

A Changed Mind Leads to a Changed Heart

Acts 10:9-48

Introduction:

Sadly, one of the one of the least examined areas of people's lives is that of their prejudices. Yes, almost everyone carries with them prejudice against certain peoples. We pick this up – ever so subtly – as we grow up from the people around us. Nevertheless, it is there, and it becomes evident in how we approach certain people. For instance, when COVID-19 broke out a Chinese friend was yelled at and treated rudely as if the pandemic was her fault. That was a betrayal of prejudice. I have seen First Nations people treated rudely simply because they were First Nations. A friend who was very educated and brilliant was treated as a simpleton because he was black in color. Prejudice is all around us. But God wants to root that out of us, because we are to embrace all people with the love of Christ, with no barriers or distinctions.

Peter was miraculously changed at Pentecost as the Holy Spirit came on him. There was a boldness and a steadiness in his life that there was not before. Nevertheless, the transformation God wanted to work in his life was not completed. There was still much to do. In this chapter, we see how God changes first his thinking which then led to a change in his heart. I wonder what kind of changes God wants to make in our hearts?

Peter's Vision: Acts 10:9-16

Last week we were introduced to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. He was a godly man who did many good things to help others. God knew his heart and wanted him to reveal to him the wonderful truths of the Gospel. So God prepares Cornelius by telling him that he needs to meet a man named Simon Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner in Joppa. This is where we pick up the story.

1. Luke adds a little drama by noting that even as the party from Cornelius is approaching Joppa God starts preparing Peter. What is Peter doing at noon (sixth hour) and where is he? (vs 9)

2. God often uses our personal circumstances to get his messages through to us. What was Peter's circumstances according to verse 10? What does God do to Peter so he can receive his message? Compare this to Cornelius' experience of receiving a message from God.
3. In the trance, Peter gets a vision – describe his vision. (cf. vs 11-12).
 - Where does the sheet come from? Is this significant?
 - What is the significance of the animals?
4. What is Peter commanded to do in verse 13? And what is Peter's response? (vs. 14) What is back of his refusal to God? (cf. Leviticus 20:25, Leviticus 11:1-47, Deuteronomy 14:4-20)
5. What message does Peter get in verse 15? What do we learn through this message?
6. Peter gets this message three times. Is that significant? (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:1)

Peter's Guests and Their Story – Acts 20:17-23

7. Does Peter understand his vision? (vs. 17)
8. Who arrives at the home where Peter is staying as Peter is trying to sort out the meaning of his vision? (vss. 17-18)
9. Before Peter understands the vision, the Holy Spirit speaks to him about his guests. What is he told (vss. 19-20)? How does Peter respond? (vs. 21)
10. What is Peter told in verse 22? Do you think this influenced his actions in verse 23? Notice Peter goes the next day with the three guests, as instructed by God through the Holy Spirit (vs. 20).
11. Who did Peter take with him on the journey (vs. 23)? Why might he do this?

Peter Meets Cornelius – Acts 10:24-33

12. It took the party two days to cover the 40 km between Caesarea and Joppa. Cornelius had much trust in his messengers because he was ready for their return. How did he prepare for their return? (vs. 24) What does this tell us about Cornelius' faith?
13. How did Cornelius respond to Peter when he arrived at the house (vs. 25). Why might he do this?
14. Peter gets things back on track right away by telling Cornelius that he too is just a man. Peter goes into the house and sees a gathering of people. As Peter surveys that crowd, he comes to a good conclusion. What is it (vs. 28-29)?
15. Does Peter know why he has come yet? (vs. 29) How does this reveal the prejudice he still carries without fully realizing it?
16. Cornelius then recounts his encounter with the angel and the message he was given. He told how in obedience to the heavenly vision he had called Peter to his house. Now what does Cornelius expect? (vs. 33)

The Light Comes on for Peter – Acts 10:34-43

17. What does Peter think he now understands according to verse 34-35? How important is this message?
18. In verses 36-37 Peter seems to hold to the idea that the message of Jesus was for the Jewish nation. In what ways is this evident?
19. It is interesting to note in verses 37-40 that Peter assumes Cornelius has heard the story of Jesus. What might this indicate about how well known Jesus was during his ministry?
20. Peter goes on to indicate that the few who saw the risen Jesus, who even ate with him after his resurrection, were given a specific task. What is that task according to verse 42?

21. Peter closes with two more important truths about Jesus. What do we learn about Jesus in verse 42? And what do we learn in verse 43? What does the second message indicate about Peter's orientation to Judaism?

The Great Wall Falls – Acts 10:44-48

22. Here is where God surprises everyone – Peter, Cornelius, the believers from Joppa and the household of Cornelius. What does God do? (vs. 44) Had anyone asked God for this? So who is responsible and in control?
23. How did the Jewish converts to Christianity (which is what Peter seemed to think all Christians must be) know the Gentiles really received the Holy Spirit? (vss. 45-46)
24. What does Peter suggest for the Gentile believers in verse 47? What do we learn about God's order of salvation in this passage?
25. Into what name were the Gentiles baptized? (vs. 48) This meant they were Christians – fully accepted into the church of Jesus Christ. Was this Peter's idea? Would Peter have done this if it were not for the vision and the appearance of the angel?

Conclusion:

This event marks a great shift in the life of the church. To this point all believers came out of a Jewish background. Even the Samaritans and the Ethiopian were seeking the Jewish God when they met Jesus. Now the wall between Jew and Gentile is brought down, not by the church, but by God. He alone orchestrated this meeting and the conversion of these Gentile believers. It may not seem significant unless we realize this was God swinging the door wide open for Gentile believers – which includes all of us. Peter is right: "God shows no partiality. In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right will be accepted by him." (vs. 34). And so today in every nation of the world you will find followers of Jesus, men and women filled with the Holy Spirit awaiting His return. And as it happened in this story, every one of our stories started with God taking the first step! Thank you Lord!

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