

27a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening, January the 9th of 2004 in the Book of Acts by taking a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the mystery of God's Spirit so that as we look at chapter 10 we will be able to comprehend it and remember it and apply it in the days ahead. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for the many grace provisions that you have extended to us. We thank you that whether we are successful or whether we fail in our daily struggle to live rightly, you are consistent, you are ever-present, your love for us does not change.

The work of Christ on our behalf does not change and we are secure within the confines of your plan both now and in the eternal ages to come. We thank you for the opportunities that you have given us to learn and to grow, for the challenges as well as the blessings that you bring to us to accomplish that goal. And we pray that our study tonight will be fruitful, that we will find understanding that will strengthen us and encourage us and equip us for the days ahead and for every good work.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. We pick up tonight in Acts chapter 10.

You'll remember that we've returned briefly now to the career of Peter. These are going to be some of the closing glimpses we have of the Apostle Peter before the book of Acts turns its attention almost exclusively to Paul and his missionary journeys. But in Acts chapter 10, you remember the whole thing there? You had this Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea, a devout man, one who feared God with all his household, gave alms to the people, prayed to God continually.

The ninth hour of the day, this is 3 p.m., which is traditionally the Jewish hour of prayer. And you get the idea that he is a proselyte and is following the Jewish customs. And this is a time of prayer, three in the afternoon, ninth hour.

He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who had come in and said to him, Cornelius. When he observed him, he was afraid and said, What is it, Lord? Your prayers, your alms have come up for memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa.

Send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He's lodging with Simon the Tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.

When the household servants were called in, they heard this message and then he sent them to Joppa. Then Peter has his vision of the sheet. We've looked at that in some detail.

Then in verse 17, when Peter wondered what his vision meant, the men who had been sent from Cornelius made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate. They called and asked, this is verse 18, whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was

lodging there. Obviously, they had to make that clear because if they just said, Hey, is Simon home? Somebody could say, Yeah, and you'd get the Tanner instead of the apostle.

And there's a big difference in what you get from an apostle versus what you get from a Tanner of hides and leather. So Peter is still thinking about the vision. And this was, if you remember, it's been a couple of weeks, but this was our major understanding from this story is that when you receive the Word of God, it is important to think about it.

We can assent, we can agree, we can say, Oh, yes, that makes good sense. That sounds wonderful. Isn't that stimulating? Isn't that interesting? During a class.

But if we do not make some attempt to recall, if we don't make some attempt to meditate and say and ask ourselves, we have a Friday night Bible class. So sometime on Saturday to say, Well, now what? Let me see if I can dredge up anything from what I heard last night, a main point or two. And if there is a point of application, something that I ought to learn and put into practice in my own operation, because otherwise, it's just going to be a passing experience rather than a life changing learning process.

It is all the same as if you were taking a class in school, and someone said, Here is a principle of math or here is a fact of history. Here is something scientific. And you say, Oh, well, isn't that great, but you never got quizzed over it.

You never got tested over it. You never really did a lab, and it would very soon just kind of drift away. There have been studies done back when I was in the education business professionally.

They talked about how long people retain different kinds of information. If you hear something presented at the 30 day mark later, if someone asks you a month later, you can typically only recall maybe 10 to 15 percent of it. If you both hear it and see it, if it's an audio visual presentation, then your recall goes up to the low 20 percent, which is still not very good.

Two facts out of every 10. It's really not that great. If you hear it and see it and have some sort of involvement where you do something by way of an exercise, it doubles your retention of information.

And this tells us something about the way the human soul works. Obviously, it's sort of a use it or lose it kind of a thing. So we want to take advantage of what we know about how we learn and how our minds work.

And when we learn something from the Word of God, and this is partly my job and the job of any teacher of the Word or preacher of the Word, is to go to the passage, go to the chapter or the section of scripture that we're looking at, and try to distill out what the main point is. What is the big idea? We observe, we interpret, and we apply. Application

is mostly on the part of the hearer.

My primary job is observation and interpretation, and then I can suggest general kinds of application. But really that third step is for each of us after we have received, after we've learned. This makes sense, right? I can't, although there are some who try, I can't really follow you around or call you up on Tuesday and say, now, Joseph, what did you do with what I covered on Sunday? That would be very, very strange and bizarre behavior, I think.

We have to do that for ourselves, don't we? But what a tragedy if we don't. What if we don't? And now, you know, this goes on more so in spouse-type scenarios. Where were you when we were in church on Sunday? Didn't you hear what was coming out of the Word of God there? How come you're not doing that? But even there, we can't, you know, that's not really the way it's supposed to work.

The husband is supposed to answer his wife's questions, but he's not supposed to follow her around and, you know, knock her in the back of the head and say, now, do this, and vice versa. We each have to do our own application. Nobody can apply for us.

I can suggest it, speaking the truth to one another in love. It can be illustrated. It can be remembered.

But when the rubber meets the road, we are in a situation, we're in a conversation, we're facing a challenge, water pipe breaks, car falls apart, some bad thing happens, some piece of pressure, some piece of bad news. You know, there are certain times of the day when the telephone rings, it's just not supposed to be ringing, and you're afraid there's going to be some bad news on the other end, and sometimes there is. And all of a sudden, your plan and your view and your outlook change in a moment.

Someone has passed away, someone is in the hospital, there's been an accident, your check bounced, some bad thing happens, and the news comes, and suddenly everything changes. Well, this is a point of application, and it is at that point that we need to train ourselves to stop and think, well now, have I learned anything recently that would affect or impact the way I respond here? See, I can use that word just like anybody in the modern world. Let's face it, all of the Bible study that we do, in any given year, we do hundreds of hours of Bible study.

But it is no good if it doesn't affect us at the point of application. If we are hearers of the Word only, and not doers, going to the book of James, we're just fooling ourselves. It doesn't really make a difference.

It has to make a difference. Why bother if it doesn't make a difference? The power of God operating in our souls makes a huge difference. It is one of the most untapped of all resources available to man, the power of God.

So few of us really exploit what God has given us. Jesus said, you know, if you could figure out how faith works, you could do things the equivalent of uprooting trees and planting them in the ocean, of taking mountains that are in your way and moving them out of the way. That is the power of faith, if we just would avail ourselves of it.

So I say all of that to remind us of our point last time in verse 17. Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant. This is a great example.

We are encouraged throughout the New Testament to observe the example of the Apostles and learn from it. Sometimes their example is good, sometimes their example is bad. Here is a good example of thinking about new information that comes from God.

So he's busy thinking about it, and it tells us that he's thinking about it three different times. I would not belabor this point to such an extent, except that God sends the vision to Peter three different times, and it describes it to us each of those three times. And then it tells us that Peter wondered within himself in verse 17, and then it tells us again in verse 19 that Peter was still thinking about the vision.

And then it is going to tell us when he finally meets Cornelius in verse 24. So after the servants have come, they're invited in, Peter goes away with them, and some brethren accompany him. So this is a little entourage.

The following day they entered Caesarea. This is verse 24, Acts 10. Now, Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

What I find interesting about this is that Cornelius fully expects that Peter will return. Peter is an apostle. He's important.

He's fairly well known in the region by this time. And it would be an embarrassment for Cornelius, being a Roman, being a centurion, calling all of his friends and family over and saying, hey, going to have a big event coming up here. I want you all to be there.

And so in his palatial home, if you've seen reconstructions of these homes that the upper middle class had, it would be almost a square house and have a courtyard in the middle with a fountain and murals and statuary and kind of like you see in some of the old Roman movies. This is what Cornelius no doubt had in Caesarea. And he's got quite a crowd of people there.

He's probably got hors d'oeuvres and servants going back and forth and people talking in the corners. And it's sort of a day long festival that he's having there in his house. And he's awaiting the arrival of Peter.

But he fully expects that he's going to come. Why would he have that expectation? It is entirely faith. He doesn't decide that he just had one too many glasses of wine and had a hallucination or that he bumped his head in the night or something.

He believes when the vision of the angel comes and says, your prayers and your alms, your good works have come up before God as a memorial. And God is going to send someone to tell you the answer to your questions. He believes it.

And he doesn't just say, I believe that and then kind of sit around and watch and wait to see if it happens. He acts on his belief. He banks on it.

He risks embarrassment by inviting all of these people over. He assumes what God has told him to be a fact and acts accordingly. And that's that's what's in these details.

Cornelius had called together past perfect. He didn't wait till Peter came and oh, well, so it really is true. Let me get some people together.

He treats it as fact before it happens. He had already called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped.

Now, this is humility taken actually to to excess. But Cornelius is told that that that basically a messenger from God is going to come and speak to him. And being a Roman, you know, they're used to the Caesar claiming deity and this kind of thing.

So more or less in ignorance, he bows down and gives this excessive amount of respect to Peter. But one thing before we dismiss it and say, well, that silly guy is not supposed to worship another man. Notice all of his close friends and his family.

Cornelius is an important man. But this tells you the respect he has for the things of God, that he will humble himself, as it were, and fall at the feet of this Galilean fisherman. Because the man is from God.

And this is the attitude that God honors. Why did God send the apostle Peter all the way from Joppa to Caesarea? Instead of making Cornelius, he said, well, Cornelius, if you want the answer to your questions, go to Joppa and look in the house of Simon the Tanner. He says, you send to the house and he'll come back.

So Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. So we see two things now about Cornelius. Actually, three.

One, he is a man of prayer. And God indicates that and honors that by sending the vision of the angel at the hour of prayer. Secondly, he is a man of faith.

He treats the promise of God as a reality before it is fulfilled. Thirdly, he is a man of humility. He is not ashamed to bow himself in the presence of God's messenger and to acknowledge before everyone he knows that to him there is nothing more important than the word of God.

Then in verse 26, Peter gives him one of his first Bible classes, lifts him up and says,

stand up. I'm just a man like you. It's the message, not the man that counts.

So 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.

Now, what I find interesting about this statement of Peter is that it's not exactly correct. We're in the process in Exodus of studying the law of Moses. We've just gotten to chapter 20, about finished the Ten Commandments, fixing to go forward into the rest of it.

But if you want a little exercise, go through Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy and see if you can find anything from Mount Sinai that says, don't break bread with a Gentile. Don't keep company with someone who's uncircumcised. If you look at the cross references in your Bible, if you have any cross references on this particular point, for example, in the New King James, I think you may have some there.

What do you see? They're all New Testament, aren't they? You would expect when he says, it is unlawful, that it would give you a reference back into law. But there is no law reference because they can't really find one. So where do they take you? They take you to John chapter 4 and verse 9, which is Jesus up at the woman at the well in Samaria.

And the Samaritan woman says, how is it that you being a Jew asked me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman? Then in parentheses, John says, for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. This is post-law. This is post-captivity.

Remember what happened in the Babylonian captivity? Well, actually in the Assyrian before in 721 BC, when the northern kingdom went out, the ten tribes were taken out and they sent in foreigners to occupy the land. And they intermarried with the Jews that were left and it became sort of half Jewish. Well, then when the people came back from captivity and tried to resume living in the land, here were these people that they looked down on that they felt had collaborated with the enemy and had gotten by and didn't have to go into bondage and into exile and so on.

And it created this animosity and this looking down on one another. And Ezra comes back and doesn't want to have anything to do with the Samaritans. And so the Samaritans, the king of the Samaritans up there, he goes and builds a temple on Mount Gerizim, which later I think John Hyrcanus or somebody in the intertestamental period about 128 BC or something, he goes up and tears down the Samaritan temple, which just ticked off the Samaritans even more.

But there's this rift and schism. You could compare it to the south in Reconstruction days between blacks and whites. So anyway, but none of this is in the law proper.

Right. Or they'll give you a cross reference to John 18:28. They led Jesus from Caiaphas into the praetorium and it was early and they themselves did not enter into the praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

We've looked at that in other connections. Or Acts 11:3, where there is an accusation made, you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. Or Galatians 2:12, prior to the coming of certain men from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

This is a belief of the party of the circumcision. This is a tradition. This is an old Jewish custom.

And we have a lot of this in the church today. And the point here is that we should be careful students of the word and know what the church says versus what the Bible says. What is the difference in church tradition and the Bible? One of the biggest differences is in the area of evangelism.

Evangelism as a mission, as a duty, as the highest and first and greatest, and in some cases only calling for believers, has become such a church tradition that people don't even question it anymore. And yet when you look in the word of God and count the imperative moods in Greek over and over again, be holy, abstain from fleshly lusts, forsake not the assembling, pray, speak the truth, honor God in your behavior, walk the walk, go down the narrow road. It is all about personal holiness.

The imperatives in the epistles to the church focus on and concentrate on meditation on the word of God, application of the word of God in our daily step-by-step walk. I can't worry about the whole world. I've got my hands full worrying about myself.

Is evangelism a wonderful thing? Yes. Were we all evangelized at some part of time? Yes. It's a wonderful thing, but you can't take a tiny part and substitute it for the whole.

You can't walk around with a steering wheel in your hand and say you're driving a car. But that's essentially what the church has done, and it's tradition. And Peter actually speaks of this tradition here when he says, you know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.

Well, this is a tradition. And what he's basically saying is the law as it exists in our current culture, it is as though it is in the law. He doesn't say Moses said we shall not.

That would be an outright error. But this is unlawful in the sense of what is acceptable in society. And we need to distinguish here the difference between what their culture said versus what the word of God says, even as we do today.

Keep company with or go to one of another nation. God has shown me I should not call

any man common or unclean. And guess what? When the sheet gets let down, this is really not a new truth when it comes to dealing with people.

Did Jesus talk to the Samaritan woman? Did Jesus preach to the Samaritans that came out from Sychar? Did Jesus talk to the Syrophoenician woman? Did Jesus heal the woman with the issue of blood? Did Jesus heal the centurion's servant? Did Jesus ever turn away someone who came to him, the Greeks that approached Philip and wanted to talk to the Lord? Did Jesus ever turn away an uncircumcised person and say, now he did say my mission is to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He says that's to whom I am sent. But he didn't turn her away.

He didn't refuse to speak with her. He didn't refuse to eat with her. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, which in the Pharisee mind was altogether the same as an unwashed, uncircumcised Gentile.

So here's the point. It won't be near as much of a shock if we stick with what God tells us rather than getting wrapped up in tradition. The word of God instructs, rebukes, and corrects.

It's what teaches us righteousness. If Peter had been able to keep that in the forefront of his mind, it wouldn't have been such a big deal having the sheet let down. Now it is going to be a change in the dietary law for the church.

The church will not be under the dietary laws of Israel. But we're going to see in the course of studying Acts and some of the epistles that the apostles continued to observe Sabbath, continued to observe the feasts, and basically continued to follow the traditions into which they had been born as Jews. And that's quite fascinating because there wasn't this nice clean break.

The apostle Paul didn't quit going to the synagogue on Saturdays and start worshipping on Sundays at Pentecost, or Peter, or any of the rest of them, or at the point of his conversion. They continued to honor those traditions while not being bound by them. And when he is bound by them, it winds up being a sin.

And that's that Galatians passage to which we'll return in the not-too-distant future. But Peter says, God has shown me I should not call any man common or unclean. Now for Peter, this strong cultural pressure to overcome it and get around it is a big deal.

It's hard for him. And he's actually going to kind of have a relapse down the road. Again, the Galatians passage to which I just referred there, Galatians chapter 2 and verse 12, is the apostle Paul saying, I had to go straighten out my fellow apostle because he was all ready to eat with the Gentiles until the Jewish men from Jerusalem came out to visit.

And then he kind of tightened up and got worried and was afraid they'd talk bad about him. And so then he said, well, I can't come over and eat with you tonight because the

men from James... These men from James just trip everybody up. If you follow the men from James, everywhere they go, they draw people into sin.

Peter was doing great until the men from James came and then they fouled him up. Paul goes to Jerusalem and meets with the men from James. Next thing you know, he's down there shaving his head, taking a vow, paying for other guys to take a vow, and he gets all tangled up going back to the rituals.

James was a very influential man. He was the head of the Jerusalem church and that power of tradition, the power of expectation and whatever we circle, whatever circle we move in. In their day, it was the Jewish culture.

In our day, it can be whatever circle we move in. It can be family. It can be friends.

It can be whatever environment we are immersed in. The pressures are very strong. The expectations for young people is their peer group.

And if you want to talk about my pastor when I was a teenager, he talked about being herd bound and following the herd and being caught up and carried along with the herd and not being able to think independently and decide independently and letting peer pressure. Most people start smoking out of peer pressure. Everybody else is smoking.

Oh, you're a wimp. You're sort of jeered into it or cowed into it or dared into it. Same thing with a lot of other bad ideas.

This blonde headed gal went off and got married in Las Vegas and then had it annulled a day later. You know what that was? Immaturity. Just somebody making a wild suggestion and nobody wanting to say, I'm not that wild.

And neither one of them wanted to back out once it got suggested because, oh, that would be timidity. That would let on like I'm not as wild as I want to be. And so they wound up doing this fool thing, which I think is just comical.

You know why that got annulled so fast. There's a lot of people making a whole lot of money and a guy having a legal claim to up to half of that money just on a whim to send everybody into a panic. That was all about money.

Old Mrs. Spears there, the mother worrying about her money, the record company worrying about their money, the agent worrying about his money. You never saw a legal transaction get undone as fast as that marriage. And it isn't that they were concerned, oh, you're making a mistake that might affect your happiness.

They're worried about their money. But you see what happens when you get into an environment where there are these strange pressures. It's herd mentality, being a sheep, following the flock.

Well, hopefully the grace of God in Christ in our soul gives us a little bit of independence, a little bit of power to break free from the bunch of lemmings that are jumping off a cliff there, hellbound at high speed. So, Peter says, God has shown me I should not call any man common or unclean. How many men in Israel have this view now? Peter and who else? Jesus has gone to heaven, so how many others are there? You want to talk about a voice crying in the wilderness for a Jewish man to stand up and say, I'm not calling a Samaritan unclean.

I'm not going to call a Roman unclean. Well, if he said that very loud, he could get ready to be looking up through a pile of rocks. But he says, this is what God has showed me and I'm going to act on it.

I came down here to Caesarea. I'm coming into your house. I'm walking right in.

This is no small thing when it says here, he reached down and lifted up Cornelius. He's touching a Gentile. In Israel's mind, this is like touching a leper.

This is a big thing when he reaches down. And then it says, as he talked with him, he went in and found many others. These are the close friends and relatives of a Roman.

He's walked into a room full of Gentiles. And what's the first thing they do when they go in? They remove their sandals. They get a ritual bathing.

The servants wash their feet, offer them refreshments. He is automatically now eating and drinking. He's had a journey.

He's got a mint julep or something that they've brought him. He's partaking of food and drink, which is the Middle Eastern custom with Gentiles. It's unheard of.

It's unimaginable. It's like the Guess Who's Coming to Dinner movie squared, cubed, quadrupled. It's astonishing.

It's stunning. And he has to explain it. He says, you know how this normally is.

God has shown me. Therefore, I came without objection. This has to be our attitude toward the Word of God.

If the Word of God says it, I take it without objection. As soon as it comes into play. As soon as I was sent for, I came without objection.

So now I'm asking you, why have you sent for me? I didn't even ask to see if it was an important question or not. It might be, you know, how many archangels can you name or something? Peter didn't even ask why he was being sent for. And you would think, well, if it's a Gentile and this could get him in hot water with the rest of the Jews, maybe he could ask what it's about and say, well, that's not important enough for me to come, or I'm really busy, or I've got an appointment, took a vow, something.

He didn't even ask. He said there is no good reason. Look at this.

God has just taught me something and suddenly I'm being sent for by a Gentile. I make the connection in my mind. God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Here is a man I would yesterday have called common or unclean, asking me to come. It's very clear. This is a test from God.

This is a challenge to put into application what I have just learned. There is nothing, listen to me, there is nothing you will ever learn that is any more direct than this illustration right here. This is what our life is all about.

Learn the Word of God. See the place where it needs to be applied and apply it. It's just that simple.

Peter gets the Word from God. Don't call any man common or unclean. The next day he gets a call.

I want you to come down to a Roman centurion's house. He says, without objection, without a question, I went. I walked in, took off my sandals, drank my water, ate my snack, said hello to all the Gentiles because that's what God says to do.

You could imagine a mushroom cloud over the city of Caesarea. That's how strange and unusual it would be for a Jewish man to do this. But Peter says when you get the Word of God, that's it.

That is the final authority and we live by it, we die by it, we'll be resurrected by it, we'll live in the eternal future by it. It has to be the arbiter. It has to be the basis and the foundation for what we do.

Otherwise, we are wasting our time. We're wasting our time learning the Word of God if we're not going to apply it. We're wasting God's time.

We're wasting God's good air and God's grace if we're not going to accept this challenge and do what Peter does here. And it's going to take courage and we may fail. Peter failed time and again.

The man who sunk below the waves because he took his eyes off of Christ is going to do it again. That's what's talked about in Galatians 2.12. A few too many men came up from Jerusalem and he got cold feet and quit eating with the Gentiles. He knew better.

He had a vision from God. You know what that tells me? You can't blame the quality of the teaching and say, well, the reason I failed is it just wasn't explained to me very well. Peter got a vision directly from God and failed.

People were taught by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The twelve apostles and Paul were taught by Jesus for three and a half years. Judas betrayed him.

Peter denied him. The other ten apostles ran away. Paul the apostle is going to mess up.

Peter is going to mess up. It isn't the quality of the revelation. It's what you and I choose to do with it that determines how far we go, where we are going to place, where we are going to function in God's plan both now and in the age to come.

Well, we're going to pick up in verse 30 with the words of Cornelius when we come back from the break, but let's pause here and take a break.