own thoughts from divine instructions, as his account of the dialogue in the trance shows. How he distinguished is not told; that he distinguished is. The coincidence in time clearly pointed to one divine hand working at both ends of the line,—Caesarea and Joppa. It interpreted the vision which had 'much perplexed' Peter as to what it 'might mean.' But he was not left to interpret it by his own pondering. The Spirit spoke authoritatively, and the whole force of his justification of himself depends on the fact that he knew that the impulse which made him set out to Caesarea was not his own. If the reading of the Revised Version is adopted in verse 12, 'making no distinction,' the command plainly referred to the vision, and showed Peter that he was to make no distinction of 'clean and unclean' in his intercourse with these Gentiles.

The third fact is the vision to Cornelius, of which he was told on arriving. The two visions fitted into each other, confirmed each other, interpreted each other. We may estimate the greatness of the step in the development of the Church which the admission of Cornelius into it made, and the obstacles on both sides, by the fact that both visions were needed to bring these two men together. Peter would never have dreamed of going with the messengers if he had not had his narrowness beaten out of him on the housetop, and Cornelius would never have dreamed of sending to Joppa if he had not seen the angel. The cleft between Jew and Gentile was so wide that God's hand had to be applied on both sides to press the separated parts together. He had plainly done it, and that was Peter's defence.

The fourth fact is the gift of the Spirit to these Gentiles. That is the crown of Peter's vindication, and his question, 'Who was I, that I could withstand God?' might be profitably pondered and applied by those whose ecclesiastical theories oblige them to deny the 'orders' and the 'validity of the sacraments' and the very name of a Church, to bodies of Christians who do not conform to their polity. If God, by the gift of His Spirit manifest in its fruits, owns them, they have the true 'notes of the Church,' and 'they of the circumcision' who recoil from recognising them do themselves more harm thereby than they inflict on these. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God,' even though some brother may be 'angry' that the Father welcomes them.

# The Perfecting of Peter (Acts 9:32-10:48)

 Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048*](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048)

### Introduction[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P19_6765)

Matthew and Luke have already introduced us to a centurion. Luke’s account particularly serves as a backdrop to our text in the Book of Acts:

1 After Jesus had finished teaching all this to the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave who was highly regarded, but who was sick and at the point of death. 3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they urged him earnestly, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, 5 because he loves our nation, and even built our synagogue.” 6 So Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not presume to come to you. Instead, say the word, and my servant must be healed. 8 For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” 9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him. He turned and said to the crowd that followed him, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith!” 10 So when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave well” ([Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke’s earlier text is relevant to our passage in Acts in several ways. Here, Jesus deals with a devout centurion, a centurion much like Cornelius. The descriptions of these two centurions are quite similar, in that both men are pious and are well regarded by the Jews. In Luke’s Gospel, the centurion urges Jesus not to come to his house, while in Acts, Cornelius does invite Peter into his home (just as Peter had invited his servants into the home in which he was staying). Finally, Jesus commends the faith of the centurion ([Luke 7:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). Matthew goes into greater detail:

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help: 6 “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible anguish.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” 8 But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Instead, just say the word and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this’ and he does it.” 10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “ **I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In other words, Jesus says that because of his faith, this Gentile centurion will enter into the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, while many Jews will be cast into outer darkness (hell). The significance of these observations will become clear as we study our text in Acts.

I have chosen to end this message at [Acts 10:35](javascript:%7b%7d) because the focus of this lesson is on Peter. It is Peter who is being perfected in our text, and thus it is Peter who becomes a **“fulfilled Jew”** in this passage. In our next lesson, we will consider the impact of Peter’s visit on Cornelius and on those Gentiles gathered with him, as well as upon the Jews. I believe the lesson God teaches Peter in [Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d) and 11 is one of the most prominent and one of the most crucial theological truths in the Book of Acts. These chapters are the “high water mark” of Acts, theologically speaking. Therefore, we must be sure to get the message God was teaching Peter.

### Peter Heals Aeneas at Lydda [Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)

32 Now as Peter was traveling around from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda. 33 He found there a man named Aeneas who had been confined to a mattress for eight years because he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed!” And immediately he got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord ([Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter has boldly proclaimed the gospel in Jerusalem. In [Acts 8](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter and John went down to Samaria when they heard that many had trusted in Jesus. It was not until these two apostles arrived and laid their hands on the new believers that the Spirit came upon them in power. After departing from Samaria, Peter visited a number of Israelite cities to which the saints in Jerusalem had scattered (see [Acts 8:1, 4](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). In our text, Peter first visits Lydda, then Joppa, and finally Caesarea.[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P29_12274)

There are a group of believers in Lydda ([Acts 9:32](javascript:%7b%7d)). Aeneas may well have been one of these believers, though we cannot say for sure. Nevertheless, Peter encounters Aeneas, a man whose paralysis had confined him to a bed for eight years ([Acts 9:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). Seeing his condition, Peter spoke up, telling this man that Jesus the Christ had healed him ([Acts 8:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). Furthermore, Peter instructed Aeneas to get up and take his bed with him. Aeneas did get up and walk and presumably took his bed with him, which inspired many others to trust in Jesus for salvation.

What is of particular interest to me is that this healing is similar to the healing of the paralytic in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d):[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P32_13165)

18 Just then some men showed up, carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and place him before Jesus. 19 But since they found no way to carry him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the roof tiles right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” 21 Then the experts in the law and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, “Who is this man who is uttering blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their hostile thoughts, he said to them, “Why are you raising objections within yourselves? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he said to the paralyzed man – “ **I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher and go home**.” 25 Immediately he stood up before them, picked up the stretcher he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. 26 Then astonishment seized them all, and they glorified God. They were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen incredible things today” ([Luke 5:18-26](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

Two similarities are evident. First, the condition of the man in Luke’s Gospel is similar to that of the lame man in [Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d). Both men were paralyzed. Second, the words Peter spoke to Aeneas are similar to those spoken by Jesus:

“. . . stand up, take your stretcher and go home” ([Luke 5:24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Get up and make your own bed!” ([Acts 9:34](javascript:%7b%7d))

We will see more about this similarity later in the lesson.

### Peter and the Raising of Dorcas at Joppa [Acts 9:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d)

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became sick and died. When they had washed her body, they placed it in an upstairs room. 38 Because Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent them all outside, knelt down, and prayed. Turning to the body, he said, “ Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her get up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive. 42 This became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 So Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a man named Simon, a tanner ([Acts 9:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Peter was some distance away, and thus Dorcas would have been dead for a considerable period of time before he arrived – long enough that raising her to life would have been a substantial miracle (similar to the raising of Lazarus in [John 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). This is the first record of Peter (or any other apostle) raising someone from the dead. The power of the Lord was clearly upon Peter.

What is most striking about this miracle is its similarity to the raising of the daughter of Jairus as recorded in [Mark 5](javascript:%7b%7d):[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P42_16453)

35 While he was still speaking, people came from the synagogue ruler’s house saying, “Your daughter has died. Why trouble the teacher any longer?” 36 But Jesus, paying no attention to what was said, told the synagogue ruler, “Do not be afraid; just believe.” 37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of [James. 38](javascript:%7b%7d) They came to the house of the synagogue ruler where he saw noisy confusion and people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he entered he said to them, “Why are you distressed and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.” 40 And they began making fun of him. But he put them all outside and he took the child’s father and mother and his own companions and went into the room where the child was. 41 Then, gently taking the child by the hand, he said to her, “ **Talitha koum**,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” 42 The girl got up at once and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). They were completely astonished at this. 43 He strictly ordered that no one should know about this, and told them to give her something to eat ([Mark 5:35-43](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Peter not only does what Jesus has done; he does so speaking similar words.

### Double Vision [Acts 10:1-16](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort. 2 He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and prayed to God regularly. 3 About three o’clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, “Cornelius.” 4 Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, “What is it, Lord?” The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called [Peter. 6](javascript:%7b%7d) This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” 7 When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius called two of his personal servants and a devout soldier from among those who served him, 8 and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa ([Acts 10:1-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke introduces us to a centurion named Cornelius. Luke’s description of Cornelius is similar to that of the centurion Luke has described in [Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d). Both are devout, God-fearing men. Both are known for their prayers and for their acts of charity. Cornelius seems to have communicated his faith to those in his household because they appear to share his faith. The vision Cornelius received came at three o’clock in the afternoon, the normal time for Jewish prayers in the afternoon (see [Acts 3:1; 10:30](javascript:%7b%7d)). After his angelic visitation, Cornelius explained everything to his servants and the devout soldier he sent to Peter’s residence.

When the angel appears to Cornelius, it is not because this man lacks faith, but because he (like the centurion in [Luke 7](javascript:%7b%7d)) would not have even considered asking a Jew to his home. Thus, God had to prepare both Cornelius and Peter for this breech of tradition. When the angel appeared, Cornelius responded in a way that revealed his faith: **“What is it Lord?”** (verse 4). I am reminded of Samuel’s response to the divine call in [1 Samuel 3](javascript:%7b%7d): “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” ([1 Samuel 3:10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Cornelius is a most remarkable man.

9 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. 11 He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. 13 Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!” 14 But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!” 15 The voice spoke to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!” 16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven ([Acts 10:9-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

At just the right moment in time, God spoke to Peter in a vision. This vision, like that of Cornelius, came at a time when the recipient of the vision was in prayer. It was lunch time, and Peter was hungry. I can almost hear Peter say, “I’m hungry enough to eat a horse!” What came next would cause Peter to lose his appetite. The meal was still being prepared and so Peter used this time to pray. In his vision, Peter was instructed to kill and eat various kinds of animal life, some of which would have clearly been unclean according to Jewish food laws. Some of these unclean animals (such as the **“reptiles”**) were also totally unappealing as food.

Peter’s response to the Lord’s instruction in this vision is interesting when compared to the earlier responses of Saul and Cornelius:

Saul: “Who are you Lord?” ([Acts 9:5](javascript:%7b%7d))

Cornelius: “What is it Lord?” ([Acts 10:4](javascript:%7b%7d))

Peter: “Certainly not, Lord!” ([Acts 10:14](javascript:%7b%7d))

The vision is repeated two more times, so it is very clear to Peter that God is revealing something of great importance.[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P58_21702) Peter had no idea at that moment what the dream meant, or how it was to be applied, but that would soon become clear.

### Cornelius’ Messengers Arrive From Caesarea [Acts 10:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)

17 Now while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon’s house was and approached the gate. 18 They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest. 19 While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Look! Three men are looking for you. 20 But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them.” 21 So Peter went down to the men and said, “Here I am, the person you’re looking for. Why have you come?” 22 They said, “Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you.” 23 So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests. On the next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him ([Acts 10:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

You can imagine Peter’s bewilderment as a result of his noontime vision. What did it mean? What was he supposed to do about it? Just then the messengers from Cornelius arrived at the door of Simon the tanner’s home. These men had been told to go to Joppa and find a man named Simon Peter, who was staying at the home of a tanner named Simon, whose house was by the sea. This was not the same as being given an address, which meant that the messengers had to stop and ask for directions[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P62_23543) (something men are not found doing very often). I believe this detail is supplied because it indicates that these Gentile messengers did not arrive secretly. They must have asked directions on more than one occasion, drawing attention to themselves and to their arrival. Add to this the fact that they stood outside Simon’s house, calling out to ask if this was where Simon Peter was staying. This had to attract a good deal of attention and arouse considerable curiosity.

It was at this moment that the Spirit gave Peter some very clear instruction. He informed Peter that three men were looking for him and told him to go downstairs and accompany them without hesitation, because He had sent them. So far as we are told, the Spirit did not mention that these three men were Gentiles, though this would become apparent all too soon. Peter went downstairs and identified himself and then asked the reason for their coming. They told Peter about Cornelius and then repeated the story of how the angel had instructed Cornelius to send for him because he had a message for them.

Peter invited these men into the house where they spent the night (and no doubt were also fed). I cannot help but think that it was a whole lot easier for Peter to invite these men into Simon’s home in Joppa than it would have been to invite these Gentiles into a Jewish home in Jerusalem. The fact that Peter was able to stay with a tanner, an occupation that may well have rendered him unclean, may have indicated that Peter had already become less meticulous about some of the Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean.

### Peter Gets the Message [Acts 10:24-35](javascript:%7b%7d)

24 The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting anxiously for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. 26 But Peter helped him up, saying, “Stand up. I too am a mere mortal.” 27 Peter continued talking with him as he went in, and he found many people gathered together. 28 He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. 29 Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?” 30 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house, and suddenly a man in shining clothing stood before me 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your acts of charity have been remembered before God. 32 Therefore send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. This man is staying as a guest in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea.’ 33 Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.” 34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him ([Acts 10:24-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When the centurion pled with Jesus to heal his servant ([Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)), Jesus set out on his way to this man’s home. When Jesus was not far from his house, the centurion sent some of his servants to persuade Jesus not to come any further, but simply to heal his servant from a distance. Now why would anyone not want Jesus to be a guest in their home? The centurion knew all too well that Jews did not defile themselves by entering a Gentile home (compare [John 18:28](javascript:%7b%7d)), so he made it easy for Jesus not to come any further. And in so doing, he demonstrated his great faith. He believed that Jesus could heal from a distance, because of His great authority.

Cornelius was well aware of this matter of defilement as well, but he had been divinely instructed to invite Peter to his home. It was thus with a great sense of expectation that Cornelius waited for Peter’s arrival, along with those friends and relatives he had summoned as well. When Peter arrived, Cornelius prostrated himself at the feet of Peter. Most translations indicate that Cornelius **“worshipped”** Peter. I am inclined to agree with the NIV, which says that he **“fell at his feet in reverence.”** I don’t believe that Cornelius worshipped Peter as though he were God. I think he showed reverence for Peter as God’s spokesman, as an apostle.

I do find Peter’s response to this reverential response most informative. Peter refuses to receive worship, and rightly so. When Paul healed the lame man at Lystra, the people attempted to worship him, along with Barnabas. These two apostles fervently sought to put an end to such worship (see [Acts 14:8-18](javascript:%7b%7d)). Herod received worship and seemed to enjoy it, and he died a terrible death as a result ([Acts 12:20-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter made it clear to Cornelius that he was but a mere man, and as such, Cornelius’ act of reverence was not only uncalled for, but inappropriate. Those who would give men too much glory and reverence should listen carefully to the words of Peter.

Going inside the house, Peter discovered that many had gathered in anticipation of his arrival. Peter began by explaining how it was that he was divinely directed to enter this Gentile home, in spite of his predisposition not to do so. Peter’s words are both interesting and significant: 28 *He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. 29 Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”* ([Acts 10:28-29](javascript:%7b%7d))

I find it interesting that Peter believes it is unlawful for him to associate with or visit a Gentile (verse 28). As I read these words, I asked myself this question: “Just where does it say in the Old Testament Law that a Jew cannot associate with a Gentile by entering his home?” I then came upon this statement by A. T. Robertson:

But there is no O.T. regulation forbidding such social contact with Gentiles, though the rabbis had added it and had made it binding by custom. There is nothing more binding on the average person than social custom.[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P74_30029)

I am therefore inclined to say that having social contact with a Gentile was not contrary to Old Testament law, but rather was a violation of Jewish tradition. One might be defiled by eating foods that were unclean, but we must remember that our Lord Jesus nullified these food laws:

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. 15 There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.” 17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? 19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” ( **This means all foods are clean**.) 20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from within and defile a person” ([Mark 7:14-23](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Another thing that fascinates me is that Peter is now somehow able to grasp not only the principle, but also its application. I am reminded of the “old Peter” we find in Matthew. In chapter 14, Jesus feeds the 5,000, even though the disciples didn’t see how it was possible. In chapter 15, the disciples (which surely included Peter) could not seem to figure out how God could feed the 4,000, even after the feeding of the 5,000. In chapter 16, Jesus warned of the **“leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** ([Matthew 16:6](javascript:%7b%7d)), and all the disciples could think about was literal bread. Only the Canaanite woman understood that bread was a symbol, and she grasped the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words ([Matthew 15:21-28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now, Peter seems able to leap beyond the literal message conveyed in his dream (don’t call food unclean that God has made clean) to the deeper meaning – don’t call people unclean whom God has made clean:

He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean” ([Acts 10:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

But it went even beyond this. Peter was just now beginning to understand that God does not show partiality among those whom He saves:

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

God broke down the old barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles, making one new man, one new entity, the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. This was accomplished through the saving work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary:

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh – who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands – 12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, 15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, 16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, 18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, 20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([Ephesians 2:11-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This truth was a mystery, revealed but not understood by Old Testament saints; it was a mystery God chose to unveil through the ministry of Paul and others:

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3 that by revelation the divine secret was made known to me, as I wrote before briefly. 4 When reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into this secret of Christ. 5 Now this secret was not disclosed to people in former generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, 6 namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the exercise of his power. 8 To me – less than the least of all the saints – this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ 9 and to enlighten everyone about God’s secret plan – a secret that has been hidden for ages in God who has created all things. 10 The purpose of this enlightenment is that through the church the multifaceted wisdom of God should now be disclosed to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access to God because of Christ’s faithfulness ([Ephesians 3:1-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter now asks why Cornelius has sent for him. Cornelius repeats the story of how he received instructions from an angel to summon Peter. He tells Peter that they now eagerly await the word which he was commanded to bring to them. Peter begins his message by telling them what God has just taught him: God does not show partiality, but He saves both Jews and Gentiles by grace, through faith in the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

### Conclusion

I have chosen to conclude this lesson here, because the focus has been on Peter and Cornelius. In the verses that follow, Peter will proclaim the gospel, Cornelius and those gathered will believe, the Spirit will baptize them, and then Peter’s Jewish colleagues in Jerusalem will object. That is another lesson. But for now, let us conclude by focusing on the lessons that we should learn from our text.

*First, we should observe from our text that it is God who prepares and changes men’s hearts.* In [Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d), God prepared Saul for conversion in some rather dramatic ways. He also prepared the heart of Ananias for the task He had for him. Objections were divinely overcome; they were not set aside by debate or human efforts. In our text, we see God’s preparation of both Peter (the reluctant believer) and Cornelius. Peter was reluctant to associate with Gentiles, much less to take the gospel to them. God’s preparatory work in Peter’s heart was done just as the messengers sent by Cornelius arrived. Cornelius was reluctant to ask a Jew to enter his house (just as the centurion in [Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d) had been), but God prepared him to obey and send for Peter, just as He prepared all in his house to believe the gospel Peter would proclaim.

Our friend, Colin McDougall of Church of the Open Door, has rightly contended that we need to spend much more time in prayer for evangelism, asking God to prepare those for the gospel whom He will send our way. We should ask God to prepare our hearts so that we might perceive open hearts and proclaim Jesus. But we should also ask God to work in the hearts of those to whom we desire to speak. Prepared hearts respond to God’s Word.

Note, too, the perfection of God’s timing in preparing hearts. God’s perfect timing is evident in the conversion of the Ethiopian in chapter 8, of Saul in chapter 9, and of Cornelius and his guests in chapter 10. God’s timing is frequently not ours, but His timing is perfect. When He sets out to do something, He prepares the way for it to happen, and He orchestrates every detail perfectly. Have you questioned God’s timing, or God’s ability to save? If so, I suggest that you meditate on these conversion accounts in Acts.

*Second, we should learn that prayer is a two-way conversation.* The Book of Acts has great lessons for us on the subject of prayer. When men and women pray in Acts, great things happen. What I see in our text is that God speaks to men when they are in prayer. Prayer is not just men and women speaking to God; prayer is God speaking to those who are listening to Him when they pray. In chapter 9, Paul’s vision is apparently associated with Paul’s prayer (see [Acts 9:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)). In chapter 10, Cornelius was in prayer when God spoke to him about sending for Peter.[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P93_39311) Many of us spend all of our time talking to God, rather than listening for God to speak to us in some way. In my life, this is usually through thoughts that come to my mind. Sometimes it is insight into a passage that I’m thinking about, or praying about. Sometimes it is a thought about how to respond to a difficult situation. I have found that having a pencil and paper nearby is helpful when praying. Prayer is a two-way conversation.

*Third, we should observe that Peter has become a fulfilled Jew.* Consider how the argument of our text develops. First, we read about how God used Peter to heal Aeneas ([Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)), and there is the account of the raising of Dorcas, who had died ([Acts 9:35-43](javascript:%7b%7d)). In these two accounts, we see Peter performing miracles that remind us of miracles Jesus had performed. We even find a similarity in the words Peter employed and those Jesus used. In other words, Peter is acting and talking like Jesus.

Years ago, I was preaching a sermon, and I said the word “God.” As this word came out of my mouth, I realized that I had pronounced it just like one of my heroes, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. Without even thinking about it, I had imitated Dr. Johnson. That is a compliment to Dr. Johnson. In our text, Peter was beginning to act and to talk like Jesus. This is exactly the way it should be.

It is not until Acts chapter 10, however, that Peter really begins to think like Jesus. Peter and his fellow-apostles had some distorted ideas about the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. He could only think of Gentiles coming to faith by becoming Jews – that is, they could only enter into the blessings of God’s covenant by converting to Judaism as a proselyte. When Jesus commenced His earthly ministry, He made it very clear that He had come to save both Jews and Gentiles:

21 Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.” 22 All were speaking well of him, and were amazed at the gracious words coming out of his mouth. They said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” 23 Jesus said to them, “No doubt you will quote to me the proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ and say, ‘What we have heard that you did in Capernaum, do here in your hometown too.’” 24 And he added, “I tell you the truth, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up three and a half years, and there was a great famine over all the land. 26 Yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to a woman who was a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, yet none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard this, all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, forced him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But he passed through the crowd and went on his way ([Luke 4:21-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When Jesus healed the centurion’s servant, He marveled at this man’s faith and made it very clear that many like Cornelius would enter into the kingdom of heaven, while many Jews would not:

10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:10-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It is not until Peter’s vision and his encounter with Cornelius that this apostle finally began to grasp what God had purposed from eternity to accomplish through the church. The Abrahamic Covenant had been distorted and abused by many of the Jews for centuries. Listen, once again, to what God promised Abram:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram,   
“Go forth from your country,   
And from your relatives   
And from your father’s house,   
To the land which I will show you;   
2 And I will make you a great nation,   
And I will bless you,   
And make your name great;   
And so you shall be a blessing;   
3 And I will bless those who bless you,   
And the one who curses you I will curse.   
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” ([Genesis 12:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

Abraham and his sons were not only to receive God’s blessing; they were to become a source of blessing to the world. Those who blessed him would be blessed; those who cursed him God would curse. Abraham’s seed would become a blessing to the world. His **“seed,”** according to Paul was the Lord Jesus, Israel’s Messiah:

15 Brothers and sisters, I offer an example from everyday life: When a covenant has been ratified, even though it is only a human contract, no one can set it aside or add anything to it. 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant. Scripture does not say, “and to the descendants,” referring to many, but “and to your descendant,” referring to one, who is Christ ([Galatians 3:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

God’s promised blessings came through Abraham’s **“seed,”** the Lord Jesus. Those who bless Him (believe in His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary) will be blessed; those who curse Him (by rejecting His saving work at Calvary) will be cursed.

Being a son of Abraham is not about one’s physical ancestry; it is about one’s relationship to Jesus, the Messiah, by faith:

6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel, 7 nor are all the children Abraham’s true descendants; rather “through Isaac will your descendants be counted.” 8 This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God; rather, the children of promise are counted as descendants. 9 For this is what the promise declared: “About a year from now I will return and Sarah will have a son” ([Romans 9:6-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

14 For if they become heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. 15 For the law brings wrath, because where there is no law there is no transgression either. 16 For this reason it is by faith so that it may be by grace, with the result that the promise may be certain to all the descendants – not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”). He is our father in the presence of God whom he believed – the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do ([Romans 4:14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As I understand the Scriptures, a **“fulfilled Jew”** is not merely a Jew who has come to trust in Jesus at the Messiah; a **“fulfilled Jew”** is a Jew who has trusted in Jesus as the Promised Messiah, and who is now sharing the good news with Jews and Gentiles alike. God would not allow Peter and his Jewish colleagues to restrict the gospel to Jews alone. Thanks to Cornelius, Peter became a completed Jew. Praise God.

Let me quickly add that Gentiles are “fulfilled” in a similar way. They are fulfilled by being fruitful. They not only accept the gospel for themselves, but they seek to share it with all who are lost, Jews and Gentiles alike.

If salvation is not by works, but is rather a result of God’s grace, received by faith alone, then no one gets to heaven based upon their race, or upon their worthiness. Everyone who gets to heaven gets there by God’s grace. Thus, God does not show favoritism to Jews. He saves Jews and Gentiles alike, by faith. Therefore Peter has no grounds for considering Gentiles to be unclean and unworthy of salvation because all men, Jew or Gentile, are sinful and unworthy, and thus all those who are saved are saved by grace, apart from any merit of their own:

9 What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, 10 just as it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one, 11 there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one.” 13 “Their throats are open graves, they deceive with their tongues, the poison of asps is under their lips.” 14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 ruin and misery are in their paths, 17 and the way of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed – 22 namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24 But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25 God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. 26 This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness. 27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith! 28 For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too! 30 Since God is one, he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith ([Romans 3:9-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

What Peter does in our text in the Book of Acts is a watershed event. Its importance can hardly be overemphasized. It opens the door to a whole new era – one might even say a whole new dispensation. Remember our Lord’s response to Peter’s great confession:

15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven! 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven” ([Matthew 16:15-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our Lord’s response to Peter’s great confession was a promise to give Peter **“the keys of the kingdom of heaven”** ([Matthew 16:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Scholars are not entirely agreed as to what this means, but many contend that this is perhaps Peter’s most important use of the **“keys”** our Lord promised him. In [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d), it was Peter who declared that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Peter held his Jewish audience responsible for the death of Jesus and declared that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that all who believed in Him would be saved. Thus, Peter “opened the door” for the Jews who had rejected Jesus. Next, Peter opened the door for the Samaritans who had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah ([Acts 8:14-25](javascript:%7b%7d)). Now, at last, Peter has opened the door of salvation for Gentiles who believe in Jesus. Gentiles no longer need to become Jewish proselytes to enjoy fellowship with God, or with their Jewish fellow believers.

And so I will end with this question, “Have you received the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus that God has offered to Jews and Gentiles alike, without favoritism or partiality?” This is a great truth, but it will do you no good unless you have received God’s offer of salvation by trusting in His death, burial, and resurrection.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P17_5863)

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[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P19_6766) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 15 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on February 26, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P29_12275) Caesarea is north and west of the city of Jerusalem, on the Mediterranean coast. Joppa is approximately 35 miles south of Caesarea, still on the Mediterranean coast. Lydda is inland, about 11 miles southeast of Joppa.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P32_13166) See also [Matthew 9:2-8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 2:3-12](javascript:%7b%7d).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P42_16454) See also [Matthew 9:18-26](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 8:49-56](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P58_21703) I am reminded of Pharaoh’s two-fold dream and Joseph’s grasp of what this repetition meant: “The dream was repeated to Pharaoh because the matter has been decreed by God, and God will make it happen soon” ([Genesis 41:32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P62_23544) Our text indicates the messengers “**had learned where Simon’s house was . . .”** (verse 17). I prefer the NASB rendering: “**. . . the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house. . . .”**

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P74_30030) A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931). Electronic version, as part of BibleWorks.

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P93_39312) We know that Cornelius was a man of prayer ([Acts 10:4, 31](javascript:%7b%7d)). We also know that his vision of the angel took place at three o’clock in the afternoon ([Acts 10:3](javascript:%7b%7d)). This was the normal afternoon time of prayer ([Acts 3:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).