

# ***THE REST OF THE STORY***

## *Studies in the Book of Acts*

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –  
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 10:1-23

Topic

Peter is prepared for his visit to the house of Cornelius  
by being invited three times to eat foods  
that were previously unclean to him as a Jew

Title

*Peter, Peter, Unclean Eater*

**Acts 10:1** There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

**Acts 10:2** a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

**Acts 10:3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

**Acts 10:4** 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.

**Acts 10:5** Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.

**Acts 10:6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

**Acts 10:7** 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.

**Acts 10:8** So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

**Acts 10:9** 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.

**Acts 10:10** Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance

**Acts 10:11** and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.

Acts 10:12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

Acts 10:13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

Acts 10:15 And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

Acts 10:16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Acts 10:17 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.

Acts 10:18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

Acts 10:19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

Acts 10:20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

Acts 10:21 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?"

Acts 10:22 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."

Acts 10:23 Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

## Introduction

Bats are back on the menu. You can use them to make a delicious Fruit Bat Soup. You'll need:

1. Three fruit bats, well washed but neither skinned nor eviscerated.
2. Water.
3. One tablespoon finely sliced fresh ginger.
4. One large onion, quartered.

Or what about a Penguin omelet? In addition to the usual omelet fixins' you'll need two penguin wings, minced.

These are real recipes. You might not be interested in eating them; but if you were a Jew you could not eat them. They involved animals prohibited by the Old Testament dietary laws.

When you read in verse fifteen, **what God has cleansed you must not call common**, it is a declaration from Heaven that there are no longer *any* dietary laws in effect. **All foods are certified Kosher by God and therefore fit to consume.**

(In Hebrew the term kashér means *fit*. Kashér (or kosher) foods are those fit for consumption by Jews according to the strict dietary laws of the Old Testament).

You can now eat, in addition to bats and penguins, all flying insects that creep on all fours; camels; hedgehogs; crows; geckos; tigers; and rats.

OK, *maybe you still don't want to eat some of them!* That's not really the point. The dietary laws were never about which foods were good or healthy for you. They were about restricting your diet as a Jew to show that you were separate from all the other nations of the earth. You were chosen; everyone else was **common**. The foods you refused were merely a sign to the Gentiles of God's favor upon you.

God said nothing is **common** any longer! It goes way beyond food. He meant that there is no longer a spiritual separation between Jews and Gentiles. **Anyone can be added to His Church regardless of their earthly ethnicity.**

The importance of Peter's visit to Cornelius cannot be overstated. That's why so much space is given to it in the Book of Acts. All of chapter ten is devoted to it; the first eighteen verses of chapter eleven revisit it; the rest of the book is influenced by it; world history has been shaped by it.

Without in any way detracting from this monumental event, I also want to highlight its practical, day-to-day implications for us as believers living under its influence.

If we reduce the story to its simplest form and look for the heart of God in it two things emerge:

1. God heard a sinner who was seeking Him.
2. God prepared a saint to send for Him.

I'll therefore organize my thoughts around two points: #1 If You Are A Sinner Seeking The Lord He Will Send Someone To You, and #2 If You Are A Saint Sensitive To The Lord He Can Send You To Everyone.

#1 If You Are A Sinner Seeking The Lord  
He Will Send Someone To You  
(10:1-8)

It's hard for us to understand the earth-shaking events of this visit to Cornelius. It answers a question we never asked, *Can Gentiles be saved?* Up until this point, some ten years into the Church Age, the believers were mostly born-again Jews. There was a general understanding, left-over from Judaism, that Gentiles should convert to becoming Jews before they could be saved. Jews still had few dealings with Gentiles. They didn't eat with them or lodge with them. These events we are reading about are truly monumental.

**Acts 10:1** There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

Each Roman legion was made up of ten cohorts of six-hundred men. Each cohort was made up of six centuries of one-hundred men. Each century was commanded by a **centurion**. Think Master Sergeant and you'll get the idea.

It was called the **Italian Regiment** because these were soldiers from Italy. Elite soldiers. Cream-of-the-crop. Espresso drinkers!

**Acts 10:2** a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Though his heart was seeking God, he was not saved. We know he was not saved because of what we read in chapter eleven:

**Acts 11:14** [Peter] will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'

Cornelius was an unsaved sinner sincerely seeking after God. There are some theologies that would tell you it is impossible for a sinner to seek after God. Who are you going to believe – theologians or the Holy Spirit?

**Acts 10:3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

**Acts 10:4** 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.

Often I've heard people say that God does not hear the prayers of nonbelievers. **Apparently He does hear them!**

God is interested in the heart. When He 'hears' a heart seeking after Him He acts to reveal Himself more-and-more to that person. Cornelius is an example of a man who lived up to the knowledge which God gave him. While this knowledge was not sufficient to save him, God insured that he was given the additional knowledge of the Gospel.

God has given everyone on earth a conscience within them and creation around them. It is not enough to save them. But if a sinner will respond to them God will hear from Heaven and give them the additional knowledge they need to be saved.

**Acts 10:5** Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.

**Acts 10:6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

It's an obvious observation but we note that God knew the exact whereabouts of Simon Peter. God knows where you are. He will recommend you to seekers. Your part is to be busy serving Him and stay ready to be used by Him.

**Acts 10:7** 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.

**Acts 10:8** So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius immediately acted on the information he had received. God would thus draw closer and closer to him.

God is not willing that any should perish. If a sinner will seek after Him, He will see to it he or she receives more-and-more information. I can't explain how it all works, all over the globe. But I see it illustrated clearly and powerfully here in the story of Cornelius. Yes, this was a pivotal moment in spiritual history. But it also reveals the heart of God towards every seeker.

**We might say that God is seeker-sensitive!** If your theology leads you to suppose or propose that God cannot be sought after, or that He does not hear the sinner, then abandon it and remain biblical.

#2 If You Are A Saint Sensitive To The Lord  
He Can Send You To Everyone  
( 9:43 & 10:9-23)

We left Peter in Joppa. The last verse of chapter nine reads,

**Acts 9:43** So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Simon the tanner was a born-again Jew. Still it was a big deal that Peter stayed with him. Since tanners came into contact with carcasses and blood they were considered ceremonially unclean by Jewish law. You would be considered unclean by your proximity to them. By 'unclean' we mean you would not be permitted to participate in ceremonies and sacrifices.

(On a practical note – it would also stink at a tanner's house!).

Peter was willing to stay with the tanner. He was no longer bound-up by Jewish ritual law. Or was he?

**Acts 10:9** 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.

**Acts 10:10** Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance

**Trance** is a word that has too many occult connotations for us. It's from the Greek word for *ecstasy* – not the drug, either! Suffice it to say that Peter was in a heightened spiritual state as he battled hunger and sought to keep his mind fixed upon the Lord.

**Acts 10:11** and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.

**Acts 10:12** In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

The significance of this, as we'll see in a moment, is the mixture of animals. They were of the kind both *permitted* and *prohibited* by Old Testament dietary laws.

**Acts 10:13** And a voice came to him, "**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**"

**Acts 10:14** But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

Never in his life had Peter eaten forbidden foods. When served to him, even by God in a vision, he refused even to handle them.

It's been correctly pointed out that it is a contradiction to say, **Not so, Lord!** You can say, *Not so!* But as soon as you say *Lord* you are submitting to His every command.

**Acts 10:15** And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "**What God has cleansed you must not call common.**"

Remember: The Jew thought in terms of chosen versus **common**. They were chosen by God. Everyone else was not – everyone else was **common**. Their restricted diet was never about health and fitness. It was about separation. It was a way of promoting the understanding they were chosen and Gentiles were **common**.

**Acts 10:16** This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Why three times? Not sure... But if you were Peter it would seem strangely familiar:

1. He had denied the Lord three times once before! Now here he was saying **Not so, Lord!** Three times.

2. After the resurrection, Jesus met with Peter and three times asked him if he loved Him.

These triplets were a romantic reminder to Peter of the Lord's love for Him.

**Acts 10:17** 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.

Did God mean for Peter to open up a non-Kosher deli? The ramifications of the vision were not yet clear. Until there was a knock on the gate at just that moment.

A Roman soldier and two servants were at the gate. If Simon the Tanner or his wife answered the gate, they would have been freaked-out! It's never good news if the authorities are at your house unannounced!

**Acts 10:18** And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

**Acts 10:19** While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

**Acts 10:20** Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

*God has great timing!* We accuse Him of being late when He is always right on time.

God still speaks to you. The Holy Spirit indwells you and can impress upon you and influence you God's directives and direction.

**Acts 10:21** 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?"

**Acts 10:22** 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."

It was starting to come together for Peter. The vision obviously had something to do with the visit from these Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles

had no social dealings; but here were three men who would need food and lodging.

**Acts 10:23** Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

It was huge that they all sat down together. Any Star Trek fans here? It would have been like the uncomfortable dinner between Star Fleet and the Klingon's in *The Undiscovered Country*.

Looking ahead we know that God is going to save Cornelius and his household. When He does the vision fully comes together for Peter. The sheet represented the Church. The clean animals were the Jews, previously under the Law. The unclean animals were the Gentiles, previously excluded by the Law. All of them were now equal and chosen. All were in the Church and would be taken to Heaven when Jesus returned.

Monumental. Pivotal. Historic. This little bed-and-breakfast at Simon the Tanner's house would alter the course of the world.

At its heart is God's heart. We've already seen God is seeker-sensitive. Those who are seeking Him need someone sent to them. That someone cannot be an angel; it must be a man or a woman.

It can be **you!** It *will* be you if you observe two very simple things:

1. First we saw both Cornelius and Peter regularly practicing spiritual disciplines. Cornelius gave generously and prayed often. Peter was in Joppa also in prayer. Keep yourself in a place spiritually where God can use you. Be ready as if you are on-call. Practice the spiritual disciplines of giving, fasting, and praying.
2. Second, stay busy serving. Peter was in Joppa on a short-term mission. He was thus accessible to the Lord to be sent to Caesarea. God is looking for servants who are already busy serving Him.