

Feb. 25/26, 2006

The Unstoppable Church

“What God Has Cleansed...”

Acts 9:32 – 10:23

Pastor Bryan Clark

Through our study of the Book of Acts, we have often reminded ourselves that we did not board a cruise ship; we boarded a battleship. And that is good biblical imagery, as the New Testament often refers to the Christian life in military terms.

But there is a risk in that, and the risk is that we could possibly misunderstand who is the enemy. It is very important to realize that those unbelievers in your world are not the enemy. The enemy is Satan himself, and he has devised a system to lure people away from God. Those unbelievers in your world are not the enemy; they are more like POWs. They're prisoners of war, and we've been called through the power of Jesus to liberate them and set them free.

If we don't understand that, we can often find ourselves opposing the very people that Jesus has called us to reach. This isn't a new problem. From the beginning of the Church, God was constantly expanding the understanding of the leaders of the church exactly who would be part of this magnificent movement called His Church.

Peter is certainly being stretched in his understanding of who God wants to include in the family. In our story today in Acts chapter 9, Peter gets stretched, I believe, beyond what he could have possibly imagined, as he is learning more and more who God wants to include as part of His Church.

The first part of Acts 9 was the conversion of Saul—really a radical, magnificent conversion. And because of that, there is peace in the land, which opens up the opportunity for Peter and probably other leaders of the first century church to move freely about and to investigate what is happening beyond the realm of Jerusalem.

Saul is off to Tarsus. We will pick up his story in chapter 11. Peter has been the predominant leader of the New Testament church, and again he comes back to center stage. We pick it up in verse 32 of Acts 9:

Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.” Immediately he got up. And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. (Acts 9:32-35, *NASB)

Peter is traveling about visiting the saints. Whenever the New Testament uses the word “saints” it's a term that is in reference to believers. If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, you are a saint. It is not some kind of a “super Christian” that gets tagged with this label. We are all saints if we are in Christ.

So Peter is out visiting the believers beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem. Lydda would have been about 25 miles to the northwest of Jerusalem. It is important to realize geographically we're spreading from Jerusalem out to Samaria, and now out beyond that—because that is a big part of what this text is all about.

Peter is introduced to a man who has been bedridden for eight years. Now, we understand that in our culture this would be a very difficult situation. But try to imagine it in a first century culture, where they did not have our medicine, our healthcare, electricity, our conveniences, our entertainment. It would have been a hopeless, miserable way of life.

Peter, then, in the name of Jesus, says, “Get up and make your bed.” And immediately he got up. Now to understand the power of this miracle, all those of us who have teenagers need to try to imagine such a miracle: that at 6:30 in the morning it would be declared, “Get up and make your bed,” and immediately it was done. Now *that’s* a miracle.

Actually, it was a magnificent miracle, and the key is that all the people in the surrounding area came to Jesus. In other words, they saw this magnificent demonstration of power, and of course the result of that is that they believed.

Lydda would have been a town that had a mixture of Gentile and Jewish people. I think what’s happening here is that, through this, Peter is beginning to have his eyes opened that this movement might not just be about the Jewish people but about the Gentile people. It probably was just a first step in his understanding of this.

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, “Do not delay in coming to us.” So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon. (vs. 36-43)

Joppa is another ten miles to the northwest, so about 35 miles outside of Jerusalem, and again would have been made up of a population of Jewish and Gentile people. As a matter of fact, we know early in that part of the story that Luke believes it necessary to tell us both her Jewish name and her Greek name. We would ask the question: Why was that necessary? Perhaps because of what the emphasis is in this part of Acts it was necessary to say, “Don’t forget, this place has both Jews and Gentiles.” Part of this picture of the church that is developing is it is going to include Jews and Gentiles in ways that, at this point, Peter couldn’t have even imagined.

One other thing that is worth noting in verse 36 is the word “disciple.” It’s a familiar word that we see throughout the New Testament. But this is the only time this word is used in the feminine. Now when it’s used in the masculine, it is not limited to just men; it can include men and women. But it is as if Luke is bending over backwards here at this part of the text, where the emphasis in this part of Acts is the opening up of the eyes of the leaders that this church is going to be different. It is going to include people they never imagined. Not only is this a Jew and Gentile thing, but it is a way of saying it even will include women in a way

that has not been known or understood before. So there is just a little hint toward that in the language.

Well, obviously Tabitha was a very impressive woman and had a significant impact on a number of people. But she dies. They hear that Peter is ten miles away and they send a delegation. Peter comes back and, in a miracle that looks almost identical to what Jesus did in Mark 5, she is raised back to life. And of course the response of the people is incredible, and many of them believe.

When you stop to think about what is happening here, it looked very much like Jesus. The first miracle in Lydda seems almost exactly like what happened in Mark 2 when Jesus raised the paralytic and told him to take up his bed and to walk.

Now we get to Joppa and this miracle is almost identical to a miracle in Mark 5. As a matter of fact, Peter follows step by step exactly what Jesus did. It looks as if Peter took notes when Jesus did His miracle, and he did the exact same thing—even to the point that when he said to Tabitha to arise, the wording is so exact there is only one Greek letter difference between what Peter said and what Jesus said.

So they were virtually identical miracles, which would cause us to say, “Hey, what’s going on here? It seems as if Jesus is still alive.” We saw what Jesus could do when Jesus was alive, and now those exact same miracles continue on, which would be a way of saying, “Well, that *is* what’s happening.” Even though Jesus was crucified and buried, obviously He has risen from the dead. How else do you explain how a fisherman is healing disease and raising people back to life? Jesus is alive and not limited to a house or dwelling in Jerusalem, but now He is out in Lydda and He’s out in Joppa. He’s out among the Gentiles, and the ministry continues just like it did when Jesus walked this earth in the flesh. And it is a way of saying that Jesus now is very much alive, dwells within His people, and there is no boundary or limit to what Jesus will do through this movement called His Church.

The last verse of chapter 9, verse 43, is not an insignificant passing statement. This was a big deal that Peter chose to stay in the house of a tanner by the name of Simon. A tanner was considered unclean because of the occupation. It required daily contact with dead animals with carcasses. It was a smelly, stinky occupation, so much so that a tanner wasn’t even allowed to live within the city limits. They required a certain distance so people didn’t have to see it and they didn’t have to smell it. Simon was a Jew, but he would have been considered an unclean Jew. If a father had a daughter, the daughter would not be allowed to marry a tanner because he was unclean.

So for Peter, as an orthodox Jew, to have stayed with Simon is a way of saying something is changing here. Some of the rules and traditions are now being put aside, and the grace of Jesus Christ is beginning to penetrate in ways they had never known before. I mean, frankly, a lot is changing. First they go outside of Jerusalem, and Samaritans (this group of half-breeds) are now added to the family of God. And I’m guessing for these Jewish believers that was quite a stretch of their faith.

Then it expands to the point where Saul, the Christian killer, is magnificently converted; but not only is he converted to Christianity, he immediately begins to rise up as a leader of the New Testament church. That had to be almost overwhelming for them to process.

Then you have this emphasis that maybe even women could have value in this new movement. And then you have this fisherman healing disease and raising people from the dead. Everything is changing to the point where Peter is understanding it and dwelling in the house of a tanner as his way of saying the love and message of Jesus Christ is crossing boundaries we never would have expected.

But even with all of that, I don't think Peter had a clue what was to come next. Acts 10:

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. (Acts 10:1-8)

Now we move on to Caesarea, which was about 65 miles to the northwest, so another 30 miles beyond Joppa. Basically this was a Roman city with a huge seaport that was built by Herod the Great. He wanted to build it in Joppa but the Jews hated Herod, so he had to build it in Caesarea and it was kind of an "in your face" thing. There were a lot of dynamics between these cities.

Cornelius was a centurion; he was a Roman soldier who headed up probably around a hundred soldiers, and was a very interesting man in terms of his belief system. He would have been raised in a Greek-Roman system that believed in multiple gods. Somewhere along the way he was convinced that that wasn't right. He rejected basically the religion of his people, believed that the one-God belief of the Hebrew people was correct, and to the best of his ability was pursuing that.

This text makes a great example of how God responds to those who are seeking after Him. Sometimes people will say, "You know, if people are in deep, dark tribes in Africa, you can't tell me that they have to know Jesus to be saved. How is that possible?" Well, we learned last week that God has no limitations in getting His message out. He can do it any way that He wants to, and I believe that He *does* in ways in which we are completely unaware.

But there is also a reminder, and this is seen in Romans 1 and 2 in some other texts, that whenever somebody responds to the light that has been given, God gives them more light. Romans 1 says that God has made Himself known through creation, and if people respond to that God gives them more light and more light because God wants people to seek after Him. It is not a game of Hide and Seek. He is not wanting to remain hidden from them. He is wanting them to know Him, so God will quickly respond to that.

So here you have a man raised in a very pagan religious system but abandons that and believes that the one God of the Hebrew people is correct. He is praying to that God. He is giving money to that God. He is seeking after that God. God shows up through an angel and says He is very pleased with that and He is going to arrange some circumstances, so Peter comes and delivers the

message of Jesus. It is a beautiful picture of how responsive God is to the heart of anyone who seeks Him. God wants to be known!

But there is a little bit of a problem. And that is, not only is God working in Cornelius in that situation, but He has also got to do a work in Peter's heart so that Peter is ready to receive them when they come knocking at the door. So we pick up the story in verse 9:

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city... (vs. 9a)

I love that line because it is a picture of God orchestrating events. Twenty-one hours later the group is almost to town, and God begins to do His thing with Peter's heart so that the timing of the meeting is perfectly orchestrated.

Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray [so that would be 12:00 noon]. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. (vs. 9b-16)

Peter goes up on the roof to pray at noon. He is hungry. He goes into this trance, and down comes this sheet from heaven lowered by four corners, and in it are snakes and birds and all kinds of creatures. And God says to Peter, "Kill and eat!" Peter's response is emphatic. As a matter of fact, we would maybe translate this as, "Absolutely not!" Peter in essence takes what he would consider the "high road," saying, "I have never done this. I will not do this!" In his mind, that is what is pleasing to God. And God comes back and responds to him and says, "Now wait a minute, what God has cleansed no longer consider unholy."

You have to understand that in the Old Testament, in the Old Covenant, there were certain dietary restrictions. They're discussed in Leviticus 11 and 20. And this would have been pounded into Peter's head his entire life that there were those things that were appropriate to eat and those things that were off limits. But it was about more than food. If you read the text in Leviticus, especially Leviticus 20, clearly God is tying the separation of the dietary laws to not only separating from those foods, but God's desire for the people to be a separated people unto God. So the distinction of food was actually a metaphor, a picture of what it meant to be a separated people, and that was really the point. So we're not just talking about food here; we're talking about a distinction as it relates to people—Jews and Gentiles. And Peter responds in very strong language that he absolutely will not do that.

There are a couple of things in this text that I want to point out. One has really nothing to do with the point of the text, but some people may find it helpful. Last week we shared communion together. There are those traditions that believe the elements of communion, the bread and the cup, either *are* the literal body and blood of Jesus or they *become* the body and blood of Jesus: consubstantiation and transubstantiation are those views. Here at Lincoln Berean we believe that the elements of communion are symbolic—that they represent the body and blood of Jesus, just as they were symbolic for thousands of years in the Jewish Passover.

Now there are several ways that we would defend that. But one, as it relates specifically to this passage, is understanding that in the upper room Jesus was talking to a group of orthodox Jews who, like Peter, had this message pounded into their heads since birth that they were not to eat flesh and they were not to drink blood. So if Jesus would have meant that “this is literally My flesh, this is literally My blood,” their reaction would have been very similar to Peter’s reaction in this text. It would have been contrary to everything they had ever been taught. They would have said, “Absolutely not!” The only way that they could just go on without the slightest interruption is they had to have believed that the elements were merely symbolic, as they had been for thousands of years in the Passover.

Now you could say, “Well, maybe Jesus had a lengthy discussion with them that isn’t recorded, that explained to them the dietary laws are no longer in effect and they could go ahead and partake.” If that’s true, then Peter wouldn’t have reacted this way at this point in the text. Clearly Peter indicates he is still abiding by the old dietary laws of the Jewish tradition. In the first chapters of Acts, they have communion over and over and over again. Peter had to have believed the elements were merely symbolic when you see his reaction to what God says at this point in the text.

The second thing I want to point out, which is much more relevant to the message of this particular text, is how Peter responds to what God says. God says, “Peter, it’s okay; kill and eat.” I’m convinced that Peter in his mind is thinking he is taking the high ground: *I’ve never done that. I’m not going to cross that line. That’s pleasing to God.*

There is a tendency to think as long as we’re more conservative somehow that is more pleasing to God. In other words, “I’m going to take the high road. If we’re going to err, let’s at least err to the conservative side.” But understand, to err to the conservative side is to err. To say it another way, it is unbiblical and I don’t think God is any more pleased with unbiblical to the left or unbiblical to the right. Sometimes I think we’re convincing ourselves we’re taking the high road when we’re more conservative, and we fail to realize this is more about our traditions than it is about biblical truth.

Peter should have known this. Peter was with Jesus when Jesus got into a lengthy discussion with the Pharisees on this very topic. And Jesus said to the Pharisees, “It really doesn’t matter what you eat. What matters is what’s in your heart.” Then Jesus went on into a lengthy discussion, saying, “The problem with you Pharisees is that you take the traditions of man and you raise them higher than the truth of God.”

And that is where Peter is at, at this point in the text—that this is the tradition of man. He has it so locked into this head that even when God says, “Kill and eat,” Peter takes (in *his* mind) the high ground and refuses.

There are many issues that we struggle with, and in our fundamentalist movement there is a strong tendency to be more conservative, thinking somehow that is more pleasing to God.

Lasts week I mentioned the issue of divorce and how many of those people feel like they have a big red “D” on their forehead, and we just won’t let it go and believe that somehow God can forgive them and call them and use them in significant ways. Now, I realize churches have argued about that and tried to figure it out and will argue about it until the day Jesus returns. I understand that. But I also understand there is a tendency to say, “Well, if we’re going to err, let’s err to the conservative side.” I want to remind you that to err to the conservative side is still

to err. It is unbiblical. The goal is not to be more conservative or to be more liberal. It is to be biblical, and that needs to be our challenge.

If God has forgiven them, if God has called them, if God wants to use them, who are we to say no? If God has said, “Clean,” who are we to say, “Unclean”? That is not more biblical. That is unbiblical.

Our board of elders spent almost a year trying to process this subject and understand it in order to arrive not where the culture is and not where traditions are, but where God is on this issue. That is not accommodating the culture; that is seeking to be biblical. You may not agree with where we landed, but I guarantee you we can defend our position biblically, and that is what’s most important.

When we think about wanting to be more conservative, we need to remind ourselves that the most conservative religious group in the first century were the Pharisees, and Jesus was considered a flaming liberal who continually broke the rules. So you have to ask yourself if that is really the group you want to identify yourself with. Easily that reminds us that more conservative isn’t necessarily more pleasing to God.

At the beginning of this text in Joppa, I talked about Tabitha being identified as a disciple in the feminine. It’s a way of saying that women will have a more significant role than what they had experienced in the past. That’s another big issue in the church, and there has always been debate and will always be debate, and I understand that. But the reality is the goal is not to err on the conservative side. The goal is to be biblically accurate. We get so caught up in our traditions that oftentimes we’re more committed to those traditions than we are to the accuracy of the Word of God. And we think we’re taking the high ground because we’re more conservative, but unbiblical is unbiblical. We need to understand that. If God has called and gifted and wired a woman, who are we to say, “You can’t do that”? That’s not pleasing to God. That’s not taking the high road.

Now there is a lot of disagreement. You may not agree with our position, but I’ll tell you again we spent a year processing this biblically, and I guarantee you we can defend everything we do from a biblical point of view.

Occasionally I’ll get into these discussions with people who differ in our view of the role of women, and they’ll state very emphatically, “I don’t think the Bible teaches that.” But when I keep pushing them, “Help me understand that; open up your Bible and make your case,” pretty soon I get this deer-in-the-headlights look. They don’t have the slightest clue where to even open up their Bible. *I don’t even know what the texts are; I don’t even know where to look.* And at that point, you realize this is not a biblical conviction; this is a traditional conviction. If you cannot open up your Bible and defend what you believe, you need to stop and ask yourself, *Is this tradition or is this a biblical conviction?* The goal is to be biblical in all we do.

How deeply ingrained do these traditions get in our heads? Well, look at Peter. This is God Himself saying face to face with Peter, “Kill and eat!” and Peter says “Absolutely not!” And the text says three times they have this exchange. God Himself couldn’t even change Peter’s mind. I mean, stop and think about that: Three times God said, “Peter, do it,” and Peter said, “No!” We get stuck at Peter’s processing this radical new concept that possibly the Gentiles could be included in the family of God.

We pick up the story in verse 17:

Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was reflecting on the vision [meaning he was meditating, trying to figure it out], the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings [meaning without distinction; in other words, he's saying it is irrelevant if they are Jew or Gentile], for I have sent them to Myself." Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?" They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you." So he invited them in and gave them lodging. (vs. 17-23)

Now we're just halfway through this story and we'll have to finish this story next week. Peter is processing; he's thinking about what has occurred in this trance. There is a knock at the door, and the Spirit says, "Peter, somebody is knocking at the door; I want you to go down and let them in. It is irrelevant if they are Jew or Gentile; I want you to open the door. I've sent them to Myself; I've got a job for you."

It was a big deal that Peter even let them in. An orthodox Jew wasn't allowed to let a Gentile into his home. So Peter is learning. He's growing. God is doing a work in Cornelius. God is doing a work in Peter. And He is going to bring them together at just the proper moment.

We will finish the story next week, but there is a lot from this first half of the story that we need to think about. It is so easy for us, like Peter, to begin to think of the world in categories of *us* and *them*. Most Christians, after they have been Christians for a period of time, begin to pull away from all their non-Christian friends, and pretty soon their circle of friends are all Christians and they kind of huddle together. These are the people that we like. There are the people that we know. These are the people that talk like us, they think like us, they believe like us. It is just a very comfortable environment.

But pretty soon we find ourselves avoiding the very people that Jesus has called us to reach, and we divide the world up into "it's *us* and it's *them*."

Think with me this morning: Who are the Gentiles in your world? Who are the people this week in the marketplace that you intentionally avoided, that you ignored, that you didn't want to be around because they don't talk like you, they don't think like you, they don't believe like you? They're a little irritating to be around, so you intentionally avoid them. Who is that family member or neighbor who is not like us, who is different, who is out-of-bounds? Suddenly we can find ourselves avoiding the very people that Jesus would be sitting down and dining with.

I know a lot of Christians like to listen to Rush Limbaugh, and that's fine. It's kind of in the "whatever" category. (Is that neutral enough?) But this is the problem: You listen to that too much and you start to think of the world as "us" and "them" and that starts to translate into how we think in the marketplace, how we think in our families, how we think in our neighborhood. Pretty soon we start sounding like we're the *Hannity & Colmes* show. But we're not the *Hannity*

& Colmes show. We're the church, and maybe the people that we have divided that line and separated ourselves from are the very people God is calling us to love and to reach.

I'm convinced we're drawing the lines in the wrong places for the wrong reasons. I'm going to shock some of you this morning, but I'm already way out there and I'm going to go way out there a little further. I do believe it's possible God could actually love a Democrat. I know I'm way out there on that one. But the reality is, we've set up these boundaries and we've drawn these lines in all the wrong places.

I mentioned that last hour, and a young man afterwards said, "You know, that's exactly the place where I work. I'm a conservative Republican, and because of that they won't listen to me. They won't even identify me as a Christian. It's divided up into political parties." We've done that to ourselves and we need to rethink all of that.

Who is the person in your office, in your neighborhood, in your family that you are avoiding—that you don't want to talk with? They irritate you. They don't talk like you. They don't think like you. They don't hold your views. Well, here is a shocker: They don't know Jesus. We expect unbelievers to act like they're Christians. But they're not Christians. I expect them to act like unbelievers. They don't think like me. They don't act like me. They don't use my vocabulary. But they're the very people Jesus would be sitting down with and sharing a meal and introducing to Jesus.

Who are those people for you? Who are the people last week you avoided that this week you need to love? It's an interesting concept that those people whom you avoided might be the very people that God is working in their hearts, drawing them to Himself, and this week they may come knocking at your door. And God is preparing your heart so that when they knock at your door, you're ready to say, "Hey, come on in and let me tell you about Jesus." Because the reality is we're never more like Jesus than when we love the sinners around us.

Our Father, we're thankful that You are a gracious, loving God. When Jesus became flesh and walked on this earth, the conservative crowd constantly rebuked Him because He sat down with sinners and tax collectors and He loved them. Lord, many of us realize that the very people we avoided last week are the people that Jesus would sit down with and love. Lord, the people that we avoided last week are the people that we're called to love this week. I pray that we would understand what it means to be like Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2006 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
“What God Has Cleansed...”
Acts 9:32 - 10:23
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What are the ramifications of saying we are seeking to reach “every person” in order that they may be presented complete in Christ? Who is “every person” to you?
2. Who do you find the hardest to love and why? Who might be the “Gentiles” for you?

Are there people in your neighborhood or at work that you intentionally avoid? Why?
3. Is the goal of our study of God’s Word to be more conservative or more biblical? Isn’t erring on the conservative side still a biblical error? Was there anyone in the first century more religiously conservative than the Pharisees? How would they have labeled Jesus?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 9:32-43. How did God use the miracles and response of the people in Lydda and Joppa to prepare Peter for what was to come next?
2. What is the significance of the statement, “And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon?” What did the Jews think of tanners?

What was God doing in Peter’s life?

Can you think of times when God brought you together with people you tend to avoid to soften your heart for those people?
3. Read Acts 10:1-23. What is God doing in this text?

What did God do to change both Peter’s heart and Cornelius’ heart to prepare them for their meeting?
4. Compare Jesus’ words in Mark 7:1-23 to Jesus’ message to Peter in his trance. Why was this such a hard lesson for Peter to learn?

Could Peter have taken the “high road” and simply claimed to be more conservative than Jesus if he was unwilling to change his thinking regarding the Gentiles? Why or why not?

5. Why is it so hard sometimes to let go of previously held convictions to become more biblical in our own thinking?

What are the signs that someone is “holding ground” more out of tradition than biblical conviction?

Are you guilty of this from time to time? What is the solution?

Application

1. Who are the “Gentiles” for you and why?

What needs to change in your heart for God to use you to reach those people? Are there factors you may need to monitor that feed your negative feelings about these “Gentiles” in your world?

2. What can you do to make sure the convictions you hold are biblical rather than traditional?

What can the LifeGroup members do to help you when they see you resisting a necessary biblical change in your thinking?

3. Are you ready for Jesus to stretch you by sending a “Cornelius” into your life so you can be the instrument to deliver the life-changing message of salvation? Can you name who that “Cornelius” might be today?

Take time to pray that God would prepare you for that encounter.