

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 9:32-10:48

Next to Jesus' death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the events that take place in Acts 10 are the most important developments in the history of Christianity.

If ever there was a power lunch this was it!

Up until Acts 10 the Church was made up mostly of Jews. Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism.

But Jesus promised Peter the keys to the kingdom. And the man with those keys would open the door of salvation to both Jews, *and Samaritans, and Gentiles.*

In Acts 10 God blazes a new trail, and Peter leads the way. God uses a vision from heaven to open up Peter's mind, his heart, *even his mouth - and eventually the community of God.* A heavenly vision supplies Peter the courage to chart a new course.

In this chapter a new work begins. God teaches Peter that what He once called *unclean*, He now calls *okay - and that includes both pork chops and Gentiles.*

Acts 10 forever changes the scope of Christianity, and the make-up of the Church. We cannot over-emphasize the significance of the events in Acts 10...

We pick it up tonight where we left off... in 9:32...

“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.” Lydda was an Israeli city with a large Gentile

population - 25 miles NW of Jerusalem - about 8 miles from the Mediterranean port of Joppa.

Today, **Lydda**, or its OT name, **Lod**, is between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem - home to the Ben Gurion airport.

Verse 33, “There (Peter) found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.”

Every morning for the first 18 years of my life this is what my mother commanded me to do, “*Arise and make your bed.*” And even though I had two very functional legs, I’m sad to report, I was rarely obedient.

But Aeneas, a man who had been crippled for eight years, “**Then arose immediately.**” It was a miracle!

Aeneas’ lame legs were strengthened - made limbered - then walked. *He even made his bed!*

“So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” “*Sharon*” was a regional name encompassing the entire coastal plain. The good news about Jesus had spread from Jerusalem - into the hills of Samaria - now westward toward the Israeli coast...

The Israeli port cities were next... *the Jewish port known as Joppa - and the Roman port of Caesarea.*

Verse 36, “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (the name is Aramaic for “*gazelle*”), which is translated Dorcas. (the Greek equivalent.)

“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. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room.” They were already preparing the body for burial. She was washed. Soon they would be covering her in spices.

“And since Lydda was near 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.”

“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.” Evidently, she had been some sort of a seamstress. Perhaps a fashion designer. Friends were paying tribute to her skill - displaying her handiwork.

Peter is about to put Jesus' handiwork on display.

“But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed.” And you should recognize the similarities between the mannerisms of Peter and the methods of His Master. Peter performs this miracle exactly the way Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from her death bed...

The first similarity was to put out the professional mourners. The first century Jews would paid certain women to wail and weep at their loved one's funeral.

It was a feigned grief. And Jesus had no tolerance for their crocodile tears. Our Lord prefers to work His miracles in an atmosphere of faith and praise.

But the similarities continue, “**And turning to the body (Peter) said, “Tabitha, arise.”** This was verbatim what Jesus said to Jairus’ daughter. “**Talitha Cumi** (or little girl), **I say to you, Arise...**” *You get the impression Peter knows he’s in over his head. He’s a fisherman not a miracle-worker, so he takes his cues from Jesus.*

He remembers what Jesus did and follows Him precisely... Remember Matthew 9 and Mark 5, Jesus said to the paralytic, “**Arise, take up your bed.**” Again, this is what Peter had said to the crippled Aeneas.

It seems whenever Peter felt overwhelmed by his circumstances he went to default mode, **WWJD, “What would Jesus do?”**... But then he doesn’t sell the slogan by printing it on a bracelet... *He just does it!*

And Peter got the same results... “**She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.**” The man who’d been chicken now has the courage of a lion. Peter is walking by faith - *daring to trust Jesus.*

“And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.”

A tanner was as close as you could get to an ancient taxidermist. He was skilled in dressing and preserving animal hides. And since a tanner worked with dead animals, the laws of Judaism considered him ceremonially unclean. This

prohibited Simon the tanner from participating in the Jewish rituals of the Temple.

In fact, his trade was so despised by the Jews that he was forced to work outside the city. Because of the defilement associated with his work the Jewish Mishnah gave a tanner's wife the right to divorce him.

That Peter even stayed in the house of a tanner was another example of him doing what Jesus did! Peter was willing to befriend and identify with sinners.

Jesus had shown him it was God's will to reach out to the unreachable, and love the unlovable. I'm sure Peter recalled the words of Jesus, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick..."

It's interesting, Peter seems to already be *leaning* in the direction of grace. But in Acts 10 he *free falls*.

He jumps out of the plane on a parachute of grace.

Verse 1, "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment..." Caesarea was Israel's Roman port on the Mediterranean. The city and its harbor was built by Herod the Great in honor of the Roman Caesar.

It was a magnificent city with a world renown harbor.

Caesarea was Rome's political and military capitol in Israel. It was the home to the governor, and headquarters of the Roman occupation. And there was a soldier stationed in Caesarea named Cornelius.

Verse 2, he was “a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.”

Cornelius was a Roman from Italy - *the original Italian Stallion*. And he was a centurion - equal to a sergeant in our Army. He was the military’s backbone.

It’s interesting, whenever a centurion appears in the NT its usually in a favorable light. To rise to this rank such a man had to be disciplined and trustworthy.

In verse 1 we’re told this Cornelius was in charge of the Italian Regiment - this was a detachment that served as the Roman governor’s personal body guard. They were the Secret Service of the Roman military.

Cornelius was also called “a God-fearer.”

He was a Gentile who was tired of Greek and Roman paganism. He was hungry for the true God. He had embraced Judaism, *short of being circumcised*.

These *God-fearers* were sincere seekers. They obeyed the Law’s moral demands - even gave offerings to the local synagogue. These Roman God-fearers were *good people* - yet they were *lost people*.

In all this man’s good works he’d failed to find God

“About the ninth hour of the day (or 3:00 in the afternoon) he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”

And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.”

God had heard Cornelius' prayer. God always hears the sincere prayer of a searching heart. "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

Remember Philip in Acts 8, God called him to leave a happening revival in Samaria to find a solitary man on a lonely deserted highway outside Gaza.

Philip explained the Scriptures to an Ethiopian in search of the truth. God never allows a sincere God-fearer who seeks Him to return home empty-handed.

Whether its the aborigine in the Australian outback, or a little boy growing up in a strict Islamic country, somehow, someday God will get a sincere seeker the truth and get them pointed toward the Lord Jesus.

Pastor Joe at the CC Philadelphia told me of a young lady in his church who'd always questioned, "*what about the man on the island who's never heard the Gospel?*" This had been one of her obstacles to faith.

Recently she was on a mission trip with the church in Uganda. On an island in the middle of Lake Victoria she was witnessing to a man who'd never heard about Jesus. He was moved to tears by the Gospel. That's when it hit her, she was the answer to her question, "*what about the man on the island who's never heard?*"

God has ways to get the Gospel to sincere hearts!
And His means might be you!

Verse 7, “And 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.”

Their mission was to fetch Peter... “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.”

Again, as we’ve mentioned, when God does a work it effects both sides of the equation. Cornelius’ men are in route when God tackles Peter’s reluctance. It was noon, on the rooftop, when Peter sees a vision...

And Joppa was the perfect backdrop for this vision.

Today, there’s a whale-shaped fountain in Joppa, put there in honor of Jonah who set sail from this very port.

Jonah was the bigoted prophet. He was prejudiced against Ninevites. He hated Gentiles. In Jonah’s mind and heart, God’s salvation was for “**Jews only.**”

But God altered Jonah’s direction. He stirred up a storm - scared a ship’s crew into slinging Jonah into the sea - where a fish swallowed Jonah - then spit him up on the bank. *A repentant Jonah went on to preach to the Gentiles.* Now God is again at Joppa, where He once more intends to bust up *The Jews Only Club...*

It’s noon. The tropical heat is on the rise. Peter climbs to the rooftop patio to enjoy some shade, and cool off in the ocean breeze. And it’s lunch time...

“Then (Peter) became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance...”

Peter’s stomach is growling. He’s longing for a bowl of lentils, or Matzo balls, or a mutton sandwich. He’ll settle for a falafel. *But God Himself serves Peter lunch!*

“And (Peter) saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending 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.” A huge picnic blanket descends from heaven with all kinds of *incredible in-edibles*. All the entrees are of the non-koshered variety.

Nothing Peter is being offered is on the Jewish menu. God’s tasty treats fly in the face of what Peter’s religion taught him he could munch. Yet Peter hears the voice of God that says, *“Rise Peter; kill and eat.”*

Realize in the first century, Jews and Gentiles were separated *by pedigree, by circumcision, by Sabbath worship* - but above all, they were defined *by diet*.

A kosher Jew was religiously superior to *a non-kosher Gentile*. And that kosher Jew would never in a million years pull up to a table-full of God-forbidden food - nor eat with folks who occupied that table.

Jewish dietary laws were the epitome of *religion*.

Yes, the distinction between *clean* and *unclean* had some definite health benefits - especially in a day when meat wasn't always properly prepped and refrigerated.

But kosher laws were part of a bigger picture.

God had conditioned Israel to approach life in a certain manner. All of life was to be delineated as *clean and unclean - holy and unholy - pure and impure - acceptable to God and unacceptable to God.*

This distinction was a grid that overlaid every dimension of Jewish life - food, sacrifice, washing, houses, even people. The Law provided a means of differentiating "good" from "bad." By learning the Law you could pick out *the good guys* from *the bad guys*.

And this is the purpose behind not just Jewish religion, but all religion. Muslim religion, Buddhist religion, even pseudo-Christian religion defines *clean from unclean - acceptable from unacceptable.*

Every religion has standards, and taboos, and rituals that allow you to label people "pure" and "defiled."

Often liberal critics attack religion as the enemy of unity. They claim religion is the Great Divider in the world. Rather than bring us together, it keeps us apart. It separates us into factions and inflames hostilities.

In a sense this is true. Every religion provides criteria that divides up humanity into *holy* and *unholy*.

And no other religion did this as comprehensively and rigorously as did God's religion, Judaism. Kosher Jews were

reminded at every mealtime there was such a thing as *right and wrong - holy and unholy*. Good guys ate “clean” foods. Bad guys ate the “dirty birds.”

And of course Judaism didn't end with diet...

It did such a thorough job identifying good from bad, that by the time you had subjected your life to the entire Mosaic Law you had to conclude with Rabbi Saul in the first chapters of his letter to the Romans, that “*There is no one righteous, no, not one.*”

An honest OT Jew was forced to an uncomfortable conclusion: **Everybody is a bad guy!** We're all sinners. Among humanity there are no good guys!

This is why Christianity picks up where Judaism leaves off. We say this all the time, but without its full implication hitting us. ***Christianity is not a religion!***

Christianity is about salvation - not religion.

Religion chooses sides. It picks out the good guys from the bad guys - it assigns white hats and black hats - it awards merit badges to people for accumulating filthy rags... *but that's not Christianity.*

The Gospel declares that we're all bad guys. There's only one good guy... His name is Jesus! **And the goal of Christianity is to bring everybody to Jesus!**

Whether you're a Tech fan or Georgia fan - a Mac-user or PC-user - a Republican or Democrat - a Baptist or Methodist... it doesn't matter who your religion says you are... *you're a bad guy, and you need Jesus!*

Unrighteous bad guys *and* self-righteous bad guys... secular bad guys *and* religious bad guys... pew-sitting bad guys *and* pulpit-occupying bad guys... *all of us need Jesus!* Today, the line in the sand for the whole human race is no longer *the food we put in our mouth*, but *the faith we put in Jesus!* God bestows grace and shows favor to those people who come to Jesus!

Here's what's happening in Peter's vision, God is putting an end to *religion*. He's replacing it with *salvation*. Judaism was religion. *It was God's religion - even a perfect religion - but it was still religion.*

Now God is putting religion on the shelf, and He's choosing new terms for His covenant with humanity.

Christianity is **salvation** - not *religion*... Since none of us are good, salvation is all about grace. And the only *place* you'll find *grace* is at the cross of Jesus.

Peter needed to stop being religious and drop its distinctions. Folks are no longer categorized as *clean or unclean - chosen or common - white hats or black hats*. The line of demarcation is no longer religion and its trappings. It's now a matter of receiving the grace of God that has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

This was the lesson God taught me when He introduced me to Calvary Chapel. At the time I was a straight-laced, religious Baptist. I thought my legalistic observance made me right with God. **But Calvary Chapel was my heavenly vision...** *I saw this giant Hawaiian shirt descend from heaven, and on it were*

long-haired hippies, in bell-bottom jeans - with electric guitars and drums, playing praise songs to Jesus.

I thought you had to dress up to go to church... I didn't think you could have long-hair and go to heaven... I was told electric guitars and drums were of the devil... Yet God said, "Rise Sandy, play and sing!"

The love and holiness I sensed at Calvary Chapel left me no choice. It was God, *and obviously God was not behaving according to the rules I'd been taught!*

Theologically, I believed in grace - but when I saw it in action it challenged me, and forced me from my comfort zone. This is what it did to Peter, and what it does to all of us when we realize a person doesn't have to live up to *my* standards, or *my* prejudices, or *my* tradition to be considered acceptable to God.

If God calls a man *"clean;"* He is clean indeed! And only Jesus can make a man clean in the eyes of God.

Obviously, God was up to something new, but Peter isn't sure what He's cooking up. Thus, Peter's reply in verse 14 leaves much to be desired, *"But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."* Here's the ultimate oxymoron...

You can say, *"not so friend"* or *"not so buddy"* - but you can't say *"not so Lord."* *"Lord"* means *"master, boss."* If Jesus is your Lord you're under His command.

Yet I empathize with Peter's reluctance. Asking a good Jew to eat non-kosher would be like requiring a diehard vegan to pig out on a chili-cheese burger.

This was a complicated decision. Years of religious training, and the bias it had created in him, kept Peter hemmed-in. He was trapped by three powerful forces: by **principle**, by **prejudice**, and by **precedence**.

Understand, **principles** are either *informed* or *misinformed* - depending on how they're *formed*.

Peter had grown up a good Jewish boy. *Tradition had forged his principles*. He went to synagogue on Saturday - paid his tithes - kept the Passover - made pilgrimage to Jerusalem - offered a sacrificial lamb.

And Peter kept kosher in obedience to Leviticus 11.

He only ordered off the "*clean*" menu. His wife went to a deli with the rabbinical sticker of approval in the window. Shrimp or lobster never crawled over his lips.

Peter never savored a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich - or a plate of pork BBQ! *It was a matter of principle!* I'll never doubt Peter's devotion to principle.

In my mind, a life without BBQ rivals the zeal of a suicide bomber! Peter was serious about **principle**.

So when God told him to eat unclean foods - *it was as if 1500 years of tradition, and the Law of Moses, and a thousand rabbis, and his entire Jewish family were screaming in Peter's ear to ask for another menu.*

From birth, Peter's conscience was drilled to keep kosher. This wasn't a simple preference - but a deeply-held matter of

conscience. This was a **principle** to Peter. Yet please take note, **a *misinformed principle kept Peter on the wrong side of God's will.***

Our conscience is an organ we train to act on cue. The conscience is taught by both *truth* and *tradition*. Thus, it can fight against the Holy Spirit, or be His ally.

Go to the Middle East today and you'll see this on both sides of the conflict. Jews can't *give in* to Muslims without violating *their* conscience - Muslims can't *concede* to Jews because it's violates *their* conscience. A conscience can be programmed by *truth* or *error*.

Peter needed to surrender his conscience to the Lordship of Jesus. Some of Peter's principles were wrong - some no longer applied. God was blazing a new trail. A sovereign God is now stepping out of the box, and he's recruiting Peter to step out with Him.

But Peter has to cut ties with a few long-held **principles** if he's going to be part of this work of grace.

Peter was also trapped by **prejudice**. And *don't underestimate the power of a prejudice!*

When Peter thought of eating pork and visiting Gentiles it just didn't "**feel right.**" Whether it *was right*, wasn't his biggest hurdle! This was outside his comfort zone. *Prejudicial feelings* caused his resistance.

I know some prim and proper Baptists who would never come to church wearing short pants, or mow their lawn on Sunday... It just wouldn't "**feel right.**"

There are some things that don't "*feel right*" to you, but that doesn't make it wrong for someone else.

A Christian has to represent *God's truth*, not his *own prejudices*. To live by grace I make the decision not to let my preferences, or my feelings, or my traditions govern my interactions? Your prejudices will close the door to certain people. Grace keeps those doors open.

And for Peter to obey God, he also had to step over a **precedent**. He answered God, "**nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.**" Peter had established a standard in his life. This had never, ever happened. *Peter had never had sausage on his pizza!*

This is the type of conviction religious folks applaud. Like an Eric Liddell never running a race on Sundays, or a Sandy Koufax not pitching on Yom Kippur - a guy makes a costly commitment and refuses to budge.

Here Peter does the same, **but ironically his commitment works against God's will in his life.**

God wants to take Peter - *not up to the edge of where he's been* - but to a new place. Yet to obey God and go there, Peter has to step over a precedent.

Some steps are hard to take, just because they've never been taken before. Peter has a decision he has to make. *Kill and eat* - or *sit still* and disobey?

This was a tough decision for Peter - perhaps that's why God repeated the vision three times. Peter had to wrestle,

and dissect truth from prejudice. Peter's conscience supported a prejudice he had to discard.

Verse 15, "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 up into heaven again."

On the rooftop in Joppa God was weaning Peter off religion so he could embrace His grace. *And perhaps this is what needs to happen in your life?*

Unlike religion, Christianity isn't a commitment to a principle, or prejudice, or precedent. It's the pledge of allegiance to a person! It's all about Jesus! *The Ruler always trumps the rules. The Lord overrides the Law.*

As followers of Jesus our conscience is bound to one passion: *to please our Lord Jesus!* We're not to follow religious expectations, or church traditions, or even the rules of our own making... we're to follow Jesus!

Will you go *where He* sends you?

Do *what He* says do?

Love *whoever He* sends to your door? *And realize there will always be a knock on your door...*

Verse 17, "Now while Peter 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."

We *get grace* from God, but then we *give grace* to everyone around us. And it's *the giving of God's grace* that sends us on **the grand adventure**.

Religion is *uniform*, and *boring*, and *mechanical*, and *predictable*. Grace is wild and wooly. It's the call of the wild! **It's orthodox to believe in grace, but risky to practice grace.** Apply grace and you'll be criticized by religious folks. Dare to extend grace and you'll find yourself in *uncomfortable places* - with *uncomfortable people* - dealing with *uncomfortable situations*.

This is what happened to Peter. No sooner does God fold up the picnic blanket that three Gentiles - *Romans no less* – are knocking at his door...

“And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. 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, (*and I love the encouragement...*) *doubting nothing; for I have sent them.*” Legalistic leanings can be deeply ingrained in a person, and can derail their faith. That's why to take the path of grace you have to remove all doubts!

“Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. 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. Then he invited

them in and lodged *them*.” A new venture of faith is about to begin.

“On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the following day they entered Caesarea. 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 him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” I’m sure that on the way up the coast - from Joppa to Caesarea - Peter was thinking through the implications of God’s grace.

In Judaism, a Jew was forbidden to enter the home of a Gentile. It would defile him. He would be unclean.

But Peter realizes once you strip away religion there’s no difference between him and Cornelius. They both put their britches on the same way. They’re both bad guys in need of Jesus. Peter knows he shouldn’t be worshipped. He’s just a man, like every other man.

It’s interesting though, people still revere Peter.

Go to Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, and you’ll see worshippers lined up at Michelangelo’s statue to kiss the foot of Peter. In fact, over the years their lips have rubbed away his big toe... *It’s nothing but idolatry...*

And if Peter were here he would put his foot down and stop the foolishness! He’d insist he’s just a man.

This was his approach to Cornelius. Verse 27, “And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come

together. Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is 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.

Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" 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 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." Talk about eager listeners - *this is it!*

They're all ears... Charles Spurgeon once said, "It's not a great preacher that makes a great congregation, but a great congregation that makes a great preacher."

Verse 34, "Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality." Red and yellow, black and white we're all precious in His sight... O prejudiced Pete, has come a long way!

"But in every nation (not just Israel) whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all - that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began

from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

Peter preaches - and there's nothing fancy, or clever, or eloquent about his sermon - he just lays out the facts - *which is all that preachers' today need to do!*

For “**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.**”

Peter wasn't even through with his sermon. He doesn't even have an opportunity to give His invitation, before he gets interrupted by the Spirit of God.

It's funny, but Peter holds the unique distinction of being the only man interrupted by all three members of the Trinity... On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter was interrupted by God the Father... On several occasions he was interrupted by God the Son... And here He's interrupted by God the Spirit... There are times when we also need to be interrupted. We need to

quiet our opinions and let the Holy Spirit speak into our situation.

“And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.”

Notice what happens, before Peter can *brief the Gentiles on keeping kosher, or clip a single circumcision, or make a sacrifice, or read the Law...* God saves the Italian Guard, just as He did the Jews.

And it had absolutely nothing to do with anything but *God's grace and their faith*. It's about amazing grace.

“For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.”

The same evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit that the Jews received at Pentecost was apparent among the Gentiles in Caesarea.

It was evidence that the Gentiles had entered the same covenant, in the same way, as had the Jews.

“Then Peter answered, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the *name of the Lord*.” In essence they were baptized as Christians - *not Jews*.

“Then they asked him to stay a few days.”

Throughout the OT you had to be *a child of Abraham* to be a *child of God*... Just as there were *clean and unclean foods*, there were *chosen and common people*. Jews were special. Gentiles were despised.

But when Jesus died on the cross He did so to take away the sins of the whole **world**, not just the Jews.

Access to God is now available to all people. It's been said, "The only level ground in all the world is at the foot of the cross." Today, the only "in crowd" on the planet that matters are those who are "in Christ."

Yet sadly, that's not always the case in many churches. Leaders today like to lay down *their own law*.

If you conform to their man-made rules, you can ride in the front of the bus - but resist, and you'll sit in the rear. Believers are divided into *first class* and *coach*.

It's a religious caste system - and it's the opposite of grace! There are no second class citizens in God's kingdom. Always remember what Peter learned, "**What God has cleansed you must not call common!**"

Later Peter writes to **ALL** believers, and calls them "(God's) own special people." He says we're "complete in (Christ)" - *not because we toe the party line!*

This was an amazing adventure for a good Jew like Peter... *Gentiles* knock on his door - he travels with *Gentiles* to a *Gentile* city - enters a *Gentile* home - then preaches to a roomful of *Gentiles*. It's a culture shock!

In one sense, Peter just went up the coast of Israel, but in another sense, Peter's experience with Cornelius and the Romans was *the shot heard round the world*.

Jewish rabbis at the time would've said a Gentile wasn't worthy to set foot under the same roof as a Jew.

Yet by the end of this day, Gentile believers now know the *same God* - and participate in the *same covenant* - and enjoy the *same Holy Spirit*, the *same power*, and the *same evidence* as Jewish believers.

The future of Christianity was forever altered by Peter's obedience to the heavenly vision. In fact, you and I owe our place in God's family to Peter's courage and obedience. May we also spread the grace of God, and dare to move out in our own adventures of grace.