

## **The Impartial Work of God – Part 1**

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 10:1-29 / September 7, 2025

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### **Introduction:**

Acts chapter 10 holds a story that changed everything for Peter and reshaped gospel witness. This story flows out of the pair of miracle stories in Acts 9:32-43 we covered last week, which showed how the kingdom of God broke into our world with Christ's first coming, and kingdom power continued to precede kingdom advancement after His ascension. Both miracles set the stage for what God was about to do in revealing the Gentiles too are recipients of His covenant promises. We are going to work through chapter 10 in two parts, covering verses 1-29 this morning to see how God sovereignly moved to speak to Peter's heart. These verses come in three scenes marked by three separate days. The first day is in verse 1-8, showing us how,

### **God Gives Hope to a Gentile Household**

Consider how we are drawn into the narrative with details about one of its main characters. Look at verses 1-2, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God." As the scene opens, Luke names a centurion in Caesarea and the group of soldiers he captained. Yet, note how Luke continues. He describes Cornelius as a devout man who feared God, along with his whole household which would have included family, servants, and possibly even soldiers under his command. He also gave alms to the Jews and prayed continually to God. Prayer and almsgiving were pious Jewish practices, indicating he was longing to honor the God of Israel. Peter will point back to this detail in verse 35. Notice what happens next in verses 3-6, "About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, 'Cornelius.' And he stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.'" The ninth hour was dedicated for midday prayer, suggesting that is what Cornelius was doing. As he was praying, an angel of God speaks to him by name, and he responds in reverent fear. Then, the angel says something magnificently beautiful. Because of how this verse parallels passages in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the concept of acceptable spiritual sacrifices mentioned in the Tobit and Community Rule for the Qumran community, Philip Francis Esler comments, "Luke is suggesting that the prayers and the alms of this Gentile were accepted by God in lieu of the sacrifices which he was not allowed to enter the Temple to offer himself" (Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel*, p. 162). Paul will later describe similar actions as acceptable sacrifices in Philippians 4:18, saying, "I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." So, God was indicating Cornelius' actions were accepted as spiritual sacrifices. Following this marvelous confirmation, Cornelius is told to send men for Peter in Joppa and how he who was lodging with Simon, a tanner. Look at the close of this scene verses 7-8, "When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa." Cornelius immediately obeys and calls three men to send to Joppa. Note how Luke uses the same term he used for Cornelius, calling him devout, or pious. While the focus is on Cornelius, the desires of the whole household are also in view. Consider the hope-filled anticipation that must be building in this household as they hear how God has received their prayers and delivered this vision. This is designed to build our own anticipation for what God is doing. With this hope established, we come to the next scene in verses 9-23, where,

### **God Prepares Peter to Receive Typically Unwelcome Visitors**

Our passage last week showed Peter's willingness to extend grace to unclean Jews by lodging in a tanner's home, a point alluded to in verse 6, but God was about to overcome Peter's objections of extending that grace to Gentiles. Look at verses 9-12, "The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray."

And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.” Luke places this scene on the next day as Cornelius’ men were approaching Joppa. Then he describes how Peter is given food for thought, literally. While praying, Peter becomes hungry and receives a vision as he was preparing some food. In this vision, something like a sheet is descends upon the earth and all kinds of animals were in it, including reptiles and birds. Two things are worth noting before we move on. First, Luke uses apocalyptic language when describing Peter seeing the heavens opened up highlighting the significance of this vision. Second, it is clear the vision relates the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11. All kinds of animals indicates both land and sea creatures, some of which were clean and others unclean, while reptiles and birds of the air were mostly considered unclean. Now, look at verses 13-15, “And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ And the voice came to him again a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’” When Peter is commanded to rise, kill and eat, he is repulsed by the idea and defies the command. In referencing anything that is common or unclean, he is referring to inherently unclean animals and those defiled by association. Peter may have assumed he was being tested but when the Lord’s rebuke shows it is a different kind of test. Will he obey the voice of God and trust His power to make all things clean? Pay attention to verse 16, “This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.” What happened three times? The conversation between Peter and God, because the sheet remains in place until that was complete. This could be that Peter denied the Lord three times again, or it could be because a repetition of three speaks of completeness or divine perfection in Hebrew thought. For example, when we hear God is Holy, Holy, Holy, the goal is to emphasize His perfect holiness. It may be both. Continue in verses 17-20, “Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.’” Notice how verses 17 and 19 show this happens while Peter is perplexed about the vision and pondering its meaning. Family, if we receive a vision, dream, or word from the Lord that we are unsure about, we should always ponder what it could mean and wait for the Lord’s answer. Notice also how the Spirit guides Peter to welcome Cornelius’ men without hesitation. Verses 17-19 describe the Spirit telling Peter the men had arrived and that He was the one who sent them. Like Philip on the road to Gaza, the angel of the Lord and Spirit are working in tandem to orchestrate everything that takes place, down to the moment of arrival. Note how this scene closes in verses 21-23, “And Peter went down to the men and said, ‘I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?’ And they said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.’ So he invited them in to be his guests.” Pause there. When Peter asks why these men came, Luke recounts them reiterating what we already know about Cornelius with some new insights. We discover the uprightness of Cornelius, how he is well spoken of by all Israel, and, most importantly, how the angel told him to summon Peter to “hear what you have to say,” placing emphasis on Peter’s words in the rest of this story. The scene, then, closes with Peter inviting these typically unwelcome visitors to be his guests, a point of significance unpacked in the next scene. This brings us to our last scene in verses 23-29, where,

### **God Confirms the Meaning & Purpose of Peter’s Vision**

Notice again how Luke draws us into the narrative with details. Look at verses 23-26, “The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am a man.’” Verse 23 details how other believers accompanied Peter to see what would happen. Verse 24, then, describes how Cornelius gathered those close to him to hear what Peter had to say. And verses 25-26 present a familiar exchange in Acts, where people ascribe undue power and worship to the apostles. Church, we still struggle with celebrating people today instead of recognizing everything comes from God’s grace and He is the one worthy of worship. We are called to highly esteem those who labor in love for the church, but we need to ensure we don’t place people on a shrine in our hearts and unknowingly worship the created over the creator. Look at verses 27-29, “And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.’” We are told that Peter started with a conversation with Cornelius, but the first words of Peter come when he speaks to everyone. And what does he say? He begins by acknowledging how unlawful it was for him to associate with or visit Gentiles. Richard Longenecker points out how there were provisions for Jewish-Gentile business relationships but a particular treatise in the Mishnah said, “such contacts made a Jew ceremonially unclean, as did entering Gentiles’ buildings or touching their possessions (cf. M Abodah Zarah, passim). Above all, it was forbidden to accept the hospitality of Gentiles and eat with them” (Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 9: John and Acts, p. 390). Yet, note how Peter’s comment is meant to emphasize what comes next by contrast, “but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.” He now understood the vision was not primarily related to food, but to people. And notice how he confirms in verse 29 this understanding came when the Spirit told Him the men were sent by God to bring him. Peter knew he was called to lay down his prejudices and be with this crowd of Gentiles waiting for him. However, at the end of verse 29, he still asks why he is there. We will see next week it is to share the gospel with them, bringing salvation and blessing to the Gentiles. To end our time this morning, I want to draw out two applications from this part of the story. First,

### **1) Never Think God Can’t or Won’t Do Something to Accomplish His Purposes**

Have you ever thought, “God can’t or won’t change a situation or person”? This story has God’s fingerprints all over it. Look at all He did to bring Peter to this household ready to do whatever God had planned for him. Family, this story reminds us God will do what is necessary to accomplish His purposes. Our understanding of God needs to be anchored deep in His sovereignty. He turns the hearts of kings, moves through dreams and visions, and guides his people according to the counsel of His will. Isaiah 46:9-11 says, “remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” Don’t let a foolish thinking that God can’t or won’t do something keep you from praying for Him to move in mysterious ways. It didn’t keep Cornelius from praying continually to God. Believe in His power to accomplish His purposes and trust in Him to do it. Second,

### **2) Never Presume Someone or a Group of People are Beyond God’s Saving Grace**

Do we fail to pray for salvation or seek to share the gospel with people we subconsciously think are too far gone? Could God reach that politician you despise? How about gang members or addicts? Or radical LGBTQIA plus proponents? What if God sent you to share the gospel with them? Kent Hughes provides gives comments on how Peter’s experience might apply to us that are worth consideration. He quotes Alexander Whyte, who said to his church in Edinburgh, “how we also bundle up whole nations of men and throw them into that same unclean sheet. Whole churches that we know nothing about but their bad names that we have given them, are in our sheet of excommunication also. All the other denominations of Christians in our land are common and unclean to us. Every party outside our own party in the political state also.

We have no language contemptuous enough wherewith to describe their wicked ways and their self-seeking schemes. They are four-footed beasts and creeping things. Indeed, there are very few men alive, and especially those who live near us, who are not sometimes in the sheet of our scorn; unless it is one here and one there of our own family, or school, or party.” Hughes then concludes, “We too write off whole churches simply by what we have heard about them. We too shut out whole ethnic groups because of a bad experience with one person or family. We too mentally excommunicate those who do not agree with us on one secondary issue or another. Our sheets easily fill with educational, racial, cultural, and spiritual rejects, and we cry, ‘By no means, Lord—they are not my type!’ The result, of course, is a Christianity that grows solely on homogeneous lines. We then only seek to win our own kind, and thousands never come to grace who, humanly speaking, would have if they were given the chance” (R. Kent Hughes commenting on Alexander Whyte, *Acts—The Church Afire*, p. 146). Family, God shines the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ into the hearts of all kinds of people, and we should never presume any person or group of people are beyond God’s saving grace.

**Conclusion:**

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, ask the Lord if either of these things are temptations of your heart. As you ponder the meaning of communion, ask if your faith needs to grow in what God can and will do for His glory. Discern whether your heart is moving in gospel love towards others. And run to Jesus if you discover any of these things aren’t true of you. Let His grace and mercy in the gospel draw you closer to Him. Confess and sin, and know His blood covers all past, present, and future sin. Surrender all to the Lord’s will and way, asking Him to use you as He sees fit. Would you pray with me as we remembering all God has done for us in Jesus Christ and prepare to take communion together?