

## “When God Needs us to Change our Attitudes”

*Acts 10:1-23*

Ch. 9 is usually entitled the ‘Conversion of Paul’ while some commentators entitle Ch. 10 the ‘Conversion of Peter’. Peter’s already saved, so what do they mean? Just because he’s saved doesn’t mean he didn’t need to change some of his ideas about how God works. And just because we’re saved doesn’t mean we don’t have areas in our life that need to change. Here God challenges Peter to change his attitude about who can receive the gospel. He’s going to challenge his prejudice towards Gentiles and see that God is the Creator of all and Jesus died for all so that anyone can come to faith in Christ. We too need to be willing to see everyone through the eyes of God and probably need an occasional attitude realignment every now and then and maybe even a 180’ change in our negative attitude towards people or God’s work. That’s called repentance. [Let’s pray]

Last week the apostle Peter was brought back into the Acts narrative that Luke is writing to help his readers understand how the gospel spread. We learned in 9:31-43 that Peter, who had basically been staying in Jerusalem (even though Jesus commanded them to start in Jerusalem and be His witnesses in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world) but God was working in his life and he travelled 50 km west to encourage the believers in Lydda. While there he performs a miracle in the name of Jesus, healing a lame man. This results in many people being saved.

News travels up to Joppa on the coast. As we learned last Wednesday, Joppa is a big international port city. Any goods needed in Israel and eastward came to Joppa. It was a New York or a Miami or a Montreal of its day. The believers in Joppa hear Peter is only 30-40 km away and they ask for him to come and heal a young woman named Tabitha who passes away before Peter gets there. When he does arrive, he repeats what Jesus did to Jairus’ daughter and she is brought back to life. Again, many people are saved as a result. At the end of the chapter Peter is staying at the home of a man named Simon who is a tanner. A tanner works with dead animals and their skins. Traditionally the religious leaders declared you unclean and unfit to worship God in the synagogue because of your work with dead animals. But Peter has no issue with this. Why? Because Peter is growing spiritually. He knows the difference between the traditions of men and the Bible. Leviticus taught that you were only unclean until sundown, you washed and then you were fine.

Peter’s spiritual growth in his moving away from Jerusalem and discerning Scripture from traditions is opening up his mind and heart to changes that never would have happened before he met Jesus. Now that He knows Jesus and has the Holy Spirit, God is working in his life to change his attitude about things he once was a hard head about. Is Peter ready for a bigger change? We’ll all be ready for bigger changes when we’re open to smaller changes for sure. How does God often help us change our attitudes? He uses people.

### **God Brings Different People into Our Lives** **(10:1-8)**

... who will help us see things about ourselves that we didn’t see before. God was working on getting Peter to Joppa so he would be in the place where God could arrange a meeting with Cornelius who is 50 km north on the coastal highway in Caesarea. When God wants to confront us with our need to change he connects us with people and situations that will

### ***Expose our judgmental attitudes (vv.1-2)***

Jews were prejudiced against Gentiles as were Gentiles against Jews. They each had misconceptions about the other. Most of our misconceptions are not based on personal experience. Its based on hearsay, false information and stereo-types. Or perhaps we did have one bad experience with someone and we label everyone the same way.

And not just a Gentile, a Roman centurion. Cornelius is not your typical Roman soldier. He was a centurion, a commander of 100 soldiers, from Italy stationed in Caesarea basically to keep order in Israel. Yet he's a God-fearer. He prays to God not the Roman gods. He helps Jewish people. He probably attended their synagogues. But he wasn't a proselyte. He didn't become circumcised and he probably didn't follow all their dietary restrictions. He was even praying at the 9<sup>th</sup> hour which is the Jewish afternoon prayer time.

Not coincidentally, Jesus encountered a similar man in Matt. 8:5-13, another centurion who approached Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant. He had the faith to believe Jesus could heal him from a distance without going into his home, which he knew Jews were reluctant to do. We'll come back to something Jesus said here shortly.

Peter's willingness to change in small ways – move out of Jerusalem, travel to meet others, staying in the home of a tanner – are all small steps to help him towards a bigger change. If the gospel is going to the ends of the earth it has to go to Gentiles. Other than the Ethiopian eunuch, it really hasn't happened yet. God brings people into our life who are from different races, languages and backgrounds to

### ***Expand our relationships (vv.3-8)***

If we're going to reach people with the gospel we have to meet different people. We have to leave our comfort zones and not just hang around the same people all the time. To befriend non family members, co-workers, neighbours with the prayer that we may be able to share Christ. Jesus chided his disciples in Matt. 5 to love their enemies and to be different than the tax collectors who only hung around tax-collectors. If you only hang around your family or your same friends, Jesus says, you're not doing what I asked you to do.

Peter (a Jew) needed to stretch his relational boundaries. His prejudices against Gentiles and Romans are going to be challenged very shortly as God brings Cornelius' servants towards Joppa.

And God uses a vision to Peter and an angelic message to Cornelius to communicate where they need to change. Because this was so radical and needed direct divine affirmation, God arranged it this way. But however He chooses to do it

## **He'll Show us Where We Need to Change** **(10:9-16)**

The scene shifts to Joppa. It's noon, Peter is getting hungry. While waiting for the meal he goes on the roof (ancient patio) and prays also. While praying he has this trance like vision and sees a sheet coming down from heaven with clean and unclean animals on it and a voice commands him to 'Kill and eat'. This happens 3 times for emphasis. Remember, Peter has a history with a thrice repeated message from Jesus.

Peter responds 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eating anything unclean or unholy' (v.14). But the Lord (Jesus?) responds

*"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean"*

We have to remember that God originally gave Israel these dietary laws as a way of separating them from the Gentiles so that they would not be influenced by their godless lifestyle. Table fellowship expressed intimacy and friendship. Under the Law God warned Israel not to mix with the nations but rather win the nations with God's message. Yet Peter should have known that Jesus already laid the foundation for changing this. Back in the miracle of the healing the centurion's son, Jesus commanded the Roman centurion for his faith and then said this in Matt. 8:10-12,

*I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. <sup>11</sup> I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup> But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Jesus was indicating that not all Israelites will enter the kingdom of God and that there will be many Gentiles who will join believing Jews at God's future table fellowship. Another time in Mark 7 the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus' disciples because they didn't follow the hand cleansing rituals. Jesus explained it's not what you touch that makes you 'unacceptable/unclean' before God it's what in your heart.

*"Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? <sup>19</sup> For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") . <sup>20</sup> He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "*

And God had shown He wanted to reach the Gentiles as well as the Jews in the world in numerous places in the Old Testament.

*Ps.2:7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession*

*Is. 49:6 It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*

Peter himself quoted Joel 2:28 on the day of Pentecost:

*<sup>28</sup> "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*

When God is working in our mind and heart to make difficult changes I believe

## **He'll Clearly Confirm What We Need to Work on** **(10:17-22)**

By the time this vision is finished Cornelius' men are at the door. This is no coincidence! They ask for Peter. The Holy Spirit speaks to him directly saying 'It's okay, this is from God.' Notice God

has to assure Peter of this before he meets them. He doesn't know they are Gentiles asking him to come see a Roman centurion 50 km away. They explain why they are there and tell him about this God-fearing, Jewish loving Roman centurion. And that he had a message from God himself about meeting you and that Peter has a message for Cornelius, which is the gospel because while Cornelius knows who God is he doesn't understand his need for forgiveness is available through Jesus, God's Son. It's quite clear in 11:17-18.

How does God confirm these things with us? He'll use people of course and situations that can't be explained other than God-moments. Peter just healed two people just like Jesus had. Aeneas, the lame man and he brought Tabitha back to life and now God sends Peter a Roman centurion who has great faith just as Jesus had! God is working in ways that Peter will hear what He's saying. The people and the situations God brings into our life are not coincidences. They are meant to teach us something, to point us to areas in our life where we need to change. Maybe its sin we need to repent of our a negative attitude we need to change or wrong thinking about people that needs to be changed.

Even in the book of Acts, God has already spoken about the need to reach Gentiles. Acts 1:8 Jesus said be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. And in 9:31 we just read

*<sup>31</sup> 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.*

The church was making an impact all around. It was reaching Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and now it needed to reach the Gentiles. But in order to reach the Gentiles Peter and the other apostles and the church needed to change their attitudes about who God wanted them to reach. To believe that God loves everyone not just Israel. For too long they were haughty and felt God called them because they were special. To be called by God is special but its because of His grace and mercy not because of anything we've done. 'For God so loves the world' , therefore so should we. But in order to love the world we need to love that co-worker who rubs us the wrong way or that neighbour we have a bad attitude towards or that person of a different race or culture that we encounter in our routines that we don't know and we're reluctant to get to know.

So God arranges people and situations to open Peter's heart and mind to change the way he thinks God works. There is no question that God arranged all this. It is not a coincidence when God exposes our attitudes through what we hear and read and who we meet and even the timing of all these things, but, it is interesting that He doesn't force us to change. Now Peter has to choose what he's going to do. These three Gentiles show no harm to him, who want to talk about God, who want to take him back to Cornelius, all of which God has clearly confirmed, are now in Joppa and its probably too late to get back to Caesarea in one day. What's Peter going to do with these Gentiles? God allows him and us to make our own choices. Which I am encouraged by. The fact that God doesn't force Peter (or us ) to change is His way of showing

## **God Believes We Can Change** **(10:23)**

*<sup>23</sup> Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.*

What time was it? Lunch time. He invited them in to share food and fellowship and get to know them more. Then he let them stay there. Then he travelled with them the next day and convinced a

few other believers. Peter was changing. Peter was listening to the voice of God speak truth into his life. God didn't force him to change, He just showed him what he needed to change and let him choose.

Sometimes we don't always choose wisely do we? God speaks truth into our life through His Word or through people and circumstances and we revert back to our old habits or our old attitudes. And then He'll do it again and again and again until we move incrementally at times to change. Why wont God give up on us? Because God believes we'll change because God believes His own Word! Phil 1:3 says,

*<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Paul was confident God would do this because God doesn't lie. He is committed to making us more like Jesus every day. We can make His job easy or difficult based on our own attitudes. Because I believe God's Word I believe all of us can change the attitudes we need to change about the unsaved, about each other, about our involvement in God's work and about personal unhealthy life choices. This is a verse 23 moment where God now leaves the decision with us. Will we change? Who of us can help you, keep you accountable or even pray for you? We're in this together so let's help each one of us grow [change!] in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

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