

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon January 22, 2023

Acts 10: 1 – 48 “Epiphany: Pentecost for the Gentiles” – Part 2: Peter’s Vision (v9-23)

9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. 17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate. 18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. 19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.” 21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

I. Introduction

- a. Acts 10: “Epiphany: Pentecost for the Gentiles”
 - i. Part 1: The Vision of Cornelius v1-8 – Last week
 - ii. Part 2: Peter’s Vision v9-23 - today
 - iii. Part 3: Peter and Cornelius meet v24-33
 - iv. Part 4: Peter’s Sermon v34-43
 - v. Part 5: The Conversion of the First Gentiles v44-48
- b. “This section is one of the most important units in Acts. Here the gospel goes out directly to a Gentile and his household for the first time. Everything is coordinated by God, as was the case with Saul’s conversion. The Spirit’s coming upon the group independently of any action by Peter also confirms God’s direction in what takes place, a point Peter makes very clearly when the controversial inclusion of the Gentiles is discussed in 11:15–18. In a sense this scene is the book’s turning point, as from here the gospel will fan out in all directions to people across a vast array of geographical regions, something Paul’s three missionary journeys will underscore.”¹
- c. Today: Acts 10: “Epiphany: Pentecost for the Gentiles” Part 2: Peter’s Vision
 - i. The setting v9,10
 - ii. Peter’s Vision v11-13
 - iii. Peter Refuses and is Corrected Three Times & Vision Ends v14-16
 - iv. Peter Considers the Vision as Cornelius’ Three Servants Arrive v17,18

¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 380.

- v. Peter Considers the Vision & the Spirit Bids him Go with the Men v19,20
 - vi. Peter Obeys the Spirit v21-23
 - d. “**EPIPHANY:** The term “epiphany” comes from a Greek word which means “appearance” or “manifestation.” In Western Christianity the festival of Epiphany, observed on the sixth of January, celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the coming of the Magi to see the child Jesus (Matt. 2:1–12).”²
 - e. So, we saw last week how the Lord had graciously worked in Cornelius to make him a God-fearing Gentile, seeking the Lord in the path of Judaism, yet still not converted to Judaism, not circumcised, not in the covenant. Cornelius has laid aside the false gods of Rome and is diligently, reverently, prayerfully leading his household in genuine piety and charity toward God and man. He is generous with his wealth, caring for the poor, as he seeks the Lord. As a Roman centurion, he is respected by the Gentiles, and as a diligent God-fearer, he is respected by the Jews as well. Into this situation of seeking the Lord, Cornelius receives a vision from heaven of an angel, encouraging him in his faith and commanding him to send for Peter who is in Joppa. Cornelius immediately obeys, sending three trustworthy servants of his household. In this we see God’s all-controlling Providence to bring His Kingdom to the Gentiles, and in Cornelius, we have an example to encourage us all toward sincere piety and charity.
- II. The setting v9,10
- a. 9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready...
 - b. Cornelius’ servants are drawing near to Joppa.
 - i. Again, we see the Lord’s Providence at work. These servants could not have known the Lord was opening Peter’s mind and heart to receive them, even as they are arriving at Joppa and beginning their search for Simon the Tanner’s home by the sea. And, Peter was surely unaware of their approach. Note, we need to be aware the Lord is always working and be happy when His plan intrudes upon ours.
 - 1. “Peter knew nothing of their approach, and they knew nothing of his praying; but he that knew both him and them was preparing things for the interview, and facilitating the end of their negotiation. To all God’s purposes *there is a time*, a proper time; and he is pleased often to bring things to the minds of his ministers, which they had not thought of, just then when they have occasion to use them.”³
 - c. Peter is praying. Time: the 6th hour = about noon. Where: on the housetop.

² Fred A. Grissom, [“Epiphany,”](#) ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 501–502.

³ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2107.

- i. Here, the once impetuous apostle shows a steady Christ-likeness in how he approaches prayer. It appears Peter has set aside a time and a place to pray around noon.
 - 1. “*Peter went up upon the house*, that he might pray alone by himself; for a quiet and lone place is a great help to prayer, which thing Christ himself did not omit, that the mind, being free from all things which might call it away, might be the more earnest and bent toward God. And the Jews had another manner of houses and buildings than we use; for they had walks upon the tops of their houses. The sixth hour was then noon. And it is not to be doubted but that he got himself to prayer then according to his custom. For because we are drawn away with divers businesses, and there is no end of turmoiling, unless we bridle ourselves, it is good to have certain hours appointed for prayer, not because we are tied to hours, but lest we be unmindful of prayer, which ought to be preferred before all cares and business. Finally, we must think the same thing of time which we think of place; to wit, that they are certain remedies whereby our infirmities is helped; which, if the apostles counted fit for them, how much must more the sluggish and slow use the same?”⁴
- d. Peter’s state: Very hungry, desiring to eat, awaiting meal from the tanner’s servants
 - i. Luke gives us this detail that we may more fully appreciate Peter’s state as he approaches the Lord in prayer upon the rooftop. Hungry for food for his body, Peter is not distracted from his hunger for food for his soul. Would anyone have thought it odd or irreverent for Peter to have instead assisted in food preparation? Peter may have risked appearing unhelpful as he ascended to the rooftop to pray as others worked to prepare food. This is reminiscent of how Mary chose the one needful thing and sat at Jesus’ feet.
 - ii. Also, consider the alluring smells of cooking that would have likely wafted to the rooftop as Peter was praying.
 - 1. “Peter’s hunger and the preparations in the house for a meal, whose appetizing odors he may have savored on the roof, make the “food content” of the vision all the more apropos and provocative.”⁵
- e. So, we can see in our mind’s eye Peter on a rooftop, turning to gaze upon the Mediterranean Sea, feeling the sea breeze and the sun upon his face, hearing the sounds of the sea and the city, enjoying the mixed aroma of sea air and cooking

⁴ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 418.

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 10:9–10.

food, as he closes his eyes and lifts his soul up before His Lord, seeking His Face in prayer.

III. Peter's Vision v10b-13

- a. "he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."
- b. Peter is in a trance.
 - i. Trance = ἔκστασις = a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, alienation of mind, whether such as makes a lunatic or that of a man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt condition, although he is awake, his mind is drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God.
 - ii. Unlike Cornelius whose retinas beheld the angel and whose eardrums heard the angel speak, Peter is taken into a trance where he sees and hears the angel in his mind.
 1. "He *fell into a trance or ecstasy*, not of terror, but of contemplation, with which he was so entirely swallowed up as not only not to be regardful, but not to be sensible, of external things. He quite lost himself to this world, and so had his mind entirely free for converse with divine things; as Adam in innocence, when the deep sleep fell upon him. The more clear we get of the world, the more near we get to heaven: whether Peter was now *in the body or out of the body* he could not himself tell, much less can we, 2 Co. 12:2, 3. See Gen. 15:12; Acts 22:17."⁶
- c. Peter sees heaven opened
 - i. There lies a veil between heaven and earth that our natural senses cannot pierce. In this trance, Peter is somehow made able to perceive beyond the veil into heaven.
 1. "*And saw heaven*; either visibly to his corporal eyes, as to St. Stephen's; or rather mentally, more suitably to the rapture mentioned in the former verse. *Opened*; which might signify, that heaven, that was shut to the children of men by the first Adam, was now by Christ, the Second Adam, opened to all believers."⁷
- d. Peter sees something: Like a great sheet bound at the four corners, Descending to him, Let down to the earth [from heaven]

⁶ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2107.

⁷ Matthew Poole, [Annotations upon the Holy Bible](#), vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 417.

- i. “the *sheet* here spoken of, bears an analogy to a table and table-cloth amongst us. *Knit at the four corners*; so gathered up or knit, that the [animals], ver. 12, might not fall down. And this Peter saw to come from heaven, to show that the liberty of taking Cornelius and other Gentiles into the church, did come from thence only.”⁸
- e. Loaded inside this sheet are animals of every kind
 - i. “In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.”
 - ii. All kinds = including unclean animals that Jews like Peter would NEVER have eaten as a matter of religious piety and love for God
 - 1. Lev 11:46,47 “This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.”
- f. Peter is commanded to rise, kill and eat these animals, both the clean and the unclean. This commandment would have crashed into Peter’s old covenant conscience as the most offensive concept. Peter did not yet understand the difference between eternal moral law and temporary applications of moral law. Here, Peter is being taught that the OT dietary restrictions were only transient applications of God’s holiness applied between Jew and Gentile.
 - i. Lev 11:44,45 “I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 45 'For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”
 - ii. Thus, we see the Lord created OT animal categories of unclean and clean to serve as constant reminders of His holiness and of His commandment to consecrate themselves in His Ways and not take up the ways of the surrounding unclean nations with their idolatry and wickedness.
 - 1. “The food laws underscore Israel’s separation from the nations. By making unclean food clean, God is showing how table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles are more easily accomplished in the new era. The vision symbolizes that what separated Jews from Gentiles is now removed, as Peter will explain in Acts 10:28”⁹
 - iii. Hence, here in Acts 10, the Lord removes the dietary code as a binding commandment during the new covenant age. And, connected to this, the Lord removes the laws restricting Jews from interacting with Gentiles,

⁸ Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 417.

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 390.

eliminating the practical OT hindrances to the dissemination of the Gospel amongst Gentiles.

1. “The vision, whether a parable or a command about food, shows the arrival of a new era and is not just about diet”¹⁰

IV. Peter Refuses and is Corrected Three Times & Vision Ends v14-16

- a. 14 But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.
 - i. Here, the impetuous Peter speaks out three times in opposition to killing and eating unclean animals, three times in opposition to the heavenly vision. Yet, three times the voice from heaven gives the same command.
 - ii. Our memories can be unreliable. Repetition is very important in teaching. It’s unlikely Peter will ever wonder if he misunderstood the commandment. The striking vision of all kinds of animals piled into a sheet and the thrice repeated command would leave a permanent mark on his memory.
 - iii. Also, this is reminiscent of Peter’s thrice denial of Christ and Christ’s thrice restoring Peter in John 21: “Feed My lambs...Tend My sheep...Feed My sheep.”
 - iv. “The importance of the message requires three repetitions to convince Peter. As subsequent events show, Peter does respond to the divine message as he journeys to Cornelius and welcomes the opportunity to present the gospel. Once the vision is successfully communicated, the sheet with the animals is removed back to heaven. The fact that the vision is from heaven is stated at its beginning (v. 11) and end. The verb for its ascending to heaven also matches the verb of the ascension in Acts 1:11.”¹¹
 - v. “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Peter must learn to accept the impact of Christ’s atonement upon the cosmos. No longer are unclean animals to be considered unclean. No longer are Gentiles to be considered unclean. The clean/unclean distinction now exists purely based upon faith in Christ and obedience to His eternal moral Law.
 1. Note the Lord’s patience with Peter, to speak to him three times. Peter’s resistance is based upon an effort toward faithfulness, but Peter is ignorant of the new era and its new openness to Jew-Gentile relationships. Peter needs the new covenant understanding to sweep away the old covenant way with the Gentiles. This sweeping away requires repetition.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 389.

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 391.

V. Peter Considers the Vision as Cornelius' Three Servants Arrive v17,18

- a. 17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. 18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.
- b. Wondered = to be entirely at loss, to be in perplexity
 - i. Peter is perplexed, entirely at a loss over the meaning of the vision. He knows the vision's content, but he doesn't understand its meaning in his life yet.
- c. While Peter is still swimming in his befuddlement, the three servants of Cornelius arrive at the tanner's house, serving as an immediate key to help Peter decipher his vision.
 - i. "and by their errand it will appear what was the meaning of this vision. Note, God knows what services are before us, and therefore how to prepare us; and we then better know the meaning of what he has taught us when we find what occasion we have to make use of it."¹²

VI. Peter Considers the Vision & the Spirit Bids him Go with the Men v19,20

- a. 19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."
- b. With the three servants waiting below, Peter continues to deliberate, to ponder the vision, seeking its meaning. The Holy Spirit answers Peter's holy meditation very clearly, showing Peter the immediate application of the vision:
 - i. Go with the three servants of Cornelius
 - ii. Doubting nothing
 1. Doubting = discerning = to separate, make a distinction, discriminate, to prefer; to withdraw from one, desert
 2. "The expression is usually translated as "without hesitation" in the sense of "without entertaining doubts." While this somewhat trivial meaning is not impossible, it is not likely in the context of the vision. As Peter has just been directed by the heavenly voice three times not to treat pure animals differently from impure animals but slaughter and eat animals that only profane Gentiles eat (vv. 12–15), he is now directed by the Spirit not to make a distinction that he would normally make between pure Jews and morally impure and profane Gentiles. The distinction between the sacred and the profane and between the impure and the pure was one of the fundamental tasks of the priests and thus of Israel.²³²⁷ The Spirit helps Peter make the interpretive move from

¹² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2107.

the animals in the vision to the people that he is to visit, viz. Gentiles.”¹³

iii. The Lord has sent these men to Peter.

1. As the vision was brought down from heaven to Peter’s mind’s eye three times by the Lord, so now these three men arrive at Peter’s door, before his very eyes.

VII. Peter Obeys the Spirit v21-23

- a. 21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.
- b. Peter knows the men are from the Lord, and he knows he is to go with the men, but he doesn’t yet know why they are seeking him to go with them. His question is reasonable, not any expression of doubt or resistance to the Lord.
- c. Again, Luke gives us a commendation of the Gentile, Cornelius, who was “divinely instructed by a holy angel”. In this setting, it shows how God is cleansing a “common” Gentile, and so Peter should not call Cornelius or his household unclean. Peter would surely be remembering the Spirit’s Words: “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”
- d. Demonstrating that he is no longer making old covenant distinctions between Jew and Gentile, Peter invites the men in and lodges them, which surely would have meant eating with them.
 - i. “Peter hosts them overnight before the trip back the next day. Already the idea of fellowship is implied. This would not be viewed as containing as much risk of uncleanness as a Jew going to a Gentile home, but it is still a significant step. It probably would be regarded as risking potential exposure to uncleanness by the more scrupulous observers of law.”¹⁴
- e. Peter fully obeys the Lord and goes with the men back to Caesarea to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to Cornelius, and some brothers from Joppa go with Peter.
 - i. What great joy! Think of it. The Lord has done such great things to arrange for Peter the priceless opportunity to preach the Gospel to hungry, hungry souls. Oh, Lord, we beseech Thee, bless us with this same wonderful gift!

¹³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 10:19–20.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 392.