

PETER SEES A VISION OF GOD

Acts 10:1-11:18

Key Verse: 10:13

“Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’”

Today's passage is a story about two persons: one is Peter, a Jew, and the other is Cornelius, a Roman soldier. God moved Peter's heart through a vision to visit Cornelius. God also moved Cornelius' heart to welcome Peter and accept the gospel of salvation. The gospel of Jesus, which began in Jerusalem, had not yet reached Rome. But it reached to a Roman soldier. In this way, a new landmark in church history was made.

I. The visions of Peter and Cornelius (10:1-23a)

In this part, two persons, Peter and Cornelius, see God's vision. Let's learn how they could see God's vision, and the contents of their visions.

First, Cornelius' vision (1-8). Look at verse 1. "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment." Cornelius was a Roman soldier stationed at Caesarea, the headquarters of Roman government in Palestine. Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian Regiment. Mostly, Roman soldiers were Africans drafted or hired by the Roman government. But there were a minority of Italian soldiers--crack units of the Roman army. Cornelius was an Italian centurion with 100 Italian soldiers under his command. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, and they were expected to win victories or otherwise, to stand fast and die at their posts. Therefore, Cornelius must have been a well-disciplined Roman officer with the spirit and loyalty of a Roman soldier. At that time, the world was a Roman world, and Cornelius was a Roman centurion. Humanly speaking, he was a lucky person. It seemed that he didn't need anyone's help, and that he didn't have to seek God. He could claim to be his own man. But to our surprise, Cornelius sought God earnestly until he learned of God Almighty from the Jews. The prosperity of the Roman Empire and being recognized as a man of Roman spirit made him happy from time to time, but these human conditions could not satisfy his soul. His soul was thirsty for the holiness of God. His soul was hungry for the truth and grace of God. He was a pompous Roman soldier, but he wanted his heavenly Father because he was made in the holy image of

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God.

In the New Testament times, there were many thirsty souls. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch was the treasurer for the Ethiopian queen. He lived in a palace, but he came to Jerusalem to seek and worship God. Probably he was tired of all the luxury and immorality and empty way of palace life. He was suffering from deep fatigue and boredom. He came to Jerusalem to seek and worship God.

Commonly, soldiers are very wild and enjoy the fleeting pleasures of life in order to forget about present realities. But Cornelius was different. He was a very pious man. He was also a good influence to his family members. Because of his good influence, his family members were also devout and God-fearing. He was a blessing to the people around him. Cornelius also gave generously to those in need. His love for God made him love others. And he was a man of prayer. Obviously, he learned how to pray regularly from the Jews. In brief, he was a Roman centurion, but he had the fear of God in his heart. He was a man of integrity; he was not far from the kingdom of God. However, he needed to hear the good news about Jesus.

Once, in the afternoon at the regular prayer time, Cornelius prayed earnestly. Then God visited him in a vision. Look at verses 3-5. "One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!' Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked. The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.'" So many people calculate this and that and are finally swallowed up by the worries of life. But Cornelius prayed and saw a vision of God. There were so many things to seek, but he sought God (Dt.4:29; Mt.7:7,8). God saw this man Cornelius and told him in a vision to welcome Peter and hear the message of salvation. It is amazing to know that Cornelius saw a great vision of God while he was praying.

Second, Peter's vision (9-23a). About noon the following day as Cornelius' servants were approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. As he was usually, he was hungry and wanted something to eat. While the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw

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heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat!" In this short phrase, "Kill and eat," all God's plan for world salvation is passionately summed up, and it was revealed to Peter.

How did Peter respond to the voice? Look at verse 14. "'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'" We understand why Peter protested. He was brought up in a society where food laws were strictly kept. According to Leviticus 11, the Jews could eat only the animals that chewed the cud and whose hoofs were not divided but cloven. Peter had never eaten pigs or lizards or squirrels. He had never eaten animals that were unclean. Because of these food laws, the Jews despised the Gentiles, who ate raw and rare meats of any kind. The Jews thought that the Gentiles were like unclean animals because they ate all kinds of unclean animals. The Jews felt nauseous even to think about the Gentiles because of their way of eating.

The Jews also despised Gentiles because they thought they were not God's chosen people. They thought God's favor was not extended to Gentiles and that the law of God could not be applied to them. The Jews' view of Gentiles was blindly prejudiced and traditional; it lacked the universality of God. So Peter, who was brought up in these rigid traditions, could not accept God's voice, "Kill and eat!" But in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, Peter had to unlearn the old habits and traditions of the Jews. According to the voice, Peter had to kill and eat. But his stomach was too weak to digest all kinds of insects and animals wiggling on the sheet.

What did God do with this man who had such a weak stomach? Look at verses 15 and 16. "The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven." In these verses, all kinds of animals and insects represent all kinds of peoples on earth. "Kill and eat," meant, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk.16:15). For Peter, world evangelization was an impossible task as long as he called anything impure that God had made clean. He needed to change his outlook on the Gentiles. He

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needed to train his stomach until it could eat deliciously any kind of food. Above all, he needed to obliterate the solidarity of Jewish exclusivism from his heart so that he could rise above his own culture and traditions and learn the universality of God's love.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him to go downstairs to meet them and go with them without hesitation. In this way, Peter and the men from Cornelius met together at the house of Simon. Peter was not ready to invite them into the house as guests. But the Holy Spirit helped him to do so. It is interesting to note that although Peter only thought about delicious food, God showed him a great vision of his world salvation plan.

II. Peter's message to Cornelius (10:23b-48)

The next day Peter arrived in Caesarea. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence, together with his relatives and close friends. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself" (23b-26). There was a large gathering of people inside the house. Peter said to them, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean" (28). Again Peter says in verse 34, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism..." At this point Peter realized that God is not only the God of the Jews but also the God of the Gentiles. A great revolution had erupted in his heart. As soon as Peter finished telling the whole story of how he had come to their house, Cornelius asked Peter to speak God's message to them. In verses 34-43 Peter spoke of the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. In this we learn several things about Jesus.

First, Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 38. "...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." Why did God anoint Jesus with the Holy Spirit? It was because God, through his Son Jesus Christ, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit, wanted to deliver all those who were under the power of the devil. Mankind seems to have many

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problems. But the root problem of mankind is that they are suffering under the power of the devil. Jesus is the only one who saves people who suffer under the power of the devil because Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Second, Jesus died on a tree. Look at verse 39. "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree..." Jesus was sent by God. While on earth, he healed the sick and preached the good news of the kingdom of God. His life was truly beautiful, so much so that during the last 2,000 years many people have made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to feel his footsteps. Even now there are so many people who want to follow in his footsteps. Everything he did was life-giving, and an invitation to God's kingdom, where there are no more tears. But evil men killed him by hanging him on a tree. They did not like Jesus because they were so sinful and Jesus was so beautiful. They killed Jesus simply because Jesus was so beautiful. But he was not just a victim of sinful men; his death was for the sin of the world. John 1:29b says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Third, Jesus rose again. Look at verse 40. "...but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen." When Jesus was crucified on a tree and died, the power of sin and death seemed to win the victory over the good Jesus. But this was not true. "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Ac 2:24). Through his death Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death. Through his resurrection he won an eternal victory for us. There is victory for all who believe in him.

Fourth, God appointed him as judge of the living and the dead. Look at verse 42. "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." No man is worthy to be a judge over others because we are all the same sinful human beings. But Jesus is worthy to be the judge of all men because with his blood he purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 5:9). Death is not the end of everything. After death, each of us must stand before the Judge to receive a report card.

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Fifth, Jesus is the giver of forgiveness of sins. Look at verse 43.

"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." No one can be happy when he is sick with sins. No one can enter into a new relationship with God without the forgiveness of sins. No one can enter the kingdom of God except through Jesus' grace of forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the only one who gives the grace of forgiveness of sins to those who come to him.

What was the response to Peter's message? The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message from their hearts. Cornelius' attitude in listening to the message was so sincere that the Holy Spirit began to work in him and in his people. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles and that they spoke in tongues, praising God. Peter said to the circumcised believers in verse 47, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." In this Peter was saying that since the Gentiles had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they could be baptized with water and declare that they too were God's people.

III. Peter defends himself (11:1-18)

Look at 11:1-3. The circumcised believers were boggled on the inside because of Peter's visiting Cornelius. Because of this incident, Peter became a target of criticism. They criticized Peter that he went into the house of a Gentile, and that he ate with Gentiles. Their criticisms were so funny. They were slaves of their own traditions.

What did Peter do to explain his actions? In verses 4-16, Peter told them the whole story once again about how he saw a vision of unclean animals, and how he met Cornelius, and how he spoke to him and what happened after his message. In conclusion, Peter said, "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (17) After listening to Peter, the Jewish Christians agreed to accept Gentiles as the same human beings and as the same fellow Christians. Look at verse 18. "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance

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unto life."

In this passage we learn that Peter and Cornelius saw a vision of God when they prayed. Let's pray earnestly until we meet God personally and see God's vision. It is the time for all young men to see God's vision. Sometimes we think, "What's the use of the life of faith in this generation?" But this is not right. God used the lives of faith of Peter and Cornelius when they saw the vision of God. God used them to make a bridge between Jerusalem and Rome for future world evangelization. May God bless you to be men and women of God's great vision through prayer.