

# *The Parish of Wellow*

## 'Be Daring and Dynamic' 24 Studies in Acts Acts 10:9-20 & 29-35 & 44-48 – Peter's Prejudices Purged Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

### **1. Talk Passage**

#### **Acts 10:9-20 & 29-35 & 44-48**

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.

13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.

18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you.

20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

29 May I ask why you sent for me?"

30 Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me

31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.'

33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism

35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,

47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

### **2. Talk Notes**

#### **2.1 Introduction – Prejudices**

- All of us if we are honest have our own set of prejudices. Our own set of views about those around us.
- Often these prejudices are so deep seated that it is difficult for us to change our views.
- Just like us the apostle Peter and his fellow Jews have their own set of prejudices conditioned by their upbringing and by their cultural setting.
- Peter and his fellow Jews too are going to find it difficult to change these prejudices especially when it comes to the gentiles and those who do share their Jewish faith.
- Chapter 10 is pivotal in the Book of Acts, because it records the salvation of the Gentiles.
- We see Peter using "the keys of the kingdom" for the third and last time. He has opened the door of faith for the Jews (Acts 2) and also for the Samaritans (Acts 8), and now God uses him to bring the Gentiles into the church.
- God challenges Peter's prejudices in three ways firstly
  - i. through a vision
  - ii. through a personal encounter with Cornelius
  - iii. By turning up himself in the person of the Holy Spirit.

## 2.2 God challenges Peter's prejudices through a vision – Acts 10:9-20

- The distinction between "clean and unclean foods" was a major problem between the Jews and the Gentiles at that time.
- God uses a centuries-old regulation found in Leviticus chapter 11 to teach Peter and his fellow Jews an important spiritual lesson. God was not simply changing their diet; He was changing their entire program!
- God was saying through this vital vision that the Jew was not "clean" and the Gentile "unclean," but both Jew and Gentile were "unclean" before God! "
- Both Jew and Gentile are in the same position, both are sinners, both are in need of salvation or rescue.
- God was also making clear through this vision that a Gentile did not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.
- All of this would have been mind blowing to Peter.

## 2.3 God challenges Peter's prejudices through a personal encounter with Cornelius – Acts 10:29-35

- Cornelius is a gentile and a Roman centurion, whose heart has clearly tired of pagan myths and empty religious rituals, and who has turned to Judaism in the hopes that he can find salvation.
- Cornelius is as close to Judaism as he can get without being able to become a true Jew.
- In every way, Cornelius is a model of religious respectability—and yet he was not a saved man.
- The difference between Cornelius and many religious people today is this: Cornelius knows that his religious devotion is not sufficient to save him. Many religious people today are satisfied that their character and their good works will get them to heaven, and they have no concept either of their own sin or of God's abundant grace.
- God hears Cornelius' prayers. God hears this gentile man crying out to him that he is a sinner and that he needs God to save him.
- As Peter hears Cornelius' story he too is blown away by the fact that God has clearly spoken to this gentile as well.
- Peter finally puts his prejudices to one side and says some of the most crucial words ever written in the Bible verses 34 and 35 *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."*
- Ten years after the Day of Pentecost God's salvation is now available to all: to Jew, to Samaritan and finally to Gentile. God's rescue plan is now complete.

## 2.4 God challenges Peter's prejudices by turning up himself in the person of the Holy Spirit – Acts 10:44-48

- God interrupts Peter whilst he is in full flow and pitches up himself to endorse everything that Peter has done and said.
- Peter realises that something exceptional is going on and says *"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."* So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- With this event, the period of transition in the early history of the church comes to an end. Believers among the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles have all now received the Holy Spirit and are united in the body of Christ.
- Interestingly Cornelius, his relatives and close friends are not saved by being baptized; they were baptized because they gave evidence of being saved. This is an important distinction that we forget to our peril.
- The experience of Cornelius and his household makes it very clear that baptism is not essential for salvation. From now on, the order will be: hear the Word of God, believe on what Jesus has done at the cross, receive the Holy Spirit, and then be baptized and unite with other believers in the church to serve and worship God.

## 2.5 Our Prejudices

- Is God challenging our prejudices in our politically correct society of today?
  - i. Do we believe that being religious will get us to heaven?
  - ii. Do we think that just because we are baptised we are guaranteed a ticket to heaven?
  - iii. Do we believe that by being good we can earn our way there?
  - iv. Do we think that because we live in a Christian society we will make it to heaven?
  - v. Do we think that God will save all people: Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus irrespective of what they believe or do?
- Or do we believe like Cornelius that we are all sinners in need of salvation and that only one person can offer us a solution to our problem and that is Jesus because of who is his and what he has done on the cross?

## **3. Questions to consider at Home**

- 3.1 What are some of the prejudices we as a society have, we as a church have, and we as individuals have?
- 3.2 If both Jew and Gentiles are "unclean" before God, does this mean that the Jews are no longer God's chosen people?
- 3.3 God appears to tare up the Old Testament Food laws in Peter's vision; does this mean all Old Testament law is now redundant?
- 3.4 If Cornelius is a model of religious respectability what is it that Peter has to offer him?
- 3.5 A mum says to you that she hopes to have her baby baptised as soon as possible. That way if anything happens to the baby she knows it will go to heaven. Would you agree?