

## **Week of January 22, 2012**

### ***Loving in a Divided Culture***

#### **Passage Outline:**

- 1. Challenge Your Assumptions** (Acts 10:9-15)
- 2. Change Your Behavior** (Acts 10:22-25,27-33)
- 3. Clarify that Jesus Is Lord of All** (Acts 10:34-36)

#### **What This Lesson Is About:**

God doesn't show favoritism and neither should we.

#### **How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life:**

This study will help you identify your prejudices and look for ways to overcome them.

### **1. Challenge Your Assumptions - Acts 10:9-15**

- A. While Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner named Simon (see 9:43), God prepared Peter for a new stage in his missionary career that would shake him at his core beliefs and prepare for the entry of Gentiles into the church.
- B. Two visionary experiences led up to the decisive encounter:
  - i. Cornelius's vision of "an angel of God" (10:3) an angel stunned this seasoned Roman veteran in a vision and told him God had honored his petitions and gave Cornelius exact instructions to send for Peter in Joppa.
  - ii. The scene shifted the next day, as they (Cornelius's delegation) traveled to Joppa, in search of Peter. About noon, Peter is on the flat-patio-like house-top praying and waiting for someone to prepare some food. In Peter's vision of a large sheet filled with all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds—possibly both clean and unclean according to Jewish law and custom.
- C. A voice commanded Peter to rise up, kill, and satisfy his hunger from the assorted meats available to him in the sheet. Peter protested that he had never eaten anything impure or unclean. Peter believed that to partake in such food would violate God's mandate to His people and make Peter ritually defiled or unfit to serve God.
- D. Deeply entrenched prejudices also exist within us. When our attitudes toward people from other racial backgrounds affects the way we interact with them, then we have permitted our prejudices to overrule God's counsel in the Bible.
- E. The voice speaks again, saying, "What God has made clean, you must not call impure." This happened

three times. Why?

- i. Seems Peter always learned in multiply of three's: Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Him three times.
  - ii. Later as Jesus restores Peter to discipleship, He would ask Peter if he loved Jesus three times.
  - iii. So here, the vision comes to Peter three times because he was a stubborn and slow learner.
- F. Peter was prejudice toward Gentiles. Eating in a Gentile's home would break the Jewish dietary laws. Peter should have remembered when Jesus "made all foods clean" (Mark 7:19), and Peter had heard this truth already, as he watched Jesus ministered to a Gentile woman (vv. 24-30).

## 2. **Change Your Behavior - Acts 10:22-25,27-33**

- A. With Peter still reeling from his vision, Cornelius's delegation arrived at Simon's gate and inquired about Peter. They told Peter about Cornelius and how an angel had instructed the centurion to call on Peter in Joppa and to hear a message from Peter.
- B. Good News! Peter connected the dots between the vision of the unclean animals and the Gentiles standing at the door.
- C. Peter responded to the Holy Spirit's prompting and invited these men into the house. We can safely assume that they all sat down together to share the meal Peter had previously ordered.
- D. Can you imagine how uncomfortable Peter must have felt as he invited these Gentiles to spend the night? Not only had Peter just met them, but good Jews didn't associate with Gentiles, much less entertain them and share food with them.
- E. Just like Peter, we cannot wait for our feelings to change before we obey God's commands. Obedience comes first. Obedience often requires that we step outside our comfort zones. We need to do more than just "be nice" to people of other races. Rather, we need to look for ways to build relationships with them and to welcome so that we may even share with them the Good News of our Savior Jesus.
- F. Peter went with them. When the party reached Caesarea the next day, they found Cornelius, his family, and friends waiting in anticipation for Peter's arrival.
- G. As he entered the house, Peter said, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate

with a Gentile or visit him.”

- H. Despite this deep-seated taboo, Peter announced that God has shown him that he must call any man impure or unclean.
- I. Peter had surrendered his prejudiced notions and came without any objection in obedience to the Lord.

### **3. Clarify that Jesus Is Lord of All - Acts 10:34-36**

- A. Peter began his sermon with the words that swept away all the racial and religious prejudices of centuries, “Now I really understand that God doesn’t show favoritism,” literally, “to receive the face.” When greeting a social superior, one lowered his face. If the one thus greeted raised the face of the greeter, it indicated recognition and acceptance.
- B. Peter realized that God will accept anybody of any race who fears Him and does righteousness.
- C. However, Peter did not suggest that God universally accepts all people on the basis of sincerity or works. Rather, a righteous, God-fearing Gentile was just as acceptable to Him as a righteous, God-fearing Jew through faith in Jesus Christ.
- D. Peter summarized the gospel message. In the person of Jesus Christ, God’s peace came in the form of a Person who made salvation available to all who earnestly seek Him who is Lord of all.
- E. Peter’s preaching on this impartial God and universal Lord and Savior shows how the Great Commission lies at the heart of authentic followers of Jesus Christ as we are called to make disciples of **ALL NATIONS**.

#### **Today’s Biblical Truths**

1. When negative attitudes toward people of other races or cultures affect how we interact with them, we have permitted prejudices to overrule God’s counsel in the Bible.
2. God loves and values all people and desires for everyone to come to know and to have a faith relationship with Him in Jesus Christ.
3. We should not wait for our feelings to change before we obey God’s commands.
4. We need to look for ways to build relationships with people of other races and cultures in our communities and welcome them into our churches.
5. God accepts anyone of any race who fears Him and places faith in Jesus Christ.