

Expanding the Menu – Part 1

Acts 10:1-10

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Message Transcript

We turn the page to Acts chapter 10, today. As of Acts, chapter nine, verse 32, the narrative of the book of Acts has brought us back to the ministry of the apostle Peter. And his ministry will be our focus of study over the next handful of Sundays. And savor these studies about the apostle Peter. Because once we come to Acts, chapter 12, verse 17, we read of Peter, that "he departed and went to another place." And boy, did he ever. We don't know what happened to him or where he went to. He'll have that cameo appearance in Acts chapter 15. And you'll get to see his council vote there as he speaks to the board of elders in Jerusalem headquarters church. And then after that, pretty much it's so long Simon Peter, we hardly knew ye. But for now, we're still with Peter in Acts. We left off with him lodging at the house of another guy named Simon; this guy Simon the tanner (Acts chapter nine, verse 43). And it was a very bizarre choice of accommodations for an Orthodox Jew. As I mentioned, the Lord was clearly working in Peter's life to begin to break prejudice against non Jews (or Gentiles). But it's even much bigger than that. It's much bigger than the Lord just trying to break the prejudice or the racist tendencies of one man. This is about the Lord aiming to break the church of it. So the Lord goes straight to the big dog, you know? He, Peter is kind of the lead apostle, the chief apostle, and the Lord figures: "if I can get Simon, if I can get through Simon's thick skull, I can get through anyone's skull, that racism needs to be a thing of the past. And we can't have that. We can't tolerate that in the New Testament church. So Acts chapter 10, is a major step in that direction. And it's just that. It's a step.

The way the Lord handles dissolving the racism that existed between Jews and Gentiles really does show us how deep-seated that prejudice or discrimination was, the Lord had to do it in these little bite-sized chunks. You know, how do you eat a whole camel? One bite at a time. That's what the Lord had to do to get rid of racism in the church. So first he took the gospel to the full-blooded Jews there in Jerusalem. That was phase one, you know. And then, the next step would be to take the gospel and expand it out to the Hellenistic Jews. Now, they were full-blooded Jews, but they were living like Gentiles. So that was a challenge. The next step was the Samaritans, which aren't full blooded Jews. They're half Jews, but there's some Jew in their bloodline. And the Lord sent Philip up there to bust open that whole field of evangelism, and prove to them that the Lord's not just into the Jews, or the Jews that live like Gentiles. He's into half-Jews, the Lord wants to save half-Jews as well. And then logically, if you just follow the progression of how the Lord is breaking racism in the church, the next step would be what? A Gentile that lives like a Jew, right? And that's what we have in Acts chapter 10. Peter is going to be commissioned to take the gospel to a Gentile, a full blooded Gentile, the first full blooded Gentile that the gospel would be offered to. But it's a tiny step again in that direction, because this full-blooded Gentile is a Jewish proselyte. So he has converted to Judaism. And in that sense, he's already in the fold. The Jews have already received that guy, so to speak.

And then last, of course, certainly not least, would be the Lord commissioning the apostle Paul, to go out and reach, not just Jews, not just Jews who live like Gentiles, not just half-Jews, not just Gentiles who live like Jews, but full blooded Gentiles that don't care a thing at all about Judaism, and they want to skip that whole step. And they want to go right for their liberty, their freedom, and their salvation in Christ. And that of course, is going to be the final phase to opening up the Great Commission to the whole world.

With that said, I do want to add that the Bible never really stresses the combat of racism as a major theme or doctrine within its contents. The Bible never really challenges the church to combat racism. Never really tells us to pick up that axe and start grinding it, or go picket, or riot, or strike; or anything like that. And that's because the Lord has a much better way of tearing down racism. And that way would be the gospel. That's the Lord's solution to racism. Because the Lord knows that if the Gospel goes out, and the gospel is heard, that will bring someone into a relationship with Christ. That relationship with Christ will change their heart. That change of heart will change their life. And that change of life will change the way they look at the world. They'll begin to look at the world with spiritual eyes, rather than eyes of flesh. And racism just naturally, and easily melts away because of the power of the gospel at work in the life of human beings. And it does work. It works better than anything else. You could demand that racism stop. That doesn't really work. That could burn down cities. I think we've seen proof of that. You can try just about every solution that you're

looking for the best one I've ever seen, is spreading the gospel, bringing people into faith, into a relationship with Jesus. That's the real solution to racism. For that matter, that's the real solution to all of the world's problems, right?

So let's study this as this continues to unfold (the breaking of the New Testament Church of all of their prejudice and discrimination against non-Jews). Beginning at verse one. "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius." Now, first, real quick, a word about Caesarea. You might remember Caesarea from our study of Phillip. Phillip was originally located in Jerusalem. Scattered from persecution, directed by the Lord, he takes the gospel up into the city of Samaria. The Lord then redirects him down south to Gaza, to minister to one man; the Ethiopian eunuch. At which time, Philip is instantaneously translated to Azotus. And then, we believe, under the inspiration of Lord, Philip begins to make his way up the Mediterranean coastline, preaching and evangelizing as he goes. And I told you, that Philip's ultimate destination was Caesarea. Once he gets up to Caesarea (a very far northern coastline city there in Samaria), that's where he stops. He builds a house. He creates a life for him and his family. That's where he remains; Philip, the evangelist of Caesarea. And that is Caesarea, Israel; or Caesarea in Samaria (the region of Samaria). There is another Caesarea spoken about in the Bible, and that's Caesarea, Philippi. That is way far north and slightly eastward. That is up about as far as you can go in Galilee; almost to the border of Syria. That is not the Caesarea that we are talking about early on in the book of Acts. We'll get to that later in Acts. For right now, we're looking at the city of Caesarea where Philip settled. That's where Cornelius lives.

So, we might wonder, well, where is Philip in all this? Why don't we read about Philip getting roped into some of the work here? Did Philip not get up there yet? Is he still evangelizing his way up the Mediterranean coastline? Enjoying those beaches as he goes? I don't know. It sounds like something I would do. Maybe he didn't make it to Caesarea yet. Maybe he did. The truth is, it doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter. Because the Lord didn't choose Philip to do the work that's going to be done in Acts chapter 10. The Lord had this work specifically carved out for the apostle Peter. And the reason for that is because the Lord needed a prominent apostle to do the work that was required in Acts chapter 10. Because, and you'll see why by the time we're done with Acts chapter 11 and Acts chapter 15. Here's why he needed Peter. Because what happens in Caesarea doesn't stay in Caesarea. What happens in Caesarea is going to be a spark in the church, that if not dealt with properly, could just light the whole thing on fire, split the church, cause sectarianism; and all that other stuff. This really could even cost Peter his apostleship. They could, you know, revoke his apostle license. This was a big deal, because he's going to go up there, and he's going to offer salvation for the first time ever to full-blooded Gentiles. So you need a prominent apostle to be a voice in the ear of the council back in Jerusalem. We'll talk about that more in a little while here.

But let's keep reading on here in verse one. Cornelius, he was a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort. Now, I know what you're thinking, but this has nothing to do with the mafia. Come on, just because Italians are involved, that doesn't mean the mafia is. Shame on you people for thinking that. This is an Italian regiment in the Roman army. Cornelius is leading this particular regiment. Centurion. He's a Centurion. Centurion means an officer over 100 soldiers, because century means 100. So, Cornelius, he is in charge of 100 soldiers in this Italian band, or this Italian regiment, in the Roman army. And as a centurion, of course, he was going to be a full-blooded Gentile, I don't think they would give this role to a Jew or even a half-Jew. So, centurions were always full-blooded Gentiles. That explains Cornelius. He is a full-blooded Gentile. But, gentile or not, centurions always had a very popular reputation among the people, a very positive reputation among the people, even among the Jews. And, if you peek ahead real quick. We'll cover it, yeah, actually, this week, hopefully: verse 22. You'll see in verse 22, part of the plea of the servants of Cornelius to Peter is for Peter to come, because they say Cornelius, this guy, we want you to come see our master. He is, and I quote, "well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation." In other words, he's a Gentile, look, but even the Jews like this guy. And that was generally the case with centurions. Because, to be a centurion was a very high position. And you could only attain that, if you met very high qualifications. Just a few of them from history, to pull out and hand to you today, would be that a Centurion would have to have a prudent mind. He would have to display good leadership. He would have to be fair, steady, and composed; not overly bold or reckless. But, if necessary, willing to stand at his post and die for the Roman cause. So those were high qualifications. And it was high caliber people that took those positions. All of the centurions that we read about in in the Bible, the New Testament, they are all honorable men.

If you're keeping track, this would be the third centurion that we have met scripturally (as of the flow of it). The first one was the Centurion that asked Jesus to heal his servant. That would be Luke chapter seven. And you remember that

story, hopefully. Jesus marveled at that guy's faith. He was like, this is a Gentile. And this is how strongly this guy believes in me. Oh, if only my people, the Jews, had that kind of faith. But I can't even find that kind of faith among the Jews, my people, that I've been, you know, working with, and training, and developing for over 1000 years. So very high praise for that first centurion (Luke chapter seven). The second was the centurion that watched Jesus die on the cross. And He fully believed him to be the Son of God. He confessed that. He just shouted that out, cross-side, Christ dying on the cross: "Truly, this man is the Son of God." So another wonderful moment that really elevates the position of centurion in the mind of a Bible reader. The third centurion, of course, is Cornelius, the man that we're studying about here in Acts 10. And he was no less of a man than the other two. This is a good man. You're going to read his story, and I think you're going to be impressed with him.

Verse Two. "He was a devout man who feared God with all of his household." Now, do you recall what the New Testament Scriptures are trying to tell us when they use this phrase: devout God fearer. I think we just had this a few weeks ago. I think it was with the Ethiopian eunuch, right? Anytime you see that that phrase (a devout God fearer) in the book of Acts, here's what that means: it means that it was a person that was very religious. They were faithful in Judaism. They were completely sincere in their faith of God. But yet they weren't Christians. At least, not yet. They, for whatever their reasons, have not come into a saving faith of Christ. Usually, when we read about them, it's because the Lord is bringing them into a knowledge of Christ, bringing them into salvation. As is the case in Acts 10. But that's the state of them. So, just, you know, trickle that down to Cornelius. Seeing that Cornelius is a full-blooded Gentile, but also a devout God fearer, that can only mean one thing. And I've already told you it, I think in the introduction. Cornelius, this full-blooded Gentile, is a convert to Judaism. He is a what we would call a Jewish proselyte. He had previously been subjected to the polytheism of Rome, but now has embraced the monotheistic religion of Judaism.

The Romans, as you know, were polytheists. They believed in many gods. And the Roman gods—for the most part—were nothing more than the deification of human desires. We have a word for that. It's called hedonism, right? The deification of human fleshly desires. So, their gods really did nothing but embolden them to pursue their own fleshly desires. And whatever fleshly desire you had, there was a Roman god who was into that same thing, and was in charge of it. So, you would pray to that God and ask for that thing that you desired. If you were lusting after love, you would pray to the goddess Venus. If you were lusting for victory in war, you pray to the God Mars (who was the violent one) or the goddess Minerva (who was the strategic one). If you were lusting after prosperity, you pray to the God mercury, or maybe you pray to the god Saturn. They had all these gods assigned to all these different human conditions. But that's really all they were, is the deification of human conditions. Their gods never gave them guidance. Their gods never disseminated right and wrong. Their gods had no laws to follow. So as a result of that, all that Roman worship could really do is bring about moral decay to the nation of Rome. And actually, this, all of this, came from the Greek culture. If you study the Roman religion, all they really did was embrace all of the pantheon of Greek gods. And they Romanized it, you know? They changed some things up. They changed some names. They made it their own. Give him credit for that (sarcasm). But it was essentially Greek theology (pantheism, polytheism).

I heard someone say before (and I think it's a very true statement) that Rome may have conquered Greek militarily, but morally, Greek conquered Rome. That influence of Greek pervaded them. And this polytheistic religion of Rome has brought about moral decay within the nation. After about 100 years of that moral decay, what started happening (at least as near as we can tell from history), is that some of the Romans started to wake up. They started to look around at the moral decay that was being produced from Rome and all of its many gods. And they compared that with that monotheistic religion of Judaism. They looked at the life of the Jew, and they saw something in that, that they didn't have in their own religion. They saw that the Jewish God was a God of morals. He was the god of right and wrong. He was a god that cared about the individual so much, that if there were fleshly desires that were harmful to a person spiritually, physically, emotionally, that God will call that a sin and tell his people to avoid that. So, what happened was a pretty big, pretty major mass exodus out of Roman polytheism into Judaism. So, people were people from Rome, were converting to Judaism by the scores.

I think Cornelius had the same kind of revelation that I've been having for quite some while, and that is that, hedonism, or even humanism, is always going to produce the same result: moral decay, anarchy, lawlessness. And I think Cornelius just came to the point where he said, You know what, I don't want that for myself, or my family (or as we're going to see in a little bit), my friends. I want to know the one way, the right way, the true way. I want to know the one God, the right

God, the true God. And that's what I'm going to have to be the dictate of my life.

Reading on in verse two. Cornelius gave alms (which means charitable, charitable gifts to the poor). "He gave alms generously to the people." I would just summarize that by saying he loved God, and he loved people. Which is really saying something. Because it's one thing to love God, but it's a whole other difficult thing to love people. And yet it's important, isn't it? Because loving people is one of the ways that we can express our love to God. Because they're God's people. Good people, bad people, right people, wrong people, doesn't matter. They are God's people. And if we can look past the bad and love those people, indirectly what we're doing is loving their God; which happens to be our God as well. So he loved God. He loved people. Specifically mentioned here, poor people. He loved poor people. He didn't turn them away. He was well-to-do as a Centurion. He didn't lack for anything. But he did not use his wealth selfishly. He was not greedy. He did not love money. He was not attached to it. Instead, he gave that money away, as he could, to financially help the poor; those doing less-well financially in life. His faith inspired that. His faith in Yahweh inspired him to give to the poor.

And on top of that (reading on in verse two) he prayed continually. If I were you, I'd underline that word. That's just me though. "He prayed continually to God." Which means he had a regular, consistent, dedicated prayer life. This guy was doing better than many Christians I know, and he doesn't even yet know Christ. So I think we ought to be challenged by this devout Gentile God fearer from Acts 10. And ask the same questions of ourselves. Are we sincere? Do we revere God? Do we love people? How about the poor people? Do we give to poor people? And is our prayer life consistent, regular, and dedicated? You might be tempted to read about this guy and go... this guy doesn't need anything. What does he need? He's doing very well on his own. He's right where he needs to be with the Lord; a stellar servant. How could he possibly improve on what it seems like he already has down pat? But church what is missing from Cornelius' spiritual repertoire? What's missing? forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. This guy, technically, is not saved. He's sincere. He's devoted. But as of right now, he is sincerely unsaved and devoted to destruction. Devotion, reverence for God, good works, alms, consistent prayer... are those the kinds of things that save us? Of course not. We know that very well in this church. Because there's always going to be that undevoted moment. There's always going to be that moment where we slight God. There's always going to be that moment where we pass that poor person up. There's always going to be that moment where we choose to do something other than prayer. So, when it comes to our works, there is always going to be enough there to prove to us that we all fall short of the glory of God. Because his standard is perfection. Jesus said, Matthew chapter five: "be therefore as perfect as your Father in heaven." That's the standard. As perfect as God. Which means, we need substitutionary righteousness. We need a substitutionary sacrifice, that we might be forgiven of sins. Forgiveness is a must. As sincere in his religion as he is, we need to know that the Lord looked down on this man, he saw an unsaved man that needed to be brought into the full light of Christ, and needed to be saved, and come to know Him as Lord and Savior.

Verse three, "About the ninth hour of the day." About the ninth hour of the day, which is one of the daily hours of Jewish prayer. The Jews prayed three times each day, as many of you know. The third hour of the day (9am), the sixth hour of the day (12 noon), the ninth hour of the day (being 3pm). So, Cornelius, this convert to Judaism, is doing what you would expect him to be doing. He is obviously observing those Jewish prayer hours. And during that third and final prayer session of the day (around 3pm), reading on verse three, "he saw clearly in a Vision (something invisible to the physical realm around him, visible only in the spirit realm), he sees in this vision, "an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius." So this angel knows him by name, and calls him by name.

Verse four – "And he stared at him in terror." I always like when big shots are humbled. And this is one of those occasions. This man who leads 100 soldiers into battle is petrified at the sight of an angel (a holy angel), as he should be. "And he said, What is it, Lord?" I don't think he really knew who he was talking to. You can't blame him. He's a Gentile convert. So, he probably doesn't know a whole lot about Holy Angels. And actually, Sadducees themselves did not believe in Holy Angels. The Pharisees did. But, I doubt that was a topic of much discussion during those feast in Jerusalem, which is when this guy Cornelius would be present in Jerusalem to learn about the Lord. Probably not a subject he's all that versed in. So, he sees this angelic magnificent being. And his knee-jerk response would be to say, "maybe this is the Lord. I don't know. But we'll go with that. Because I don't want to offend this thing; whatever it is." So, he says, "what is it Lord? And He said to him, 'your prayers and your alms have ascended to as a memorial before God.'" And I'm glad that verse is there. Because, I wouldn't want you to think that the heart-position and the work

accomplishments (the spiritual work accomplishments) of Cornelius didn't matter. Because, they did matter. They do matter. Our works matter. They always matter. It is still true that our works cannot save us. But the sincere heart and the holy works of Cornelius are what have moved God to take action, and lead Cornelius into saving faith. Those are the kinds of things that got his attention. A heart that sought the Lord, works that honored God, the Lord saw that and said, "I gotta get this guy saved." And the Lord is always going to do that. Wherever there is a sincere heart that seeks God. Wherever there are works that are exhausted to honor the Lord, God is going to bring that person into full salvation; no matter what he has to do. If he has to send a holy angel with a message, then that's what he's going to do to reach that person that's seeking, and looking, and working to honor God. If he has to send a Phillip (you know, an Uber evangelist), to your chariot, then that's what he's going to do. If he has to send an apostle to your doorstep, in order to give you the full message that you might be saved, then that is what the Lord is going to do. Because, the Lord rewards our sincere heart-position toward him, and our good works for him. Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 6, says that the Lord, "he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." So all the more reason for you, as a Christian, to continue to be dedicated to these things: a sincere heart before God and works that honor him. I hope you do that. Spiritual works, just to bless the heart of God. If it was up to you, you'd probably do something different. But you love the Lord, and you want to take those moments to really truly bless him. He will reward that.

Verse five – "And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter." Verse six – "He is lodging with one, Simon a tanner, whose house was by the sea." And the New King James Version adds the words: "he will tell you what you must do." Certainly, that's what's taking place here. The Lord is going to send Simon Peter to give the full gospel message to Cornelius. Give a man a fish, and you feed him for the day. Send a man a fisher of man and he might just get saved. That's the Lord's thinking here. So get this, the angel's message to Cornelius is this... ready? The angel's message to Cornelius is this: "I just popped in to tell you that a guy by the name of Peter has something to tell you." That's it. That's the message. "I dropped by just to let you know I got a message for you, but I'm not gonna give it to you. You're gonna have to find a guy named Peter, and he'll give that message to you." The Lord did the same thing in Acts, chapter nine, with Saul too, didn't He? He struck down Saul and he said, "Saul, I just struck you down to let you know that I've got a message for you. And I've got help to send you. So look for a guy name Ananias." And both of those circumstances cause us to ask the question. Acts C9 - why didn't the Lord just give the full message? Why didn't the Lord do the full work right there. He could have. Acts chapter 10 – why didn't this angel just give Cornelius the full message? Why didn't he just get that over with. Now, we know why the Lord did that with Saul. It was a part of breaking Saul's discrimination against non-Jews. But how about Cornelius? Why not just let the angel tell Cornelius what he needs to do. Joppa was about 40 miles of travel away from Caesarea (35 miles as the crow flies). 40 miles of travel. So here's what's going to have to happen. He's going to, this guy, Cornelius, is going to have to send servants 40 miles to Joppa to track down Peter. Then Peter, and all these men, are going to have to travel another 40 miles back to Caesarea (that's north and west). So, you've got 80 miles and almost a week between Cornelius and his salvation. That doesn't seem good to me. Right? I would say get this done. Just get this done. He's ready. But why does the Lord do this? I'll tell you why. Bearing the gospel is not the job of angels. God leaves that work to those of us who have been saved by grace. God created the angels (the Holy Angels) in grace. And they never fell from that grace. God created mankind in grace. And we fell from that grace. So, we have experienced His grace through redemption. That's why it needs to be us as the human instruments that the Lord uses to share that message; because we've experienced it, the angels haven't.

And so, what's an angel going to say when it comes to the gospel? "Hey, you should believe the gospel and get saved. I hear good things about it. Never experienced it personally, myself, but people rave about it. Seems like it works. You ought to give it a shot." An angel cannot give that perfect gospel testimony, because of that fact, they've never had to experience the grace of Christ like we have. In second Corinthians chapter five, verses 17 through 20... let me read that to you real quickly. This puts it about as plain as you can put it. Those that have been redeemed by the Lord are the ones that have to offer redemption to others. It says this: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come." Listen to this verse: "And this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." So, you see what happened there. Because it's us, because we have been the ones that have experienced the truth and the grace of the gospel. That's why it must be us that shares. There's a reason why, in the book of Revelation, that the angels are constantly singing about how the Lamb redeemed people. And then there's a reason why the church is up

there singing about how the Lamb has redeemed them. That's the difference. So it needs to be mankind, taking up that responsibility and fulfilling the Great Commission. Like it or not, do it or not, it doesn't change the fact... that's our job Christians. It is us that needs to share the gospel.

Verse seven – “When the angel who spoke to him had departed (so Cornelius wastes no time here he obeys immediately),” when he had departed, “he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him.” Verse eight – “and having related everything to them, he sent them (on that 40 mile journey) to Joppa.” So, Cornelius selects two of his household servants to immediately lead to Joppa to track down this Simon Peter, so that Simon Peter can be roped back into the trip to Joppa. And the Centurion, being a military-minded guy, what does he do? He sends a soldier with those two servants. Those two servants have the message. The soldier is there for security detail. And I'm just thinking to myself, I'm not sure that that is the proper use of his soldiers. This isn't exactly Roman business. I'm wondering, how's he gonna write that one off, you know? Like, “ah, I'll just write this off as a business luncheon. We'll talk about insurrection and stuff, and I'll write this off as a business luncheon. That's what we'll do.” Makes me think of pastors, you know, right around this time every year, come tax season, they're scoping out their entire life, going through it with a fine tooth comb, trying to find anything that they can write-off as a ministry expense, you know? Like, “let's see, okay, that ATV I bought. I bought it for hauling firewood... which heats my house... which keeps me alive for ministry... therefore, that's a ministry write-off.” A little sketchy, right? Well, he gets away with it, apparently. He picks three men to send. And he wants to make sure that they have their story straight. You noticed that from verse eight? “Having related everything.” He wants to make sure the story is straight. And there's a reason for that. Cornelius is a smart guy. He knows—in general—how the Jews feel about Gentiles. So, this request that he's sending, it has to be well-stated. It has to appeal. It has to be good. And sure, the Lord mentioned through this angel, where Simon Peter was staying. He mentions that he's staying at the house of a tanner. I know that's for identification purposes, that so that they can get in town and say, “hey, we're looking for the home of Simon the tanner. Can you tell us where he lives?” Yes, for identification purposes, for location purposes. But I would have to think that hearing that would encourage Cornelius, because Cornelius knows that about the worst place for a Jew to pick for overnight accommodations... lodging... would be the house of a tanner. You know, you go into the house and there's all these dead animal carcasses hanging from the rafters. So I think at least part of the reason why the angel included that in there was to encourage him that, “hey, if this Jew Peter, if he would stay at the house of a tanner, that's not a very orthodox thing to do. And if he would do that, maybe he would be open to entertaining this conversation that I'm seeking with him.”

Verse nine – “The next day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the house top.” Jewish house tops were flat and they used them for decks and porches. I guess if you live in a New York City apartment, you probably do the same thing. You go up on the rooftop, that's your deck. But that was the way they did things. So, he goes up onto the roof “about the sixth hour to pray.” Again, we see mentioned the three daily Jewish prayer hours. The sixth hour was the second prayer hour of the day for the Jews (that would be 12 Noon). So yes, even these first century Christians in the church, no longer in Judaism, set free from the law, and yet, even they are still observing those three times a day, daily Jewish prayer hours. And I say to that, why not? It may be a remnant from Judaism. But it dates back to Daniel. It take dates back to the psalmist David. And I say, when it comes to religious practices, you're not wrong to keep the stuff that has a definite benefit spiritually for you. If there is a good, beneficial spiritual purpose for it, I say that until you find something better to replace it, there's no use in getting rid of it. Basically, what I'm saying to you is that you always choose whatever serves you best in your relationship with Christ; so long as it is biblical, not contrary to the Word of God... even if it's a tradition. I know some of us that have left traditional churches. The first thing we want to do is scrap it all, get rid of every trace of tradition, every trace of what could be termed religion, so that we can feel more free. Well, we can do that, if we've been really stung, really burned by religion, and tradition, and older church models. Fine, if that's what you need to do. I think I did that for a while. I went polar-opposite of what I came from. But after time, when your heart settles and establishes, when your feelings simmer down just a bit, I think you'll see that maybe some of those traditions weren't worth ditching immediately. But some of those traditions held value to us.

Verse 10. So Peter is praying at noon, and what is noon? The lunch hour, yes. He's praying at noon, and Verse 10 – “He became hungry, and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance.” Which, by the way, is why I never try to keep yours past noon on Sundays. I try to avoid trances, you know, hunger comas in the fellowship. This trance is a spiritual experience for Peter. He drifts out of earthly consciousness and into heavenly consciousness. His spiritual state overpowers his physical state. His spiritual senses overtake his physical senses. He's

now hearing and seeing in the spirit realm. If you've never experienced this, perhaps the closest relatable experience that I could bring up would be when your body is in one place and your mind is in another. Maybe you've done that with driving before. You arrive at your destination and you come to and you're like, "I don't even know how I got here. I don't remember the drive at all. How did I survive that trip?" That's kind of what it's like, only in a deeper spiritual state, where you're just completely snapped-away with the Lord; separated from material earthly reality, and into a spiritual trance. The Lord uses this trance to reveal the same thing to Peter that he's already revealed to Cornelius. So, this is God working on both ends. The messenger is going to be ready. The Lord's preparing him. The one who is meant to receive the message, he's going to be ready, because the Lord is going to be working on him as well. This was true of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Both of them were seeking and praying. The Lord spoke to both of them, directed both of them. They showed up... perfect timing, perfect appointment; the Lord working on both ends. But you can't always expect that to happen, can you? Not by a longshot. Sometimes the Lord doesn't work on the other end, until you've done your part. And that's when the Lord goes to work. Sometimes the Lord's trying to work on the other end, but he can't because that other person, or that other people group, won't let Him. So those sorts of things are going to happen from time to time. Not all of us, are all the time, going to be finely tuned into the voice of the Lord's spirit. But, oh, in those moments, when it does work out that way, it's perfect. You show up and you say, "Hey, this is tough, but I gotta tell you.." "Oh, yep, I already know. The Lord was leading me in that same direction." I love those moments.

I have a story about how I was expecting that to happen in a ministry situation in the past. And it didn't—at all—go like I expected. And I guess now that I brought it up, I should probably share it with you. But, ministry situation years ago when I was pastoring (and this has nothing to do with evangelism. It's just an example of the Lord working on both ends sometimes, and sometimes not)... I came into a situation where, as I showed up to pastor this church, the Sunday School teacher that was there had been there for decades. And I'm sure at one time he was a fine teacher. But by the time I got up there, I'm not trying to be mean, I'm not a critical person, I don't think, but I'll just be honest with you, it was bad. The teaching was bad. No matter what the Sunday school text was for that day, this guy would always every week, week in and week out, say the same things over and over again. I watched this guy and I thought I feel like it's time for maybe him to step down and someone else a little bit more capable of expounding the scriptures and encouraging the fellowship to step forward and take his role. So, I began to pray about that. I'm not, as a pastor, very quick to make big changes like that. So I wasn't quick to drop him out of ministry. I prayed about it for a long time. I came to the point where I felt very pressed in my spirit that the moment was then and now to remove him. And having observed him for that time of prayer, I was convinced that the Lord was working on his end too. I watched this guy and I saw a guy that was exhausted from teaching. I saw a guy that was desperately wanting to just retire, knowing that this was a struggle, seeing that he didn't put any effort into the teaching. So I went up to him, and I said, "well, I wanna have a talk with you, something I want to share with you, a decision that I feel like I need to make, and I suspect, you know it's coming. I think it's time for you to step down from your Sunday School teacher position, and let us replace you with someone else. He was not expecting that. He was crushed. It was a very tough situation for a while. And, you know, pastors often have to make very unpopular choices. But as the Lord leads, that's the right thing to do. And it was the right decision. It was the right thing to do. But man, that was one of those moments where I just wished, "oh, Lord, if you could have been working on the other end, like you were on my end, that would have been so much smoother." Doesn't always work that way.

For Peter and Cornelius, it worked that way. God working on both ends. Why? Because both people were praying. They were praying on both ends. That's when the Lord can do incredible things. When you're praying, and I'm praying, and the Lord can just piece everything together through our obedience and accomplish incredible things in our midst.

Verse 11... Tell you what, I think we're gonna have to, let's hold off verse 11 for next week. And this will be a three parter. At least. But, we should get through it in three parts. Because as we get down to verse 24, there's going to be a lot of repetition, as the story that we're reading now is retold. So we can make a little time there, but would you stand with me. And, worship team come forward? And I'm gonna ask you all if you would bow your heads, and close your eyes (worship team, not you until you get up in place). If you would bow your heads and close your eyes, and open your heart. That's a key component. Open your heart to the Lord. I guess considering where we ended up here in our text today. I will close you out with this thought. The Lord wants to use you and, oh my, how the Lord can use you. If you're a man or a woman like Cornelius, that is continually in prayer, sincere toward God, and dedicated to works that honor the Lord. If that's the kind of person that you are displaying yourself to be, I promise you, you're not going to be overlooked

and bored. You're going to be put-to-use by the Lord. He's going to use you. He's going to call your number multiple times. When he is in need of a messenger, or an encourager, or a worker, and there you are just praying, "Lord, I'm here. Use me however you want. I'm ready, Lord." So if that's not a pursuit in your life, it's my prayer in closing today that that becomes a pursuit in your life. "Lord, I want to be that person. I want to see your work continue. I want to see your kingdom grow and I am willing Lord to be used in it."

Let's pray. God, open hearts before you. Soft and sensitive to the voice of your spirit. speak into our lives in this moment. Tell us what you would have us to do. Convince us of that in our spirits. Persuade us of that in our minds, Lord. This is your church. We are Your servants. We are hands, and feet, we're mouths, we're ears. Use us in the body as you see fit. Send us where you want to send us. Lead us to reach out our hands to those that need a hand. Lead us to lend our ear to those that need it. Embolden us to open our mouths for those that need to hear from You. Use us, Holy Father, for Your glory... for the edification of your church... for the glory of your name. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.