

ACTS | Two Visions & A Visitation | Story 15

Acts 10: 1-48

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Introduction

Over the last two months we've been journeying through the Book of Acts. Remember a few weeks back, I told you that Acts 1:8 gives us the overview of the flow of Acts: Chapters 1-8 in Jerusalem; 9-12 in Judea & Samaria; 13-28 to the ends of the earth. **Today** we find ourselves in Chapter 10, in Judea, within the cities of Joppa and Caesarea.

We are going to look at a key moment in church history today: **Two Visions & A Visitation**

First Vision: Cornelius

Acts 10:1-8

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day^[a] he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ 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. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ 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, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Let's see where this is on a map...
 - Joppa (Jaffa today) is about 33 miles west and a little north from Jerusalem, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is where Peter raises Dorcas from the dead.
 - Joppa is located about 38 miles south of Caesarea (mileage wise, about the distance from GC to Target on Old Hickory and back); a 12-13 hour walk for Peter and company.
 - Caesarea – a seaport, magnificently rebuilt by Herod the Great (the Herod who killed all the baby boys in Jerusalem around Jesus' birth), renamed after Caesar Augustus.
 - A showpiece of Roman culture, a temple dedicated to Caesar.
 - Philip, a few chapters back in 8:40, first brought the gospel to Caesarea.
- Cornelius
 - A Roman centurion, in command of 100 Roman soldiers.
 - Devout – feared God (all household) – gave alms generously – prayed continually.
 - Likely means he and his family attended the synagogue, honored Jewish laws and customs, but were not a part of the Jewish community through circumcision.
- Cornelius' Vision
 - Another Acts vision: Stephen seeing Jesus; Saul: Jesus on road to Damascus; now two more here in this story. A few more in Acts. One of the ways God speaks...
 - An angelic appearance in a vision. "Stared at him in terror..." vs.4 (wouldn't you?)

- Cornelius' acts of love and sacrifice had ascended into God's presence...
- He is told to summon Peter, at Simon the tanner's home by the sea.
- He sends a team of three, led by a devout soldier who seems to be close to him.

Second Vision: Peter

Acts 10:9-23

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour^[a] to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷ 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 ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation,^[b] for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²² 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." ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

- We find Peter (one of Jesus' 12 disciples) on one of the flat roofs of Palestine, which is approached by an outdoor flight of steps, which were common places of prayer in biblical times. It was a good place to pray during the daytime as it was separate from the activity of the house, and often the sea breeze and an awning helped cool the place.
- As lunch is being prepared, and Peter is hungry, he has a unique vision: heavens open, great sheet descending – in it all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds – "Rise, Peter; kill and eat".
- Peter's first response, as a Jew, was that the Lord may be testing him. Eating certain "unclean" animals would be unacceptable to him as a Jew, as they were not kosher (suitable or acceptable for Jews to eat). Their dietary laws were not about things like etiquette and culinary customs. Rather, they were a matter of their identity as a people.
- In the midst of Peter's response, God says something of great importance to him: "*What God has made clean, do not call common (or unclean).*" In Mark 7:19, Mark, a disciple of Peter's, makes an editorial comment, that "*in saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.*"
- Three times! Jews: reiterated three times speaks to a kind of completeness, permanence.
- Message from God: not to consider any group of people 'common or unclean' – Peter is being prepared by God to accept Cornelius' invitation to visit him. *RACIAL HATE – Jews/Gentiles.*
- Vs. 17 – Peter "inwardly perplexed." The Greek word behind Peter's thinking here makes its only appearance in the Scriptures. It means "to think about something thoroughly with intensity of thought." Peter was leaning hard into discovering God's will on this.
- Vs. 19 – "The Spirit said to him..." Peter goes downstairs and finds it just as he was told and goes with them – vv.21-23. A game-changer when the Spirit speaks!
- Cornelius' messengers arrive at the door...and Peter's unhesitant response to agree with these men launches a new day for the young church!

A Visitation of the Holy Spirit

Acts 10:24-48

²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

³⁰ And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour,^[a] and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

- Peter takes a few of the brothers with him (a regular practice in the early church), rather than going this alone. A two-day journey for them to go from Joppa to Caesarea.
- Cornelius was fulling expecting Peter to take him up on his offer to come – he had called together his relatives and close friends. Reveals Cornelius’ great faith in God!
- Falls at Peter’s feet in worship. Such acts of respect for highly esteemed people were not unusual at that time in this part of the world. Peter takes care of this mis-directed worship!
- A huge and historical step for Peter to enter Cornelius’ home – a Gentile home – as this was a major no-no for Jews as it went against their laws, making one ceremonially unclean.
 - The hope that Gentiles would share in the blessings of God is a clear theme throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the call of Abraham:
 - **Genesis 12:1-3**
“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- We also see Jesus ministering to Roman soldiers, a Canaanite woman, a group of Greeks, a Samaritan woman, etc.
- **Matthew 28:18-20**
 “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Peter begins to open his mouth and speak to this audience of God-fearers:
 - Shares his own recent revelation that God shows no partiality; gospel=every nation!
 - Preaches Jesus: his life, death and resurrection.
 - How he was a first-hand witness of all these things!
 - An invitation given to “everyone who believes in him receive forgiveness of sins...” (v.43).
 - Vs. 44-48: The Holy Spirit fell (“embrace with affection; seize, fall into, press upon”) on all who heard the Word! Conviction/sense of His holiness/compelled to respond!
 - The brothers from Joppa are stunned watching the Holy Spirit transforming Gentiles like this! Seeing things that happened years earlier in Jerusalem in Acts 2 (10 years earlier).
 - Speaking in tongues, praising God. Baptizes them. WHAT A DAY!!! He stays for a time.

Three Observations – Holy Spirit

- The Leading of the Holy Spirit in Prayer
 - Peter was a man of prayer who sought God on a rooftop. (Note: Cornelius’ was in prayer as well, when he is directed to send for Peter!).
 - Listening to the Spirit and Peter’s willingness to grasp what God was showing him combined to produce a significant change in his thinking, even though it was something he was uncomfortable with.
 - The Spirit may first “adjust our thinking” to prepare us for where He is taking us. Prayer positions us for breakthroughs in our own lives, so that we can be used by the Spirit to impact others. Often a source to key Kingdom strategy.
- Responding to the Holy Spirit in Obedience
 - Peter accompanied them and went with them to Cornelius’ home
 - The Holy Spirit uses those who are willing to obey and simply follow His lead.
 - Cultivating an attitude of availability and obeying right away
 - Cultivating the Fear of the Lord, as it relates to obedience.
 - Peter goes without hesitation. **TOOK COURAGE FOR PETER – Your Obedience???**
- The Positioning of the Holy Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit often positions us where He wants us, and then teams with us do to His work.
 - The Spirit knows what He has deposited in us so He knows what He can pour through us.
 - He uses our experiences, relationships, gifts, etc.
 - **PAY ATTENTION EACH MOMENT!**

Grieving & Quenching the Spirit

- **Grieving**

- **Ephesians 4:30-32**

- “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

- Context – words, unloving conduct towards others; things that cut off good relationships. Literally means: “*to make sorrowful, cause grief, to affect with sadness, to offend, make one uneasy.*”
 - When the Holy Spirit says “No” – we say “Yes.”

- **Quenching**

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**

- “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

- Context – movement towards joy, prayer thankfulness, prophecy. Literally means: “*to extinguish, quench, suppress, stifle divine influence.*”
 - When the Holy Spirit says “Yes” – we say “No.”
 - Does this speak at all to you – if so, an opportunity to respond to Him in repentance...

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that non-Christians can hear from God?
2. Are there times in your life where God had to speak to you three times before you listened to Him?
3. Has God ever asked you to do anything that was contrary to what you were believing in your cultural Christianity at that time?
4. How have you seen obedience to God be a blessing in your life?
5. Have there been times in your life when you have grieved or quenched the Spirit? What were the consequences?

NOTES