

Sermon Title: God Sets The Table
Scripture Text: Acts 10:1-23 (Acts #25)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 10-15-23

Come with me, please, to Acts Chapter 10. Acts is one of those books in the Bible that has a very prominent inspired outline which you probably have memorized by now. Jesus was about to ascend, and His disciples said, "Well, are You bringing the Kingdom at this time?" and He said this, in Acts Chapter 1, Verses 7 and 8—"It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and"—here comes the outline—"you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' " (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

First to the Jews in Jerusalem, then to the hated Samaritans, and *then* to the *despised* Gentiles. It is not ours to know when this current age is going to end and the prophesied events of the Seventieth Week of Daniel that are going to begin and lead to the ultimate buildup to the second coming of Christ (Dan. 9:24-27)—when that is going to come, we don't know (Matt. 24:36).

Israel has been attacked; Israel has been attacked many times. This is not "the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3); this is not the end of the things. This is not the beginning of lighting the fuse to the second coming of Christ. That has been going on for 2,000 years. It is *horrible*. Pray for the people who are affected by it. But be about what we are supposed to do. We do not know when that second coming is going to happen; we do not know when the Rapture is going to happen. We *do* know God's plan for this era: We are all to be His witnesses.

It began in "Jerusalem" and the surrounding area of "Judea." It jumped the firebreak into "Samaria" when Philip, one of the first deacons, went there, as we saw in Chapter 8; and many Samaritans believed, and then their salvation was confirmed by a visit from the Apostles Peter and John, who saw that it was exactly what had happened in Jerusalem. And from that day on, the Church kept growing in Samaria.

And then in Chapter 8, we got just a *little* foretaste of "the remotest part of the earth"—or, the Gentile-salvation-part of that outline (cf. Is. 49:6). That was when Philip also introduced a man from Ethiopia to Christ; it was there also in Chapter 8. But that was just a hint of what was to come.

In Chapter 9, we had this interlude, if you will, where we saw the spectacular salvation of the man named Saul from Tarsus. He was viciously leading the persecution of Christians wherever he could find them; and on his way to Damascus, just before he got there to arrest and imprison Christians, God stopped him in his tracks. And once Saul was converted, the persecution that he had led now turned on *him*, and he was persecuted just as he had persecuted Christians before him.

He escaped Damascus rather dramatically; and he went briefly to Jerusalem, where he met with Peter for a number of days. And then there, the haters of Christ found out that he was there and what he was saying, and they tried to kill him there. But his newfound Christian brethren learned of the plan, and they hustled him down to the seaport of Caesarea—remember that place—from which they sent him to his hometown of Tarsus.

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Now, Saul is going to be out of the limelight in the book of Acts for several years—actually several chapters in the book. When he comes on the scene again, he will be known from then on as Paul, the "Apostle" to the "Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7); and from Chapter 13 to the end of the book, Paul's ministry will be the primary focus.

But before Paul launches this systematic, planned spread of the Gospel far and wide through the Roman Empire to the Gentiles, God "opens the door" to the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 14:27), and Peter comes back onto center stage for this to happen.

Remember, in the last part of Chapter 9, Peter showed up again after Saul's conversion. He ministered in two towns called "Lydda" and "Joppa"; he healed a paralyzed man in Lydda, and then he raised a woman named Tabitha from the dead in Joppa.

And in Joppa, beyond that miraculous manifestation, Peter took a *huge* step. Last we saw him, he was staying—living with—a tanner named Simon. You see, the nature of the work of a tanner—dealing with dead animals and hides and all of that—besides being yucky work and stinky work, it made a person unclean in the eyes of the self-righteous Jews; so Peter was showing evidence of having made a full break with the legalistic, separatistic ways of the Pharisees, just by living with Simon.

Now, what is coming here in Chapter 10? Let me paint a picture for you: If you walk into your dining room—or, maybe it's Grandma's dining room—and it's a special holiday, when you see a nice cloth on the table, and the best dishes and silverware and glassware are at each place; there are napkins that aren't even paper, and they are folded, and they are at each place; and maybe even candles, maybe flowers and place cards. Well, you see that, and you know that soon there is going to be a special gathering in that place.

Well, as we come to Chapter 10, I want to show you how "God Sets The Table" for the Gospel to begin to spread like wildfire to the Gentiles, and Peter is going to be at the center of this. So, "God Sets The Table," and here is an outline for the first 23 verses. It's a narrative section; we are going to take the biggest sections that we can without giving them short shrift. So, here is God setting the table:

- Number 1: The Unlikely Host (vss. 1-8)
- Number 2: The Shocking Menu (vss. 9-16)
- Number 3: The Unexpected Guest (vss. 17-23)

In this groundbreaking encounter that we are going to see in this chapter, the first element is our introduction to the one who is going to host the meeting. Chapter 10 starts with these words: "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius..."

We have to pay attention to some of the details here, because they help paint the picture. "Caesarea" refers to "Caesarea Maritima"—or, "Caesarea Maritime," or "Caesarea by the Sea." Keep that distinct from "Caesarea Philippi." "Caesarea" is when Caesar humbly named things for himself. "Philippi" is way up in the north, and that is where Jesus took the disciples, and Peter blurted out, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). That was a significant thing, but this is a different Caesarea. This is a seaport

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town, and if you look at a map, you'll see this place; it has already been mentioned twice in Acts. We know that after Philip led the Ethiopian to Christ, he was dramatically teleported, if you will, to a place called Azotus, which is down in the same region; and that he kept preaching, city by city, until he reached Caesarea. Then we saw Caesarea mentioned again in Chapter 9: That's where they took Saul from Jerusalem down to Caesarea, and put him on a ship to head back to his hometown of Tarsus.

So, "Caesarea"—this special place—was one of the shining gems that give evidence to the fact that Herod the Great—the Herod when Jesus was born—he was a builder of special places; this is one of them. The Temple in Jerusalem is another of them. You have heard of Masada. Caesarea Maritima is a spectacular place. He had a seaport built with manmade breakwaters. We are talking the century before Christ, here. There is some pretty cool stuff about how that was accomplished. The city included a hippodrome for chariot races that could seat up to 20,000 spectators. A few of you remember where we were walking around in that place there—*massive*, massive place! He also built an amphitheater that still stands, and that was for events—just think of an outdoor convention center/theater. They put on theatrical events there, gladiator bouts, even animal performances. And the ruins of Caesarea Maritima are some of the most striking in all of Israel. If you ever get a chance to go there—if *anybody* ever gets a chance to go there, after the events of the last week—it is an awe-striking place. It was also a seat of government in the region, and some of Herod's successors set up their shop there.

So, there was this man at Caesarea. It's on the seacoast. There is a narrow strip of land there called The Plain of Sharon, and you see Caesarea on the Sea and Joppa on the Sea—about a two-day journey between Caesarea and Joppa; and that is going to play a role in our study for this morning.

The rest of Verse 1—"There was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort..." Now, the first deal about Cornelius is that he was a "centurion." That means he was a Roman soldier, and he was in command of a hundred men. Ten cohorts of 600 men each—one of them was called "the Italian cohort." Why was it called "the Italian cohort"? Somebody named it that. Maybe they were trained in Italy. Who knows? It doesn't mean anything for us. Ten cohorts of 600 each comprised a legion, which would be 6,000 soldiers. To have achieved this position of "centurion," Cornelius had to prove himself a natural leader; he had to be a well-trained soldier; he had to be calm and willing to defend ground under attack, at his own peril. He was a strong, reliable, responsible man, just to have qualified for that position.

We see a couple of other things about this Cornelius, though, that are unusual and special about him. He was "a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort," and it goes on to say: "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" (vs. 2).

So, two descriptions of him there: He was "a devout man," and he "feared God." That puts him in a special category. We are going to see others in the Book of Acts, but Cornelius is the first one, so let me plant the idea in your head now: these ones who are called "God-fearers." They are non-Jews—notice, he "gave" gifts "to the Jewish people"—

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they are non-Jews who had abandoned whatever pagan roots they were raised with, and they recognized God—Yahweh God, the true God—the God of Israel, that He is the true God and the Creator of everything (e.g., Jos. 2:11; 2 Kings 5:15; Dan. 6:26).

They are distinct from full converts to Judaism—those were called "proselytes" (Acts 2:10; 13:43). They had gone through training; they had submitted to circumcision. That is becoming a "proselyte," and to do that, you would then be right in with the Jews (cf. Est. 8:17b)—primarily under the dominance of the Pharisees in their version of keeping the Mosaic Law (Matt. 23:2).

The God-fearers accepted the moral teachings of the Bible, but they *did not* go into the full-blown participation in the Law. In the case of ones like Cornelius, they would be welcome to attend a synagogue as a guest, and so they could get instruction in the things of God; but they could enter the Temple only as far as the Court of the Gentiles, because they *were* Gentiles and they were not proselytes.

Such people prayed. In the case of Cornelius, he regularly not only "prayed," but he "gave alms"—he gave to the poor; he had a heart of compassion, and a desire to worship the true God. And there is a note here that this was true of "all his household."

God-fearers, you can imagine, were the most *fertile* soil for evangelism. They were still lost, they still needed to hear the Gospel and commit to the Lord Jesus Christ. But Cornelius is our first example in the Book of Acts. And in the bigger picture of the Doctrines of Man and Sin and Salvation, Cornelius is an example of someone who lives up to the light they have, and so God gives them more (Lk. 8:18; contra 2 Thess. 2:11-12).

We know from Romans Chapter 1, Verses 18 through 20, that your average garden-variety sinner "suppresses the truth in unrighteousness" (cf. Ps. 14:1; Jn. 8:44-45)—*ignores* the fact that creation *screams* that there is a Creator (cf. Ps. 19:1), *ignores* the fact that you have a conscience that tells you right and wrong (Rom. 2:15). The evidence of God is within us (Ecc. 3:11), and *no one* has ever been born an atheist!

But, if someone begins to *pay attention* to the evidence for God, that person may become a God-fearer, and not heaping up more and more judgment by "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." So, those who *do not* "suppress the truth" are the ones of whom it becomes obvious that God brings them to the knowledge of sin (Lk. 18:13), and He brings the Gospel to them (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 16:14). In the sovereign plan of God, He chose and prepared Cornelius to be "ground zero" for the salvation of the Gentiles.

And He dealt with him in a miraculous vision. Verse 3 of Chapter 10—"About the ninth hour of the day"—that's about three o'clock in the afternoon; there were several times during the day—like noon, three, six—when it was the standard of most Jews to pray for certain categories of things. He was doing the afternoon prayers, and "he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, 'Cornelius!'"

Now, these days you have people who claim to be talking to angels all the time, hanging out with them like they are buddies, and God is telling them all these things—*never*, ever

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happens with a real encounter with a real angel. It *scares you spitless* when you are in the presence of a holy angel of God (e.g., Matt. 28:4).

So, while he is praying, this angel says, "Cornelius," and he was "much alarmed"! I guess! But he got very specific instructions. Look at Verse 4 and following: "And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, 'What is it, Lord?' " "Lord" does not always have to mean deity, but clearly, he [the angel] is the one in charge in this encounter! "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."

I have a pretty good idea that you have a pretty good idea of what is coming here. You've read Acts before, right? Well, Cornelius had not read this book! He did not know what was coming. And it is *amazing* what is said here: a *direct visit from an angel!* Specific instruction! It is equally amazing what is *not* said.

It is kind of amazing what is said about how "your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God" "Before God"—that means that God was at work in Cornelius' heart, and God *received* the prayers of Cornelius as sincere and pleasing, and God was blessing the generosity that he had exemplified by giving to help the poor.

When someone responds to what they know about God, the general principle is that God opens up to them further understanding (Lk. 8:18), and that is what was going on with Cornelius. We happen to be made privy to more details about him than about most people.

Now, not only had Cornelius not read Acts, he also had to read Romans or Ephesians or First Thessalonians or First Peter. He *could not have understood* that this was the unfolding, in time, of God's will from eternity past—that God had "chosen" him "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; cf. Gal. 1:15; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9).

When you came to Christ, I am sure you did not have a visit from an angel. You probably had a visit from a friend, or a sermon, or a book, or a TV show—*something* that presented the Gospel to you. But if you have come to believe in Jesus Christ—if He is your Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9), and He is the Number One thing in your life (Matt. 10:37; Phil. 3:8), you "belong" to Him (1 Cor. 3:23), you are His adopted child of God (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5)—*that* is the evidence that you were "chosen...before the foundation of the world" (cf. Acts 13:48; cf. Jn. 6:37; Rom. 8:29-30; 9:11, 15-16, 23; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

So it is kind of amazing what a good description of this guy there is here, even though he is not a Christian yet.

But what is *not* said in these instructions to Cornelius is just as amazing.

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There is nothing here about *why* God wanted Cornelius to have Peter come to his house. There is *nothing said* in those instructions about salvation. There is *nothing said* about receiving the Holy Spirit. There is *nothing said* about a special blessing. There is nothing here about Jews and Gentiles, and the relationships between them. All he got was Peter's name, the address where he could be found, and the instructions: "Send for him."

Cornelius' reaction—that's pretty amazing, too. It was what Paul, at the beginning and end of Romans, called "the obedience of faith." Cornelius immediately did exactly as the angel instructed: He sent a fellow God-fearing soldier, one who was called "devout," along with two of his personal assistants, to fetch Peter. They were probably all in that category of God-fearers. You see, God is setting this table according to His plan.

Think about it: God could have had the angel give the Gospel message to Cornelius, but He didn't. Now, in the last days, before the second coming, we are told specifically in Revelation Chapter 14 that God will use an angel to proclaim the Gospel around the world (vs. 6). But in *this* era, He works primarily through *human* instruments who proclaim His Word (Rom. 10:14-15).

And clearly, God wanted Peter to deliver the message to Cornelius. God wanted Peter to witness the genuine conversion of this man, Cornelius, and the others from among the Gentiles who would come to believe at the same time, just as He had made Peter witness the salvation of the Jews in Jerusalem and the Samaritans in Samaria.

But there's more. That's just the guy who is going to *host* this meeting. God was *also* continuing to work with *Peter* on a personal level. Not only was God preparing the one who was going to *receive* the message—that's Cornelius—He was preparing the one who would *deliver* the message.

So we come to Point 2 in our outline: The Shocking Menu. We are going to watch what God does with Peter as He sets the other end of the table. Alright, I confess: I am a preacher. We like to outline things; we like to be clever. I am playing it a little bit loose with the table-setting motif when I mention The *Shocking* Menu. What these guys had to eat when they got together is of *no consequence* to us or the passage whatsoever. I am just saying there was something shocking about what God revealed to Peter. It all has to do with the work of God in Peter's heart, and the revelation for *all* of us concerning His plans for Jews and Gentiles.

What you are about to see is the *reversal* of the centuries-old dietary laws that God gave to Israel in order to be part of what would keep them distinct from the other nations. Over in Leviticus Chapter 20, Verses 25 and 26—this is right in the context of living your life according to the Law that God gave through Moses—God says: "You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean"—speaking of "ceremonially clean" or "ritually clean"—"and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. Thus you are to be holy to Me"—set apart—"for I the Lord"—that's Yahweh—"I Yahweh am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine."

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So we have seen Cornelius' end of the table, set. Now the scene switches to Peter: He is at the house of Simon the Tanner, down in Joppa; and this is the day after the angel visited Cornelius, and it is the first travel day of the guys sent by Cornelius. Peter was expecting what you are about to see just as much as Cornelius was expecting the angel—he wasn't expecting it. It was a *total* shock to him.

Verse 9—"On the next day, as they"—the three sent by Cornelius—"were on their way and approaching the city"—the city of Joppa—"Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray." Why was Cornelius praying at three in the afternoon, and Peter was praying at noon? Because most Jews prayed at noon *and* at three. Don't make any deal about the time; we're just telling you the setting here: another normal time for Jewish prayers.

Peter went for the solitude of "the housetop," and I think you have heard a lot about houses in that part of the world at that time. The "housetop" is what we would think of as the patio. When it was really hot, people would even sleep there. It was the gathering place, it was a quiet place, it was a social place when it needed to be. And Peter was planning to finish his midday prayers before the midday meal.

Now, look at it from Verse 10—"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" (vss. 10-16).

Okay, "all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures"—the point is: This was both clean *and* unclean animals, and [the voice] said, "Peter, go for it." They were the ones that were defined according to the kosher laws of the Old Testament. God gave those regulations—some of *many* regulations that He gave—to keep Israel separate from regular social interaction with the idolatrous nations that they were going to encounter (cf. Lev. 11:44-45).

The command was pretty clear: "Kill and eat!" Peter was pretty clear: "No way am I going to do that!" Well, imagine just how *shocking* that must have been to Peter. "I have never eaten *anything* unholy and unclean!"

But God was *changing* something. You may have heard the word "dispensation" or "dispensations" or "Dispensationalism"—it's one of the doctrinal conclusions we draw from Scripture that there are different eras or dispensations in which God does certain things a certain way, and sometimes things change from one era to another: like before and after the Law, before and after the Flood, before and after Jesus, before and after the Rapture, etc. etc. (e.g., Ex. 12:48 with Gal. 2:3; Ex. 20:8 with Rom. 14:5; see also Jn. 14:17). Well, here is a change from the Dispensation of Law to the Dispensation of the Church—or, *this* era (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:4-6).

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And this was one of many points at which Peter, and the other Apostles as well, had to be *reminded* of things that Jesus had said to them, but they did not comprehend them at first. You know how many times you read through the Gospels, and Jesus is saying, "The Son of Man is going to go to Jerusalem and be betrayed and arrested and killed and buried and rise again"—and they didn't get it (Lk. 18:34); they didn't get it until all the way after the Resurrection, so many things they did not understand until God opened their eyes to understand them (Lk. 24:45).

Well, here is one of them, because Peter had heard this before. It's in Mark Chapter 7—and there is a parallel to it in Matthew Chapter 15—where Jesus deals with this ridiculous, silly, convoluted, superstitious ritual handwashing that the rabbis had come up with that you had to do before you ate. And Jesus explains how that actually, in the name of obeying the Law, they were *disobeying* the Law.

And the disciples were asking Him questions about that afterwards, and that brings us to Mark 7, Verses 18 and 19—"And He said to them"—and this was to the disciples—"Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" You know, there are some sentences in God's Word for which you do not need an expositor to make an explanation. What you eat goes in, goes through, goes out. The *evil* is not in what you *consume*; the evil is from the wickedness in your heart. And then, notice: "(Thus He declared all foods clean)." (cf. Gen. 9:3)

Now, rather than understanding God's intention of a social barrier between Jews and Gentiles, the legalistic rabbinical teachings had morphed into believing that if you *eat* the wrong thing, you'll get spiritual cooties, and you are going to be messed up by that. They were not catching on to the fact that the evil comes from your "heart" (Jer. 17:9), so they came up with this silly, superstitious ritual of handwashing before you ate. Now, I'm all for washing your hands before you eat, but it is not going to keep spirits from you.

So, God played that scene "three times" to make His point: "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." "No longer" is an important expression. "It *used* to be unholy; *now* it is not. The regulation is *changed*. It served its purpose, and now it serves a *different* purpose to have it removed." Well, Peter is eventually going to get the point. He made the connection not only to food, but also to Gentiles that God was calling to come to faith in Christ.

It took Peter a little while; he had to think about it. But I want you to notice a subtle insight. I just quoted to you from Mark. We are working our way through Mark in our daily e-mails. We preached through Mark several years ago. Maybe you remember, maybe you don't, but Mark was not one of the Twelve—Mark was not one of the Apostles; he was a close associate of the Apostles. The evidence is quite strong that Mark had one primary resource for his material: it was Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13), and there are even writings in the early church that say that. So I can imagine that when Peter recounted that incident when Jesus rebuked the silliness of the superstitious ritual handwashing, he made the point to Mark about declaring "all foods clean" (cf. Rom. 14:14).

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And notice, it is in parentheses at the end of Mark 7:19. That is not part of the quote from Jesus; Mark wrote that. Why would Mark have written that? Probably because he heard the story from the guy who had the incident of the sheet and the clean and unclean animals. So this was a big deal, and Peter was not only at ground zero for the Gospel going to Gentiles, but this regulation as well.

Now, we have not only this passage in Mark and the one here in Acts 10, there is a lot more in the New Testament. In Romans and in First Corinthians, there are extended sections concerning the fact that it is a matter of conscience regarding one's diet, and it even applies to "meat sacrificed to idols" (1 Cor. 10:18)—that was *never* an issue for Israel; but when you get to the Gentiles, well, sacrifices would be made in idol temples, not all the meat would be consumed, so sometimes the best meat market in town was the back door of the idol temple. And is it evil to eat that meat? Well, the conclusion is quite clear, *exactly* the same as the silly ritual handwashing: It is a matter of, if it doesn't bother you, it doesn't bother God. It is okay to eat what you want to (Rom. 14:1-6). What you eat or don't eat has *nothing to do* with being spiritual (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8)—that is the point.

Then there's this, and it goes *much* further: First Timothy 4:1-5. This is Paul now, near the end of his life, writing to his protégé Timothy. He says: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron"—and you're thinking, "Wow, Paul, that's strong! Can you give me an example?" And he says, "No, I'll give you *two*"—"men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer." You can eat what you want to eat!

And as a matter of fact, one of the principles of evangelism is: When you go to a strange place, eat what they give you (Lk. 10:7-8). That's been a test of my faith a few times! I've eaten some things I never thought I *would* eat. Kangaroo meat is pretty good—I was kind of surprised; it makes your stomach a little jumpy. But I have eaten it—it was good.

Now, to say that *spirituality* is to *in any way* be judged by what you eat is "paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"! If you receive it with thankfulness, it's okay!

Now, you have your things, I have my things; I even have some food allergies and stuff like that, some things I stay away from—but it has nothing to do with being spiritual. You go other places, and people will eat things that I don't think people ought to eat...I mean, *snails*? Eat them if you want to, but I'm sorry—I'm not going to do that! You know, there's octopus, rattlesnake—go on and on (cf. Gen. 9:3). If you receive it with thankfulness from the hand of God, it is perfectly fine.

And also, as a matter of fact, it is a *sin* to judge spirituality connected with food. Colossians 2:16-17—"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink

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or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

So, Cornelius' end of the table is set: He has the guys on the way down to Joppa to fetch Peter. In the next scene, it is Peter's turn to demonstrate "the obedience of faith." He is going to have to go with men he doesn't know, to travel a day or three to meet a man he has never heard of, to deliver a message he has not thought of yet. That's all.

So, let's look at The Unexpected Guest. Peter was still dealing with what he just saw when Cornelius' men showed up. Verses 17 and 18—"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."

Okay, so you hear a knock on the door, there are some Roman soldiers, "We are looking for Peter"—how fast would *you* run downstairs? Well, imagine what Peter was thinking.

I was thinking about this, too—one of those "silence" things, not in the text—I was wondering about *Simon*: What was *he* thinking about this? He must have known that it was a stretch for Peter to stay with him, and now he has been there for some time. And later in the passage, it is going to say that "some of the brethren from Joppa" went *with* Peter up to Cornelius' house (vs. 23). I can't *imagine* that Simon would have stayed behind. He *had* to be wondering, "What is going on here?" I wonder if Peter told him what was going on. I wonder if Peter told him about the vision. I wonder if Simon was privy to the conversations between Peter and Cornelius' men. You have to realize what a *shocking* thing this was!

And again, God gave special revelation to Peter: Verses 19 and 20. He hears that they are downstairs asking for him, and "While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.' "

Now, Cornelius sent these guys, but God told him to send them, so God takes full credit. "I have sent them Myself"—the Holy Spirit says that to him.

"Accompany them without misgivings"—literally, that is: "go...doubting nothing" (NKJV). The Legacy Standard Translation is: "without taking issue at all." "Peter—*just do it!*" And he doesn't even wear Nikes.

Here comes the final flourish for the table-setting for today, starting at Verse 21—"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' "—now, realize, Peter hadn't even heard Cornelius' name yet—"a centurion"—*gulp*...a Roman commander—"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."

Sermon Title: God Sets The Table
Scripture Text: Acts 10:1-23 (Acts #25)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 10-15-23

It is interesting: The antecedent of "he" is Peter. This wasn't Peter's house! I guess I wonder what Simon was thinking. Obviously, they had a pretty good relationship.

But now, we will have to wait a week to see what happens next, but the table is set.

The plan of God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles is in motion. Cornelius is going to be the main man to receive the Gospel in a Gentile setting. He has been chosen and called by God. He is right on the cusp of hearing the Gospel and being saved.

Peter—he is the one to deliver the message. He has *likewise* been sovereignly chosen and called by God. His mind was electrified, baffled, churning by this new revelation from God about what is "clean" and what is "unclean."

Neither Cornelius nor Peter knew *exactly* what was going to happen, but they both dutifully obeyed God.

Now, maybe today, you are kind of like Cornelius. Maybe you are a God-fearer—you don't believe in multiple Gods; you believe there is one God, you believe He is the Creator of Heaven and Earth...but you don't go any further than that. "I try to be a good person"—but you don't go any further than that. Maybe, if you are like Cornelius, I have good news for you: You don't have to wait a week. You can come to Christ right now; turn your life to Him (2 Cor. 6:2).

Or, maybe you are a little bit like Peter. Maybe there is someone to whom God is going to dispatch *you* this week—someone who needs to hear the Gospel. Are you ready? Maybe, like Peter, you need to be jolted out of some kind of prejudice. "Oh, Lord, I would *never* do that!" Peter is going to learn and apply the lesson. But right now, all he knows is, "Go with these guys you don't know, to a place you have never been to, to a man you have never met, and preach a sermon you have never thought of. I'll take care of it."

When God sets the table, my friends, when He arranges your encounter with another human being, come and feast at the unfolding of His will (Jn. 4:34), and speak His "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). God will use it for His glory (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; cf. Acts 16:14).

Let's pray:

Father, we thank You for setting that table that day, as it were. We realize that this encounter between Peter and Cornelius is part of our spiritual family tree—that that same Gospel has spread person by person, generation by generation, to where it has come to us. Oh, Father, make us good recipients, make us good communicators of the Gospel. May we realize that any of our human circumstances are of miniscule importance compared to the joy of knowing You, walking with You, serving You. Have Your way, we pray, in each of our lives, for Your glory alone. In Jesus' name. Amen.