

ACTS

Part 28 – “Clean”

Acts 10:9-23a

God has set things in motion by directing Cornelius to seek out the apostle Peter (10:1-8). God now grants Peter a revelatory dream or vision in order to prepare him for something extraordinary. What is described in this text represents one of the most significant moments in redemptive history. God reveals to Peter that the ceremonial holiness codes (represented here by the dietary laws) have been finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is the substance of those shadows. The dietary laws (and other ceremonial holiness codes) found in Leviticus were intended to teach God's people about God's holiness and His demand that His people be holy as well. And just as there is now no longer any “unclean” foods so too are there no longer any unclean people. Through the vision God was announcing that the Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean. The gospel must go to all the nations for no people are untouchable.

Main Idea: Jesus cleanses those who have been defiled by sin.

1. God's Shocking Command

Vv. 9-16

- **Vs.9** Many Jews followed a custom of prayer three times a day, as Daniel had (6:10). Here the apostle Peter follows that pattern. Such structured patterns of prayer probably yield more time in prayer.
- **Vs.12** These are the three kinds of animals familiar from the OT law. Many of them were apparently unclean animals, perhaps all of them were.
- As Cornelius' servants were seeking out Peter they came near Joppa and began inquiring to his whereabouts. Meanwhile Peter went to the roof of the house where he was staying and fell into a trance. We are to understand that this trance was brought about by God for the purpose of granting Peter a vision.
- The vision consisted of something like a large sheet lowered by its four corners holding all manner of animal life. Since the time of Noah's ark and codified in the Levitical law God drew a strong distinction between clean and unclean animals in order to help distinguish his people from the pagan nations.
- **Vs.15** In Mark 7 Jesus' disciples were eating a meal without having observed the ceremonial washing of hands that preceded the meal. This was, by the way, a Jewish tradition; it is never required in the Law of Moses. In his reply Jesus made a point of saying that it isn't what enters a man that makes him unclean but what comes out of him. And then Mark, for the sake of his Gentile readers, adds the application: "In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean." However, it does not appear that Jesus himself abolished those practices during his ministry. That came later, especially here in Peter's vision.
- **Vs.16** Peter needed to be made ready for the next great leap forward in the progress of the kingdom of God into the whole world. Jews did not enter Gentile homes (again, this was



Jewish tradition, a tradition that was neither taught nor suggested in the OT Law). The vision had specifically to do with food, but Peter did not miss the point that what was being addressed was an issue far more sweeping than what food one could eat. He tells us this himself in vv. 28-29. The vision had more to do with people than with food, but food was a particularly clear way to make the point because Jews saw their food laws as one of the ways in which separation from Gentiles was effected and their distinction from Gentiles manifested.

- God was announcing that all those who had once been considered untouchable were now clean. That is not to say that the Gentiles, or anyone else for that matter, were no longer sinners. It meant that God's people must no longer consider anyone unclean or beyond being fully welcomed into the people of God.

2. Peter's Confused Resistance

Vv. 14-16

- In a way it is understandable why Peter resists the Lord's command. After all, to be Jewish meant, in part, to abide by the dietary laws. And now the Lord was rescinding thousands of years of regulations. However, it is important to note that Peter says "no" to the Lord at least four times in this event. While not the central point of the text, it is worth pondering the incongruity of saying "No, Lord."
- Either we can say "no" or "Lord" but we cannot say "No, Lord."
- And yet the Lord used Peter's resistance to drive home His own message: when God cleanses the unclean no man can contradict the Lord's grace.

3. Jesus' Radical Grace

Vv. 19-23

- **Vs. 20** The vision is immediately confirmed the events sovereignly orchestrated by God.
- **v.22** These Gentiles understood the difficulty a Jew would have in acceding to their request so they gave their message in a form most calculated to produce a "yes" from Peter.
- **v.23** In fact there were six other men, as Peter says in 11:12, and they will serve in an important role as witnesses.
- The servants of Cornelius (as well as Cornelius and his family) were going to be the interpretive key for understanding the vision. Peter welcomes into his home those now considered clean. And in the next passage we will see the ultimate proof of this new status.

Theology in Application:

1. God's revelation calls for obedience.

As God revealed more of His gracious purposes for the nations He expected Peter to respond obediently.

2. God is impartial.

God's blessing of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ will be granted to men and women from among all the peoples of the earth. No nation or ethnicity enjoys a special status before God.