

Bible Study

13th October 2021 Acts 9:32 – 10:48

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Breakout group Sharing time: 5 minutes

God shows no favourites.

Read - 9:32 – 10:48

Peter Heals Aeneas and Dorcas

³² Peter travelled around the country. He went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a disabled man named Aeneas. For eight years the man had spent most of his time in bed. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up! Roll up your mat!" So Aeneas got up right away. ³⁵ Everyone who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him. They turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a believer named Tabitha. Her name in the Greek language is Dorcas. She was always doing good and helping poor people. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died. Her body was washed and placed in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa. The believers heard that Peter was in Lydda. So they sent two men to him. They begged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them. When he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him crying. They showed him the robes and other clothes Dorcas had made before she died.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed. He turned toward the dead woman. He said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and especially the widows. He brought her to them. They saw that she was alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa. Many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time. He stayed with Simon, a man who worked with leather.

Cornelius Calls for Peter

10 A man named Cornelius lived in Caesarea. He was a Roman commander in the Italian Regiment. ² Cornelius and all his family were faithful and worshiped God. He gave freely to people who were in need. He prayed to God regularly. ³ One day about three o'clock in the afternoon he had a vision. He saw clearly an angel of God. The angel came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴ Cornelius was afraid. He stared at the angel. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to poor people are like an offering to God. So he has remembered you. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa. Have them bring back a man named Simon. He is also called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with another Simon, a man who works with leather. His house is by the sea."

⁷ The angel who spoke to him left. Then Cornelius called two of his servants. He also called a godly soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened. Then he sent them to Joppa.

Peter Has a Vision

⁹ It was about noon the next day. The men were on their journey and were approaching the city. Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry. He wanted something to eat. While the meal was being prepared, Peter had a vision. ¹¹ He saw heaven open up. There he saw something that looked like a large sheet. It was being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It had all kinds of four-footed animals in it. It also had reptiles and birds in it. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "No, Lord! I will not!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything that is not pure and 'clean.'"

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time. It said, "Do not say anything is not pure that God has made 'clean.'"

¹⁶This happened three times. Right away the sheet was taken back up to heaven.

¹⁷Peter was wondering what the vision meant. At that very moment the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. They stopped at the gate ¹⁸and called out. They asked if Simon Peter was staying there.

¹⁹Peter was still thinking about the vision. The Holy Spirit spoke to him. "Simon," he said, "three men are looking for you. ²⁰Get up and go downstairs. Don't let anything keep you from going with them. I have sent them."

²¹Peter went down and spoke to the men. "I'm the one you're looking for," he said. "Why have you come?"

²²The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius, the Roman commander. He is a good man who worships God. All the Jewish people respect him. A holy angel told him to invite you to his house. Then Cornelius can hear what you have to say." ²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius

The next day Peter went with the three men. Some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them. He had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him. As a sign of respect, he fell at Peter's feet. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said. "I am only a man myself."

²⁷As he was talking with Cornelius, Peter went inside. There he found a large group of people. ²⁸He said to them, "You know that it is against our law for a Jew to enter a Gentile home. A Jew shouldn't have any close contact with a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not say anyone is not pure and 'clean.' ²⁹So when you sent for me, I came without asking any questions. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰Cornelius answered, "Three days ago at this very hour I was in my house praying. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood in front of me. ³¹He said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer. He has remembered your gifts to poor people. ³²Send someone to Joppa to get Simon Peter. He is a guest in the home of another Simon, who works with leather. He lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you right away. It was good of you to come. Now we are all here. And God is here with us. We are ready to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

³⁴Then Peter began to speak. "I now realize how true it is that God treats everyone the same," he said. ³⁵"He accepts people from every nation. He accepts anyone who has respect for him and does what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel. It is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened all through the area of Judea. It started in Galilee after John preached about baptism. ³⁸You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil's power. God was with him.

³⁹"We are witnesses of everything he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by nailing him to a cross. ⁴⁰But on the third day God raised him from the dead. God allowed Jesus to be seen. ⁴¹But he wasn't seen by all the people. He was seen only by us. We are witnesses whom God had already chosen. We ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people. He told us to tell people that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets tell about him. They say that all who believe in him have their sins forgiven through his name."

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵Some Jewish believers had come with Peter. They were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶They heard them speaking in languages they had not known before. They also heard them praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Surely no one can keep these people from being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Having inserted Saul with appropriate and violent suddenness into the narrative of the Jerusalem apostles, Luke brings us back to Peter's story. Having found his way down to Joppa, Peter will be called from there on another and more widely significant errand. But there is no such thing as a small errand in the kingdom of God. We will find that Peter was where he was on proper business from the Lord, the gospel business of healing and encouraging and building up God's people.

- ? **When has a seemingly small errand or job for the Lord turned out to be more significant than you thought?**
- ? **Read 9:32-42. What are the effects of the healing of Aeneas?**
- ? **Who do you know who reminds you of Tabitha (Dorcas)?**
- ? **How can we give more recognition and honour to the Tabithas of this world, who are often overlooked or considered insignificant?**

We have to assume that there were many others like Tabitha who lived their lives in faith and hope, bearing the sorrows of life as well as celebrating its joys, and finding in the small acts of service to others a fulfilment of the gospel within their own sphere, using traditional skills to the glory of God. Luke is right to draw our eyes to the small-scale and immediate, in case we should ever forget that these are the people who form the heart of the church. I am privileged to know plenty of Tabithas. The day before I wrote this, I met one whose speciality is chocolate truffles. When I meet such people, I greet them as what they are, the beating heart of God.

Read 10:1-33.

The Roman Empire was built on relentless military power. Cornelius was a centurion, a middle-ranking Roman military officer with a hundred men under him. He was posted to Caesarea, a key port in a strategic zone. How does this first Roman we meet in the book of Acts depart from the stereotype of a Roman office (10:1-8)?

- ? **What is the message of Cornelius's vision?**

Besides pork, there was a whole range of meat which Jews were forbidden to eat (see Leviticus 11). These food laws served to mark the Jewish people from their non-Jewish neighbours, a rule reinforced by the prohibition on Jews eating with non-Jews. All of this we must keep in mind as we join Peter on the roof and watch this great sail descending from heaven with unclean food in it.

- ? **If you were Peter, what kind of emotions would you be experiencing during the vision (10:9-16)?**
- ? **God could have communicated the gospel to Cornelius directly. Why do you think he had Peter and several other believers travel from Joppa to Caesarea to meet Cornelius and a houseful of other people face to face?**
- ? **What had Peter learned from his vision, which prepares him to meet Cornelius?**
- ? **Some believe this story suggests that 'all religions lead to God' or even that all religions are the same. What evidence is there that neither Cornelius nor Peter would agree with such a viewpoint?**

The Mosaic law contains the basic prohibitions against mixing with Gentiles. The New Testament writers, including Paul, are quite clear that the law was God's word to Israel and should be respected as such. But Paul and others are equally clear that, in the light of Jesus Christ, the law was to be seen as God's word *for a particular period and for a particular purpose*.

This is the kind of shift in thinking which was going on as Peter went to Cornelius's house. In Jesus the Messiah of Israel, God has broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, humiliating both categories (Jews, because they apparently lost their privileged position; Gentiles, because they have to acknowledge the Jewish Messiah) in order to reveal God's mercy to both.

- ? **In what ways might your community need to experience humility for the sake of the gospel – forging certain privileges or giving greater honour to others?**

Read 10:34-48.

- ? **Now that Peter has an opportunity to tell Cornelius and the others whatever he wants, what does he highlight?**
- ? **Peter frames his message about Jesus and the story of Israel with two wider declarations – Jesus is Lord of all (10:36) and everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (10:43). How have you seen the power of these messages at work?**
- ? **The Holy Spirit had fallen on believers in Jerusalem (ch 8). Now it has fallen on Gentiles in Caesarea. What is Luke emphasising with this sequence of episodes?**

PRAY

Ask God to open your heart where you have been closed to outsiders. Pray that you will see people as God sees them, as beloved by God and in need of the gospel. Thank God for the people who first brought the message to those of your ethnic background, whether it was many centuries ago or recently.

Conclude with the Grace