

Peter: Building Christ's Church
WELCOMING THE OUTCAST

Friday, October 30

Reading: Acts 9-10

Acts 10:11 *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 and birds. 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."*

After several years away, Saul of Tarsus, the great persecutor of the church, returns to Jerusalem claiming to be a changed man. However, the believers don't buy it! It seemed like a trap to arrest more followers of Jesus. However, Barnabas listens to Saul and sees Christ really has changed him. He brings Saul to the apostles (and especially Peter - Gal. 1:18-19). This acceptance by Barnabas led to the acceptance of Saul by the church and the beginning of a missionary career that would change the world.

Peter's opinions have to be corrected when it comes to outsiders. After some time ministering and travelling around the country healing and preaching, Peter receives a call to share his faith with the Gentile household of a Roman centurion! Entering a Gentile home would make him unclean according to Jewish regulations. But Peter has been instructed by God in a vision to "not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Peter shocks the other Jewish believers by not only entering a Gentile home but freely sharing the gospel with them and staying for several days. The Holy Spirit shocks them all by baptizing these Gentiles with the Holy Spirit before Peter can even finish his message! This event clearly showed the church that the gospel was available to all people, a fact that would take another decade or so for the Jewish believers to fully embrace.

This was a pivotal event for the early church. For centuries the Jews had shunned Gentiles and treated them as outcasts. Now God was showing that Gentiles were as welcome in His church as Jews. The ground was now set for the first Gentile mission to begin.

LESSON ONE: Have you ever known someone like Saul of Tarsus? His change was so dramatic that it was hard to believe it was real! How would you treat a person who changed so drastically? Would you be accepting like Barnabas and help them connect with the church? How might we be better at welcoming new believers into our church fellowship?

LESSON TWO: Does prejudice still exist in the church today? How do we treat people differently based on race, dress, or social status? What would Christ say about the way we treat others who do not look like us?

LESSON THREE: Who might be considered an "outcast" by some people today? What can we do to reach out to them with Christ's love? What part might God be calling you to play in His concern for the outcasts of our world today?