

3-14-21 God Can Change A Heart

Acts 10:1-33.

Prejudice: preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

Preconceived Notion: opinion, persuasion, sentiment thought, view a personal belief or judgment that is not founded on proof or certainty.

Today we are going to look at how God deals with this in the life of the apostle Peter. Peter had his prejudices, preconceived notions, many that had been passed down through tradition, and heritage.

Ponder for a second, God could have sent the evangelist Philip to Cornelius because he was living in Caesarea at the time (**see Acts 8:40**). But in His sovereignty, the Lord wanted Peter because he was a key leader of the church, who held some keys.

Matthew 16:18-19, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

God used Peter to unlock three doors for gospel proclamation among three key groups of people:

- **Jews (Acts 2)**
- **Samaritans (Acts 8)**
- **Gentiles (Acts 10)**

The main characters are Cornelius, a Roman officer, and Peter, a Jew, and one of the twelve disciples. This is a groundbreaking chapter in the history of the church and a crucial turning point for the advancement of the gospel. It's so important that 66 verses are devoted to this encounter (we'll cover the second half next week). Two main points will emerge from the text which we can apply to our context.

1. **Adjust our Attitudes (Acts 10:1-20)**

- **(Verse 1)** Caesarea was a beautiful seaport city and home of the governor, along with many members of the Roman military. The city was named after Caesar Augustus and was a place Jews denounced for its immorality and idol worship. Cornelius was a high-ranking military officer, in charge of 100 men. Incidentally, centurions are always depicted in a positive light in Scripture.
- **Read verse 2.** What does it say about Cornelius?
- Devout, meaning reverent.
- He feared God. He was a Gentile who worshiped the Jewish God. He was a moral man but not yet saved. God-fearers were not full converts but had left their idolatrous ways.
- He was generous.
- He prayed continually. He not only gave gifts to others, but also gazed toward heaven as he offered his prayers to God throughout the day.

- **Read verses 3-4.** I think the **ESV** captures **verse 4** the best, **“And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?”** The idea behind staring is to “strain or stretch forward.” He was filled with fear but responded with a faith-filled question, **“What is it, Lord?”**
- Continuing in **verse 4** **“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial to God.”** Like a fragrant offering, his praying and his giving were like sweet incense to God.
- **Verse 5-6** God is so specific. Send men to Joppa, and get Peter, he is in the house of Simon a tanner, oh and he lives by the sea. Peter will tell you all about what is next!
- **Verse 8,** Cornelius **“explained all these things to them.”**
- Having prepared Cornelius to hear the gospel, God now must prepare Peter to go and explain the gospel to a hated Gentile. But for that to happen God had to deal with a huge attitude issue Peter had. It would be difficult for Peter to turn this key to unlock this last door.
- **Read verses 9-10.** Because it was noon, **verse 10** tells us Peter became “hangry” and wanted something to eat. As he smelled the aroma of fresh falafel and hot buttered bagels, he fell into a trance.
- **Verses 11-12.** In the sheet was a mixture of all kinds of beasts, birds, and bugs. This means there were “clean” and “unclean” animals all jumbled together. Peter was raised only to eat what was considered ceremonially clean and Kosher. He would have been repulsed by all the unclean animals touching the clean ones. Abstaining from unclean animals was part of his Jewish heritage.
- We know for certain Peter wasn’t expecting to hear **verse 13.** Remember, when a needle on a record player would scratch across the record? That’s probably what Peter heard.
- **Verse 14, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”** Peter is horrified and is saying something like, “No way!” or more literally, “I shall not do it!” And yet, He calls God “Lord.” You can’t say “no” and “Lord” at the same time. If you say “no,” then He’s not your Lord. And if He’s your Lord, you’ll want to say “yes.” Peter had kept the Old Testament dietary laws his entire life, so this really ruffled his feathers.

Leviticus 20:25-26, “You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. 26 And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

- It’s helpful to unpack the tension which existed between Jew and Gentile. If a Jew went into a Gentile country, they would “shake the dust” off their feet before returning to Israel because Gentile dirt was considered defiled. If milk were drawn from a cow by Gentile hands, a Jew could not drink. No Jew would ever eat with a Gentile.
- **Read verses 15-16.**
- It’s difficult for us to grasp how big a deal this was for Peter. He had always followed.

Leviticus 11:2-3: "These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth. Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat." ESV

- They were forbidden from eating camels, rock badgers, and pigs. And now God tells Peter he can eat camel chops and bacon because He has declared all foods clean!
- I wonder if Peter remembered what Jesus said in

Mark 7:18-19, And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ESV

1 Timothy 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving."