

(Acts) Breaking Down the Barriers

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen's sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, the role of miracles in confirming the gospel, and the need for believers to depend on God in their lives.

Duration: 1:05:23

Scripture: Acts 9:32, Acts 10:1-2, Acts 10:9-14, Acts 10:34-35, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 11:18, Acts 13:47

Topics: "Cultural Diversity", "Gods Acceptance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Cornelius and Peter from the Bible. Cornelius, a devout man, receives a message from an angel to send for Peter. Meanwhile, Peter has a vision where he sees a sheet with various animals and hears a voice telling him to eat. Peter initially refuses, but then realizes that the vision is not about food, but about people. He understands that God shows no partiality and accepts anyone who fears Him and works righteousness, regardless of their nationality. This revelation changes Peter's perspective and prepares him to meet Cornelius and share the message of God with him and his household.

Transcript

Let's open our Bibles to the ninth chapter of Acts. Acts chapter nine, and we're going to pick up this evening in verse 32. Let's pray together.

It's a lot of things to pray about. And so why don't we just spend a few moments in prayer. Father, we come to you tonight, Lord, and we thank you that we do have this access with confidence before your throne that we can come to you.

And Lord, as we look around our world, we see a world that's in desperate need, a world that's completely confused. And Lord, it's a dangerous world. It's a frightening world.

And Lord, we thank you that we have our confidence in you. We thank you, Lord, that you're on the throne. You haven't lost control of things.

And Lord, help us just to realize that even tonight. And Lord, we pray for our president. We pray, Lord, for our leaders.

We pray, Lord, for our military. We pray, Lord, for all of those people that are involved in this current crisis directly. And we pray, Lord, that you would be with them.

And Lord, we thank you that we do have a man leading our nation who's seeking you. And Lord, you know, he's being attacked from every possible angle, it seems. But Lord, we thank you that he's turning to you.

He's turning to your word and to prayer. And we pray as he does, that you would strengthen him and give him, Lord, the fortitude to continue to stand in the midst of all the opposition and to do right and to do whatever you've determined beforehand to be done. So, Lord, we just commit him and all of these issues to you tonight.

And again, Lord, we trust in you. We thank you, Lord, that you're our refuge and strength, your present help and trouble. And Lord, we pray that you would use these troubling circumstances in our world to awaken people to the need to consider eternity.

Lord, so many people live for the here and now and never thinking about anything beyond that. We pray that these things would be a catalyst to move people to think about eternal things. And Lord, that as that occurs, that you would bring them the knowledge of the gospel.

Lord, equip us, fill us with your spirit, use us in these days to get your word out to people. And so, Lord, in the midst of all the confusion and the chaos that's going on, Lord, we thank you that you're in control. We thank you that you're still working.

And Lord, above everything else, we want to keep our eyes on you and upon what you're doing. So help us, Lord, not to be distracted. Help us, Lord, to be focused on you.

Help us, Lord, not to miss what you're doing at this hour, not to miss out on being part of what you're doing. So, Lord, just keep us close to you. Keep us, Lord, sensitive to you.

Fill us with your spirit, use us in these days. And Lord, through your word tonight, we pray you'd instruct us. Lord, teach us more about who you are, what you're doing and how we are a part of all of that.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

All right, Acts chapter nine, as we come to verse 32 this evening. We are coming now to the gospel beginning to go out into all the world. You remember, as we pointed out previously, that was the command of the Lord initially that they would be these men, that they would be filled with the spirit, empowered with the spirit.

And as that occurred, they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and then eventually to the uttermost parts of the earth. And we've seen over the past several studies how that's indeed how things have been moving. First of all, Jerusalem was being saturated.

They had filled Jerusalem with this doctrine. And then they went out into Judea and then they went out into Samaria. And the last few verses that we read last week talked about the churches in Galilee and some of the different places.

So, you know, indicating that as the Lord had declared, so it was happening. The gospel was going out. But then, of course, as the gospel would go beyond the boundaries of the Jewish homeland and beyond the religious and cultural boundaries of the Jews, God was looking for a man that he would use as his instrument to take the gospel.

And so we've been studying the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a great rabbinic leader, a very devout Jew, but a man who is very cultured and had a background growing up in Tarsus, a great city of the Roman Empire. And so he is God's man to eventually take the gospel out to the other nations. And so, you know, through his conversion, we've seen in his early ministry.

But as we left off in our last study, he was heading back to his homeland and he sort of passes off the scene for just a short period of time. We'll come back shortly and pick up with him again, and then the rest of the book of Acts will pretty much follow his ministry. But now Luke takes us back again to the ministry of Peter, and he shows us some of the activity of Peter just in the region there in the land of Israel.

But then. He's going to give us the account of Peter being the instrument to open the door to the Gentiles, although Paul will ultimately be the apostle to the Gentiles. It's through Peter that the gospel will first come to the first Gentile.

So the first convert outside of any connection with Judaism will be the result of this vision that God gives to Peter and how he sends Peter to this man's house. And so that's where Luke is going with the story here. But he picks up with Peter just sort of going around the countryside there in Israel and ministering in different regions there in the land.

And so verse 32 says, Now it came to pass as Peter went through all parts of the country that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. So he comes to the area of Lydda.

And if you were to look at an ancient map of Israel and then compare it with the current situation. Peter was ministering at this time in the area known today as Tel Aviv. So around that particular area is where this ministry was taking place near near modern day Tel Aviv.

And then he'll go to what they call today Jaffa, which used to be called Jaffa. And that's the region that Peter is carrying on his ministry. And so he finds this man named Aeneas, who's been bedridden for eight years.

And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus, the Christ heals you arise, make your bed. Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

So, Peter, it's interesting. Peter is going about now really almost literally. Taking up where Jesus left off, he's doing the same things Jesus was doing, and he's using the same kind of terminology that Jesus used to remember on another occasion, Jesus said to a man, your sins are forgiven.

Take up your bed and go home. And now here, Peter and healing Aeneas, he heals and he says, take up your bed and go home. So he's just emulating what he had seen done with the Lord.

And as this is going on, there's a powerful impact taking place in the community. And it says all who dwelt in Lydda and Sharon saw it and they turned to the Lord. Now, whether that means every single person or a large majority of the people, we're not sure.

But the implication is, man, people were moved and touched and were responding to the gospel as they would see the power of God being demonstrated. Now, as Peter carries on in his ministry. We come to a situation that occurred in Joppa.

Now, you you might be familiar with Joppa as well, because that's the place where Jonah centuries before had caught a ship heading for Tarshish. And so this was a port city of Joppa. But there in Joppa, there was a certain disciple named Tabitha.

That was her name, her Aramaic name. It means gazelle. And the translation, the Greek translation is Dorcas.

So I personally think Tabitha is a little nicer than Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds, which she did, but it happened in those days that she became sick and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

And since Lydda was near to Joppa and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. And so Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him to the upper room and all the widows stood by him, weeping, showing the tunics and the garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

But Peter put them all out and he knelt down and he prayed and turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise and she opened her eyes. And when she saw Peter, she sat up and then he gave her his hand and he lifted her up. And when he had called the saints and the widows, he presented her alive and it became known throughout all Joppa and many believed on the Lord.

So, again, a miracle through Peter, a raising of Tabitha from the dead. And notice, again, the similarity between the situation here and what had happened during the public ministry of Jesus. You remember the story of the daughter of Jairus who had died and they went into the house and the people were weeping like they were weeping here.

But back in the account of Jesus, of course, they were skeptical and they scorned and mocked him when he implied that she wasn't really dead. But then, of course, the Lord put them out and he raised her from the dead. Now, Peter, he has everybody leave the room and he kneels down and prays.

And then he turns and he says to her, Talitha, which was her name and arise or the literal translation would have been Talitha Kumi. If you go back to or Tabitha Kumi, if you go back to the Jairus's daughter, it's Talitha Kumi. Just a slight difference.

But here, of course, is the name Tabitha. And when Jesus said Talitha Kumi to that little girl, what he literally said to her was a little lamb arise. But again, almost the same wording that Jesus used.

And Peter now brings her and presents her to the people. And of course, they rejoiced and many believed on the Lord. Now, a question naturally arises when you read these stories and the question that arises is.

Why don't we see those things happening today? And I don't know that there's an easy answer to that. I don't know that it would be accurate to say that these kinds of things aren't happening today. We might not be seeing them happening, but that doesn't mean they're not happening somewhere else at some point in time.

Now, one of the things we have to remember is that when the apostles were going out in the early stages of their ministry. They were bringing a message that was relatively foreign. And part of what God was doing to confirm that the message was from him was giving them supernatural power to perform miracles so that people would see that power demonstrated and then understand that the message, this message

is obviously from God.

So we need to understand when we look at the book of Acts and the miraculous things that were happening back then, part of it was the plan for the time to get the ministry launched to get the word of God out there and to bring the confirmation of the the the veracity of it through the demonstration of the power by these appointed men of God, the apostles. So as they would perform the miracles, they would be then recognized as God's spokesman, just like the ancient prophets had at times performed miracles, and that would confirm their calling to the people. So we have to keep that in mind.

But then some people go to an extreme that I don't think we ought to go to in saying that, well, these miracles were just. Given to get things started, and once things started, the miraculous was no longer necessary, and I don't think that that's true. I think that's taking it to a place that we're not warranted to take it to by the scriptures themselves, because the Lord over and over seems to imply that these kinds of things are the things that we can expect to happen all the way throughout the age of the church until Jesus comes again.

So then again, we're back with the same dilemma. Why don't we see more of these things happening among us? And I think there are a couple of possibilities. It could be that we simply just don't expect it to happen.

We don't have faith for these kinds of things to happen, and therefore it's not happening. It could be that the church is so polluted with sin today that that kind of power of God isn't being demonstrated because of the pollution of sin within the church. It could be, on the other hand, that God simply is just not doing those kinds of things at the present moment, but not to say that he couldn't do them at any given moment if he chooses to do so.

Hard questions, not easy answers, but I would say that we want to believe the Lord. We want to expect things from God. We want to make sure that we're living godly life.

So whatever the Lord wants to do through us, he's able to do. We're not hindering him in any way. And if we're doing that, then it's pretty much just up to the Lord from that point on what he wants to do.

And if he chooses to do this type of miraculous thing, then we rejoice in that. If he chooses not to do that in our midst, then that's OK, too, because we know that he's wise and whatever he chooses to do is best. But I do think that if we were to do our homework and we were to really research it out, I think that we would find that there is a lot more miraculous activity going on today than we realize.

And especially in places where. Things are much more difficult for the believers than we have it in places where there's a strong oppression from perhaps an opposing government or an opposing religion or something like that, and quite often you will hear stories from perhaps the underground church in China or perhaps from some of the believers living under the oppression of Islam. Or, you know, people suffering under other types of regimes.

You will often hear stories that have a much more miraculous element to them, stories that are similar to what we're reading about here in the book of Acts. And so, you know, and one of the things that I think would probably lend itself to that is people in those situations are much more dependent on the Lord. You see, I think part of our problem is that we are so self-reliant, we are so dependent on ourselves, we've got so much, we're so secure, we live in such comfort and ease.

And, you know, we're just a society, even as Christians, we so often just we are depending on ourselves so much. And yet when you get out into places like I just mentioned, people have nothing to depend on whatsoever. There's no infrastructure.

There's no, you know, solid, you know, sort of church community that you can go and rely on. People are depending directly on the Lord. And in their dependence upon God, in their looking to God for everything and their trusting God, they're seeing many times the miraculous happen.

So I would say that we need to emulate them, even though we have all of these other things that we tend to depend on, we need to resist that and we need to depend on the Lord. We need to trust in the Lord and not put our confidence in the things that we so often put our confidence in. Vain is the help of men, the scriptures say.

It's a vain thing to trust in a chariot. It's a vain thing to trust in horses. And those are all the things that the ancients used to trust in.

But the scriptures over and over again exhort us to trust in the Lord. To depend upon the Lord. And again, my point is, I think that sometimes we miss out on the miraculous because we don't expect it because we're not depending on God.

We're so often depending on ourselves or on other people. But, you know, sometimes the Lord will put us in situations where we've got no other alternative. We have no hope, even in man, man at his best can't help us.

And then we find ourselves saying, Lord, if you don't help me, I'm sunk. Lord, if you don't help me, it's over. Lord, if you don't step in and do something, I'm history.

And you know what happens? God steps in, he helps, he blesses, he works. But sometimes he actually has to bring us to a point of dependency because it's not our natural tendency to depend on him. It's our natural tendency to depend on ourselves.

So that's a perspective on why perhaps we're not seeing the supernatural as frequently as others might be. But again, let's not settle for less than what God has for us. Let's be open and let's be saying, Lord, we want your power.

You know, when you think of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And then Paul, as he lists them for us and sort of, you know, gives us a little bit of insight to him. He says, now, desire earnestly the best gifts.

And sometimes I wonder, do we really desire them? You know, we all know what it's like to desire certain things. We, oh, I want that so badly. Oh, I just, boy, if I could get that new car, you know, or some other material object, perhaps.

So we all know it's like to be passionately desirous of something. But here's the question, do we know what it's like to be passionately desirous of spiritual gifts and things of that nature? Do we approach the things of the spirit with the same kind of passion that we might approach some material object? You see, we ought to. Actually, Paul uses the same exact terminology.

Covet the best gifts, he said, when we think of covetousness, we generally think of it in negative terms because the Bible says you shall not covet. But it all depends on what you're coveting. Most of the time we're coveting the wrong thing, that's the problem.

But he says, covet earnestly the best gifts, desire those gifts. And again, I wonder if perhaps it's because we lack desire and passion for the things of the spirit that we don't really experience the spirit like we perhaps would if we were like that. There's only one way to find out whether or not that's true.

Let's start coveting those things, desiring those things, asking God for those things. And I believe the Lord will grant them. And so picking up again, Peter was there in Joppa and he stayed many days and he stayed with a man named Simon, who was a tanner.

Now, a tanner was a person who worked with animal skins. And there's an interesting thing happening with Peter right now. Now, Peter is a Jew.

He's a devout Jew. No question about it. But now he's a believer in the Messiah, Jesus, and he's beginning to realize that a lot of the Judaism that he was brought up with and following was really more the invention of man than the revelation of God.

So he's growing and he's as he's growing, he's starting to break out of some of the rigidity that he was in when he was ignorant of the truth. Now, one thing that he would not have done if he were still under that previous way of thinking, he would not have stayed with the man who was a tanner because you became ceremonially unclean if you were around the dead bodies of animals. But we see that Peter is going through a transition.

He's going through a process where God is reeducating him. And he's freeing him up, he's liberating him. And, you know, I think it's safe to say that that happens in a lot of our lives.

We come to the Lord. He does a work in our hearts and he deals with some real obvious things. But then as time goes on, he deals with things that maybe initially we didn't even think were issues.

But he starts to show us that, you know, this isn't quite right and that's not quite right. And he starts really a process of liberation. Jesus said to those who believed in him, he said, you will know the truth.

And the truth will make you free, you will know the truth, you will keep on knowing the truth, you will be discovering the truth as you go. And as you do that, the truth will progressively make you free. So the longer you walk with the Lord, the freer we ought to become.

We ought to be just being liberated from sin and the the clutches of sin upon our life. The longer we walk with the Lord, the more liberated we should become, not only from sin, obviously, but also we become liberated from wrong thinking. And misconceptions and wrong ideas and bad philosophies and things like that, you see, as we grow in the Lord, the Lord is changing us in all of those ways.

And so, Peter, he's in this transition process and it shows that he's coming along quite well by the fact that he would even stay with this man, Simon, who's a tanner. But as we go on in the story, we see that this is all God working behind the scenes in Peter's life, and he's going to bring him to a real radical new understanding of things right here momentarily, as we read on. So it says there was a certain man in Caesarea.

Now, Caesarea would be north of Joppa, a ways of 30 miles or so. And this man was called Cornelius. He was a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.

So he was a military man, he was a Roman soldier and he was over 100 men in a regiment, a regiment was a band of about 600. And so it says that he was a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and he prayed to God always. So here's a man who is not a Jew.

He's not even a proselyte to Judaism. He is a Roman soldier. He is a Roman by ethnically.

He's a Roman. And yet somehow. In some way, he has embraced this idea of one God and he's he's embraced this God of Israel.

Perhaps it was through serving there in that region that he came to understand through his contact, maybe with some of the people. That there was one God. And he being a Roman would have grown up with that whole pantheon of, you know, gods in his mind.

And and so obviously that never really met his need. And so now he's embracing this this idea. He's a devout man.

He fears God and he's demonstrating his fear of God by giving alms generously and by praying. And so about the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision, an angel of God coming in and saying to him, Cornelius, when he observed him, he was afraid. And he said, what is it, Lord? And so he said to him, your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Now, send men to Joppa and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon Tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.

He will tell you what you must do. Now, just a quick side note, but an important point. Here is a man who's devout, a man who fears God, a man who gives alms, a man who prays.

You can't find a more sincere individual than Cornelius. But notice. His sincerity is not enough.

There's something lacking. And he needs to have further instruction. Now, here's the point.

There are a lot of people who say, you know, it doesn't really matter what a person's religion is. What really matters is whether or not they're sincere about their religion. So if a person is sincere.

Then we ought to encourage them in their own particular religious beliefs and not worry about trying to convert them, because after all, they're sincere and that's what God is most interested in, not so. You see, a lot of people are very sincere, but they are truly wrong. When it comes to what they believe in, they are devout, sometimes people are more sincere about the wrong belief than people are about the right belief.

That's a fact. But nevertheless, what they believe in isn't true. So it doesn't matter how sincere they are.

If you believe in something that isn't true, you can believe it and believe it and believe it and believe it. But it doesn't change the fact that it's not true. So here's Cornelius.

He he's even closer to the truth than many would be in that he's he's fearing God, the true God, this God of Israel. But now the God of Israel is is being approached in a different fashion. Now, God has

established a new way of.

Coming to him and understanding him and having a relationship with him and Cornelius needs to know. The new way, so don't buy into that whole idea that as long as a person is sincere. Because that's not the issue, Cornelius was as sincere as you could be, but he needed to call for Peter, who would tell him things that he must do, not things that he perhaps should do, but things that he must do.

There's a lot of pressure today to just sort of. You know, be all inclusive in our views. And to say that, you know, all religions are equally valid and it doesn't matter which one you come through, they all roads lead to God and so forth.

And we've talked about this stuff before. And, you know, but that pressure is coming more and more and more. But that just isn't what the scriptures teach at all.

There have even been those in the church that would suggest that we shouldn't bother converting people from their religion to ours, we should just help them be better at their religion. Mother Teresa was renowned for her missionary work in Calcutta, but she herself would say that she never sought to convert a Buddhist or Hindu to Christianity, she just sought to make them better Buddhist or better Hindus. Well, you know, she might have helped people on a temporal level materially, and I'm sure she did.

But tragically, she didn't help them spiritually or eternally. And making them better Buddhists, she didn't do them any favors by withholding from them the the knowledge of the way of salvation. So, again, point being, if it was just sincerity that mattered.

Cornelius never would have been visited by the angel. Cornelius never would have been encouraged to go seek out Simon Peter. Cornelius would have been left alone because, hey, he's just fine.

He's God fearing man. He's giving alms. He's praying.

What more could you ask? No, there were other things that were necessary, things that he must do. And, of course, it was to embrace the Messiah, the Savior. And so when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually.

So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa. Now, the next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry and wanted to eat, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and he saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners descended to him and let down to the earth in it were all kinds of four footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air.

And a voice came to him. Rise, Peter, kill and eat, Peter said. Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean.

And a voice spoke to him again the second time. What God has cleansed, you must not call common. This was done three times and the object was taken into heaven again.

So notice this, though, again, we see the Holy Spirit orchestrating things and we see these kinds of things today as well. And, you know, I want to just backpedal a bit here and go back to the miracle thing we were

talking about earlier, I believe we still do see God working miraculously, maybe not in the same ways that we're reading about here with a resurrection from the dead or, you know, a healing like that. But but we see healing, certainly.

But, you know, God works miraculously in all kinds of different ways. And in this whole situation right here, we see the miracle of this angel appears to Cornelius. We see that Cornelius sends these men to Joppa, and at the same time, the Lord is giving a vision to Peter.

So he's working the whole thing out. So it's all going to come together just as he plans. Peter's up on the roof waiting for lunch, and he has this strange vision, a sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of animals in it.

Clean and unclean. Both the Lord says rise, kill and eat. Peter says, no way.

I'm a kosher Jew. I've never eaten anything on kosher. The Lord says, don't call that common or unclean what I've cleansed.

But you see, this is all preparatory. It really wasn't about lunch that the Lord was speaking to him. It wasn't that Simon was fixing pork chops and Peter was going to need to know that.

So he wouldn't offend him when he came and brought him his lunch. It was something bigger than that was going to happen. It didn't have much to do with food at all.

It had something to do with people. And so God working supernaturally in these natural circumstances, seemingly, but behind the scenes, bringing all of this together. And so, Peter, while he wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate.

And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. And while Peter thought about the vision, the spirit said to him, behold, three men are seeking you arise, therefore, go down and go with them. Doubting nothing for I have sent them.

And then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius and said, yes, I am he whom you seek. What is for what reason have you come? And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear words from you. Divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you, God has put this whole thing together so beautifully, then he invited them in and he lodged them.

And on the next day, Peter went away with them and some brethren from Joppa, they accompanied him. Now, here again, we see Peter, he's he's growing, he's learning, he's being changed. According to rabbinical law, you could not abide in a home with Gentiles, it just was not allowable.

But Peter invites these men in and they lodge with them for the evening. This, again, shows that Peter is going through this transition. He's beginning to to understand that God is bigger than what he thought, that God's mercy is much more vast than he had originally probably conceived of, that it wasn't merely a thing to bless Israel.

But it was something that was to go out far beyond. And now I think Peter is starting to get the picture. And so the following day, they entered Caesarea and now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted himself up, saying or but Peter lifted him up, saying, stand up. I myself also am a man.

So Peter here demonstrating that humility that he, of course, had seen in the Lord and and of course, just acknowledging what was true. He was a man. There's no reason to bow down to me.

I'm I'm just a man just like you. It's interesting to me, a little side note here. It's interesting to me that the pope who claims to be, you know, the successor of St. Peter, that he doesn't have quite the humility.

He allows people to bow down to him. He allows people to call him your holiness. He allows people to kiss his ring and things of that nature.

He's not really following the example of Peter because Peter would not have any of that. He said, I myself am also a man. And he talked with him and he went in and he found many who had come together.

And then he said to them, now, Peter speaking, listen to what he says. You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or to go to one of another nation. Now, it wasn't the Mosaic law that taught that it was the rabbinic law.

And you see, we have to have an understanding between those two things. The Mosaic law, of course, was the law of God. It was a law that God had given to Moses and given to Israel.

And it certainly had instructions about relations with other nations and so forth. And the Canaanites were those nations were nations that God had had appointed to destruction because of their wickedness. And Israel was not to have any association with them.

But there was nothing in the Mosaic law about just, you know, a blanket disassociation with every nation or everyone who wasn't a Jew. But that was part of the rabbinic law. Now, the rabbinic law was the law that Jesus contended with the Pharisees over time and time again.

They were always accusing Jesus of breaking the law. He wasn't breaking the law of Moses. He was breaking the rabbinical interpretation of the law, which they then put on the same level as the law.

You see, they took their interpretation and said our interpretation of the law is equivalent to the law and authority. And Jesus said, no, it's not you have taken the commandments of men, you've made doctrine out of the commandments of men. So Peter here, when he says it's how he says, you know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company.

It wasn't God's law. And this is an important point, because, you know, a lot of people today try to accuse the law of God of, you know, promoting bigotry or racism or things of that nature. Not so.

Not so at all. And Peter's reference here is not to the law of God, it's to the Jewish laws that had developed. And of course, there was a racist slant to it, because at that time the Jews had come to a place where they really did think that they were the only people on the earth that God cared about.

And everybody else was just, you know, nothing more than something to stoke the fires of hell with. That's what some of the rabbis themselves had said. So but but notice how Peter.

Notice how ingrained this was in his thinking, that's that's how powerful of an impact rabbinic Judaism had upon the people by the time Jesus came onto the scene. So Jesus was fighting against a radically entrenched religious system that was contrary to the law of Moses when he came. And now Peter is manifesting some of his own indoctrination in it.

They were brought up to just think this way. And they never really questioned because the rabbis said it was so it must be so this must be God's law. And this stuff would just get ingrained in them.

You know, it's amazing how tradition can get ingrained in us and how we can start to think that tradition is what God said. When tradition is not what God said, tradition is usually man's interpretation of what God said or, you know, man's elaboration of what God said and always got man's misinterpretation of what God meant so often. But we can also start to think that way.

And we can start to think that certain things are prohibited because, well, of course they are. That's what we've always been taught. But wait a second.

Is that really what the Bible teaches? The church itself has certainly been guilty of embracing a lot of traditional kinds of things and developing sort of, you know, its own culture that might not be totally consistent with the biblical revelation. And so it's a good thing for us to always sort of be aware that that danger exists and to occasionally sort of evaluate ourselves again in light of the scriptures and what we're doing. And sometimes to just ask, OK, why do we do this again? Let's see, is it somewhere in the Bible or did we just sort of get into a routine here and now it's become the thing we do? You know, sometimes I find that happening myself.

Sometimes I find in prayer that it can become just so repetitious, even the phraseology that we use. And sometimes I'll catch myself just sort of, you know, saying the same sort of prayer and I'll stop myself and think, wait, I'm going to mix these words up a little bit. I'm going to put this word here and that word there.

And because it shows that I'm thinking about what I'm doing, it's not just wrote. It's not just, you know, I just this is just the way we do it. And I think that's a good thing to do because we so easily can slip into that traditional kind of a thing.

And that's death. It's death. That's where.

That's where you you start dying. And when it finally works itself out to the end, man, it's like, oh, but who would have ever thought that we could become traditional? But it's a human characteristic. So, Peter, he's he's still under the cultural influences to some degree, even though he spent all the time with Jesus.

And so he says, but verse 28, the latter part, but God has shown me. So he says, this is what I was taught, it's unlawful for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

You see, that's what we've always got to go back to. Well, wait a second. What does God said? And, you know, there are people that have misinterpreted the scriptures and developed traditions, and there there have been racist kinds of things that have arisen, not because the Bible taught that, but because people misinterpreted it to say so.

Because it justified their position and things like that. And again, we have to always go back to what did God say? I think one of the most tragic things in the history of America is not even slavery itself, which is certainly a tragic part of our history. But even more tragic is the way the church responded to it, because you would find Christians that were just as committed to slavery as non-Christians were.

You would find even to this very day. Going into places in the South, still a segregationist mentality. And although, of course, it's definitely not, you know, popular these days to be like that, and so they're not, you know, as out front with it as they used to be.

But yet there's still that underlying sort of a thing that, you know, we just don't mix here in in this church. You folks need to go down the road. There's a church for you down there sort of thing.

And that is such a horrifying thing, really, because it is so completely contrary to everything the Bible teaches. And to the whole picture of what Jesus came to do to bring all the nations together with him as the head over them and that all of these national, ethnic, cultural distinctions, whatever they might be, that they would all be erased by the love of God. And that whatever color we are, whatever language you speak, whatever background we come from, that all is totally irrelevant because we're all now one in Christ.

And I think a great blight on the church in this country is that the church allowed this segregationist thing to develop and to come in and this prejudice. And it's a horrible thing. And we're still suffering the consequences of it today.

It's still with us, sadly. But it shouldn't be because the Bible certainly doesn't support it at all. So God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Therefore, I came without objection as soon as I sent for as soon as I was sent for. I asked then, for what reason have you sent for me? So Peter's still not quite sure about why he's there exactly. So 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. And he said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter.

He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you. So I sent to you immediately and you have done well to come now.

Therefore, we are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God. Then Peter opened his mouth and we could add in amazement. And he said, in a truth, I perceive that God shows no partiality.

The lights came on. Peter got it all of a sudden, he was completely blown away, but God had been leading him up to it. He'd been preparing him.

And now all of a sudden it just it just strikes him. Wait a second. We've been wrong.

Our our whole view of of God and his attitude toward people has been completely wrong because he, like the rest of the Jewish nation, he thought that. The Jews had an exclusive hold on God and God cared about them and them alone. But all of a sudden, he says, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons,

as the King James says, or or here shows no personal favoritism or shows no partiality.

But in every nation, whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him. All of a sudden, Peter, his eyes are open. He realizes that, you know, God is not the God of the Jews only.

And Paul would be the one amazingly, Paul would be the one to really ultimately take this message out. That he's not the God of the Jews, only the Jews had forgotten there was a history before theirs came into existence, Abraham himself was not a Jew. He was a Chaldean.

The first Hebrew would have been Isaac or or perhaps Jacob. But there was a whole history before that there were thousands of years and millions, maybe billions of people that God loved and God's plan was for the whole world. And now Peter's starting to realize that.

So he says, but in every nation, whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him. Now, understand the context of this statement right here. Peter's saying this is a Jew, not as a Christian.

He's speaking as a Jew. From his previous perspective, because of his Jewish background, and I say that because he's not saying as a as a Christian that, you know, in every nation, whoever fears God and works righteousness is accepted by him, regardless of what they believe, whether it's in, you know, Hinduism or Buddhism or whatever. Some people might take this second part of Peter's statement here and misapply it.

So you see, after all, Peter says in every nation, whoever fears God, that's all that matters. All those people out there, they fear God. So that's what matters.

God accepts them. He's not speaking as a Christian. He's speaking from his Jewish background.

And what he's realizing at this time in history is that God is working outside of the Jewish fold. Like Jesus said, you remember, Jesus said, I have other sheep that aren't of this fold. And they are going to be brought in, too.

And those other sheep were the sheep out in the other nations of the world. But even the scriptures themselves, if they would have paid more attention to the actual scripture rather than the rabbinic interpretation, the scriptures themselves talked about God's relationship with those outside of Israel. Even back during the Old Testament period, Job evidently was not part of.

The nation of Israel, it seems that he probably lived prior to the time of Moses, and yet, of course, he was a great man of God. Noah going back, you can go back that far, but even during the period of the covenant with Israel, remember Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, how God healed him miraculously by having him dip in the Jordan River. And he embraced the God of Israel and he went back to Syria, back to his job.

But as a as a healed man, trusting in the Lord God of Israel. And there was that widow of of Zarephath that the Lord reached out and ministered to through Elijah. And so there were examples in their history of God reaching out to the other nations.

But again, they had just seemed to overlook that and they became very narrow in their thinking. And they really did come to believe that they and they alone were God's people. But, Peter, this whole thing now is come clear to him.

And so he begins here in verse thirty six to proclaim the message to Cornelius, the message concerning Jesus Christ. And we'll leave off in verse thirty five tonight and we'll pick up in verse thirty six and look specifically at the message next time we get together. But as we close tonight, let's just remember a few things that we talked about, that God is a God of miracles.

God is sovereign. He chooses what he will do when he will do it. But we certainly don't want to be guilty of hindering what the Lord might want to do.

So if there's things in our life that might hinder God from working, we want to get those things out. And when it comes to the work of the spirit, the gifts of the spirit, we want to covet those things. We want to have that that passion for those, just like we might have a passion for something else.

Lord, let me experience those gifts, not for my personal benefit or gratification, but Lord, so that people can be touched and your kingdom can be spread. And remember that God loves. All kinds of people and God wants to reach all kinds of people from all different backgrounds, ethnically and culturally and, you know, in every other way, and.

I think the most beautiful picture of the church is a church that is just made up of all the nations, just everybody coming in. And, you know, it's interesting to me how in the past, say, maybe 20 years or so, how God has, I believe, done an interesting thing in this area. The complexion of of the area that we live in has changed drastically in the past 20 to 25 years.

And groups, people, groups from all kinds of different nations have moved into the area. Now, some people don't like that. Some people are upset about that.

I love it because I like the mission field and hey, the mission field came to us. So we don't even have to go very far. But I think it's a great thing and I think it's a thing that we should be excited about the prospects of reaching out and seeing God touching people from all these different nations and backgrounds and religions and cultures.

And to know that the gospel is for them as well. And to have that heart and that passion to reach out to them and to see them come in. And I think it'll be a great day when we look out at our congregations here and we just see all the nations out here.

And I believe that we should be thinking in those terms and remembering now, not just nationalities or different ethnic groups, but we also have to, you know, we have to keep a guard in our hearts as well when it comes to cultural differences, because, you know, the culture is a lot different and and times change and people change and and young people get weirder with each passing generation. And, you know, the things that were weird when we were young seem relatively mild now, you know, compared to what you see with some of the younger people today. And and we can end up, you know, getting caught up in our little traditional view of things and labeling somebody or judging them or looking at the way they're dressed or whatever is going on with them and saying, hey, you know, there's a church down the road that you probably feel a little more comfortable in.

But we don't ever want to do that. We don't ever want to be thinking that way. Because it's that great mixture that makes the thing so beautiful.

That's what God wants to do in showing, you know, through the church, God wants to show the world. That people can get along, people can set aside their differences, all of their differences and love each

other and work together. And, you know, if the church isn't doing that, then we're we're in really a hopeless state because there is no model then, because certainly the world can't do it.

The world is not doing it. The world, although we've got all this emphasis today on, you know, cultural sensitivity and all of the, you know, constant talk about problems with racism and all of that stuff and how bad it is and wrong it is, which it is, but it doesn't seem to make it any better. It almost seems like all the talk about it makes it worse even.

But the church, that's the place where God wants to show that it can be done, but it can only be done through him, through his grace, through his power, through him touching the life of a person and bringing them into his family and then all of us recognizing that we're just part of one big family. And so God help us not to become tied down with some traditions or limited in our perspective of what God wants to do or who he wants to reach because of the differences of people around us. But let's see it as a great opportunity for God to demonstrate to the world that he's able.

To take people that have nothing in common from the human level, people that might even be hostile toward one another at odds with one another, and he's able to merge them into one body and cause them to love each other only in the church. That's the only place it can happen. And we want to continue to have that environment where it can happen and never get caught up in those traditional kinds of things.

Or if we do momentarily, temporarily, we've got to back up and say, Lord, help me on this, reeducate me on this. You know, because of where we're at right now with a lot of the politics and the whole war issue and all that, I know even Christians are tempted sometimes to look at certain people groups. Why are they here? What are they doing here? What are they doing in our country? You know, they should and all of that.

But we we've got to be above that. We really do. We've got to rise above that sort of stuff.

And realize that, as Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world. You know, we're not fighting for a worldly kingdom. It's a heavenly kingdom.

And those people that are being perceived as enemies and, you know, not to say that some aren't truly enemies and here with the wrong motives and need to be dealt with. That's true. And and thank God for law enforcement and all of that sort of stuff.

But, you know, what happens is the tendency is to just group everybody to get lump everybody together and say, oh, because they're from that country, they must be that. And therefore, we just automatically write that, write them off. And that's what we have to be careful against doing.

So God help us to have that heart that he has for all people and that heart that Peter was getting as he was moving along, realizing that God is not a respecter of persons. But God loves all the nations and he wants to save people from every national background, ethnic background, religious background, cultural background. Jesus is the savior of all men and we're the ones to make sure that message gets communicated to people.

Let's pray. Lord, help us. Help us, Lord, to.

Seek after the things of the spirit. And Lord, we thank you that you are working miraculously and maybe. Among us, we're not seeing certain things, but we're seeing other things and Lord, we want to see as

many.

Mighty, powerful things as you'd want to do so, Lord, if there's anything in us that is hindering you from doing great, mighty things among us, Lord, help us to get those things out of our lives so you could freely move among us, Lord, help us to truly desire the best gifts to really covet the things of the spirit. Lord, to long for that work of your spirit in our lives and through our lives and in our fellowship and through our fellowship. Put in us that passion, Lord and Lord, give us a heart and give us eyes to see.

People like you see him. Oh, how you love people, Lord, you love everyone. And we think of Lord, those that come across the border looking for a better life, and we see him standing around looking for work, and sometimes there's a temptation to disdain them.

But Lord, help us to see it as an opportunity. To reach people for you, help us to see it as something you've brought about so that they could hear the gospel. Lord, as we look around us and we see that many of the neighborhoods have now people from different countries living in them instead of being upset about that, Lord, help us to realize it's a mission opportunity and help us to seek how you would want to reach these people groups.

Lord, you're so good. Thank you that you love us. And Lord, thank you that you didn't reject us, even though you could have.

But you've embraced us. And Lord, may we never forget that we're just sinners saved by grace. And that the only thing between anybody else and you is.

Is just grace, Lord. Your grace waiting to come to them, so help us, Lord. To see things clearly, to learn the same kind of lessons that Peter learned and to go from freedom to freedom in you, we pray in Jesus name, amen.

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