

1/10/16

Acts 10:9-23

## Gospel People

*The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. <sup>10</sup> And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." <sup>15</sup> And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. <sup>17</sup> Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate <sup>18</sup> and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. <sup>19</sup> And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." <sup>21</sup> And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" <sup>22</sup> And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." <sup>23</sup> So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Yesterday I spent most of the morning finishing, *We Cannot Be Silent*, a book by Al Mohler, and I would recommend it to you.

In this book, Dr. Mohler outlines how the moral revolution (*de-volution*) has worked like gangrene in the ethical fabric of our country and its churches, especially with regard to marriage between a man and a woman.

He likens the rapid change to a tsunami of gender confusion that has crashed into the collective conscience of a nation, leaving rivers of confusion in the wake. He describes in factual terms the world you and I live in, and when he speaks of the church, he says

that “the church is now tempted more than ever before in recent history to accommodate to the new morality”; and the way I see it we have one of three options:

1. We could go theologically soft (main line) and accommodate ourselves to the new morality affirming every changing wind of doctrine.
2. We could just ignore the issues altogether and do what many soft-core prosperity churches are doing, and that is preach a moralistic, therapeutic deism that says the main goal in life is to be "happy" and God has set it up so the "good" people go to Heaven (which is of course not Biblical Christianity in anybody's book). Or
3. We can decide not to be silent and be people of the truth even when it is not popular or maybe even costly to our social standing.

The third option – that's what Peter does in the text.

We've dropped right into the middle of a story already in progress. Lets set the stage: A man named Cornelius who is not Jewish and not Christian but is a good guy and believes in God, has a vision to go and find a man named Peter who is staying at Simon's house by the sea. We pick up the story with Peter, a devout Jewish man who is now a follower of Christ. In fact, he is an Apostle. And now Peter is having a vision and his vision is going to stretch him and pull him. It's going to disturb and require him to open his eyes to live as a Gospel-centered man in a bigoted world of betrayal and prejudice; and we will see how God uses Gospel-centered people to reach a hard and unholy world.

Alexander McClaren said, “God put his right hand on Peter and his left hand on Cornelius and brought the two together.” And this year, that's what I want God to do with me. Don't you want to be useful for the Gospel?

## **Gospel People Are Useful People**

### **Useful People Are Prayerful**

Notice when we dropped into the story in v. 9, the focus is off Cornelius and now on Peter. *The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour<sup>[a]</sup> to pray.*

The sixth hour is noon – the middle of the day – and the rooftop was private. He could be alone and talk to God. And at this point in Peter's life there was plenty to talk about. The leadership of the church was changing, the issues were growing and the pressures were mounting. He's like many of you. His plate was full. Just like yours. Bills and work and relationships and children, not to mention your own personal hang-ups.

So Peter is on the roof with the weight of the world on his shoulders and when you read the story, God doesn't address any of these issues. Let me just interject here and say: don't get so busy and concerned and self-absorbed that you miss the opportunity to be used by God.

With all that's going on in Peter's life, he took the time to hear God. Isn't that what your devotional life is supposed to be about? Reading His word and praying so that you can be in a

position to receive His message? And I don't mean waiting on a "feeling." I mean God's word speaking to your heart to make you useful for His kingdom.

In this very room there is enough willpower, leadership, and talent. There are enough resources and time for us to win the community for Christ. God uses prayerful people. Charles Spurgeon said that "neglected prayer is the birthplace of evil." And let me add that neglected prayer is the *graveyard* of usefulness. In God's economy, *useful* people are not *busy* people. Useful people are *prayerful* people.

I have three suggestions:

1. Get up 30 minutes early
2. Pray the Psalms
3. Keep a list.

These things will help you learn to pray. Gospel people are useful people and useful people learn to pray.

## **Useful People Are Teachable**

If you know anything about Peter, the Gospels present him as a little impetuous and maybe a little hard-headed. Now God can use people who are a little hard-headed but seldom uses people who aren't teachable.

Now from v. 10 down to v. 16 we have a description of the vision God gives him. Let's read it with some comments, then I want to point out a few things:

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

So a couple of things worth noting:

1. God is Sovereign in all things – no "buts". Earlier I mentioned what Alexander McClaren said about God putting his right hand on Peter and his left on Cornelius and bringing them together. Notice how perfectly God orchestrated the events for these two men to meet.

A. While Peter was praying and seeing a vision, the men from Cornelius were approaching where Peter was staying.

B. While Peter was perplexed at the meaning of the vision they arrived at his house.

C. While he was thinking about it the Spirit told him to go with them.

God takes the initiative and overcoming our prejudices and he does it through the power of the Gospel. And that victory is won at the cross of Jesus.

There is something else in the story that speaks to Peter's *teachability*. It's actually found back in Cornelius's vision in v. 5-6. *And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.*" Peter is staying with a tanner, by the sea. A tanner is someone who tans animals' hides and therefore deals with animal carcasses. A devout Jew would see him as unclean. In fact that's why Simon the tanner is living by the sea, because he is not allowed to live in town. His profession has made him unclean and yet Peter has agreed to stay with him.

The Gospel was already working on Peter and his barriers. That's really the lesson of the vision he has and hears when God says in v. 15-16 *And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."*<sup>16</sup> *This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.*

I've always found it interesting that this happened three times. Three is a pattern Peter would be familiar with:

1. Jesus prayed in the Garden three times
2. Three crosses on Calvary at Golgotha
3. Jesus was 3 days in the grave
4. Peter had denied Jesus three times
5. The resurrected Jesus restored Peter three times and now with the same monumental feel, God is commanding Peter to finish the barrier-breaking and take the Gospel to the to the Nations because God created the different races and nations. And God's desire, His revealed will, is for people from all ethnicities to gather around the throne in worship.

In fact, when John had a vision of Heaven in Revelation 5, he tells us the elders sang a new song to Christ:

*"Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,*

That is God's revealed will and He accomplishes it through His people. You and I bring the Gospel to bear on every part of our pride and arrogance, crucifying prejudice and busyness and materialism and distractions, bringing the cross to shadow over social media, (Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Snapchat), having the cross reach into our lives to make us useful.

God uses Prayerful people. God uses Teachable people. Are you teachable? Let's see if you are.

Here's the first lesson of Christianity. Four parts:

- God is a Holy and Loving Creator
- Man is created in the image of God, but that image is disfigured by sin.
- Christ is all-God and all-Man. He lived perfectly and died as our sin-bearer, our substitute.
- God raised him from the dead.

Our response is to believe which includes turning *from* sin and turning *to* Christ.

*(Pastor Prays)*