

A Divine Appointment

Acts 10:9-23

As Moses led the people of God out of Egyptian captivity, the Lord began to form in them a new nation. A People who would be His people and be His representative to all the other nations of the world. He gave them specific and detailed instructions. These instructions were a part of making them a peculiar people, to separate them from every other nation on the earth. These instructions dealt with every area of their lives: their system of worship, their home life, physical hygiene, and their physical relationships, even their clothes and their diet.

Every good and honorable Jew worked very hard at not breaking any of these rules, even to the point that their religious leaders had actually added to these rules so they could have a built in safety cushion, making sure they didn't even come close to breaking the Law of God. Some of them seem to be a bit humorous –

According to the *Shulchan Aruch* (the Code of Jewish Law), every step of a Jew's life, from the moment he wakes up until he falls asleep has special order and directions. There is a special order to how to put your shoes on. You put your right shoe on and then your left shoe, then you tie your left shoe before tying the right one.

In order to honor the Sabbath Day and keep it holy, according to tradition, Jews shouldn't write, erase, tear paper, shop, drive, talk on the phone, turn on a television or anything else using electricity, do laundry, cook, clean, or conduct any business transactions.

You can never have milk or even milk products if you are eating meat. This includes no cheese on your hamburger (Ex. 23:19, Ex. 34:26, Deut. 14:21 “*You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.*”).

Now these are some of the additional laws that the Jewish leaders have added to God's Law. But, you do need to realize that God's Law – the Laws we get from Exodus,

Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the Laws God gave to the Jewish people themselves were still very restrictive in many ways.

As a matter of fact, in that passage in Deuteronomy 14, as well as Leviticus 11 there are a tremendous amount of rules about your diet. I won't read them all this morning, but to give you a **small** sample, in Leviticus 11 we read –

¹ Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'These are the animals which you may eat... ³ Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud-that you may eat. ⁴ Nevertheless these you shall not eat... the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; ⁵ the coney or rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; ⁶ (and so is) the hare or rabbit..., it's unclean to you; ⁷ (oh yeah), and the swine or pig..., though it divides the hoof, it does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. ⁸ Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you.

⁹ '...whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers-that you may eat. ¹⁰ But all in the seas or in the rivers if it doesn't have fins and scales they are an abomination to you.

¹³ 'And as far as birds; the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, ¹⁴ the kite, and the falcon, ¹⁵ every raven, ¹⁶ 'the ostrich, pretty much owls of every kind, the sea gull, and the hawk; ¹⁸ '...the jackdaw, ¹⁹ ...the stork, the heron, and the bat – don't eat any of those at all.

*²⁰ 'As far as flying insects... ²¹ ...**these you may eat...** ²² the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. ²³ 'But all other flying insects which have four feet shall be an abomination to you.*

²⁴ 'By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; ²⁵ whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening: ²⁶ The carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean.

²⁹ '(Oh yeah, don't forget) the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard, ³⁰ the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the

chameleon. ³¹ *'These are unclean to you... Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening.* ³² *And if their dead carcass falls on (well, pretty much just about anything), it will be unclean... (it either has to be cleaned with water or broken to never be used again).*

⁴² *'Whatever crawls on its belly, whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has **many feet among all creeping things that creep** on the earth-these you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.* ⁴³ *You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them.* ⁴⁴ *(Don't) 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.*

And that's just a small sample. But this is the area we will be looking at today. This is the area that Simon Peter is going to be tested on.

We are actually in the book of Acts this morning, in chapter 10. Last week we spent a good deal of time on the Gentile Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius. The man that Luke tells us here in Acts 10:2 was...

"...a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always."

Yet, he was not a proselyte to Judaism, nor was he a convert to Christianity – at least not yet. He was simply *a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.*

And God paid attention to his devotion. This was something that a Jew could not fathom... and even for the Jew who had become a Christian, it was hard to understand. So, God had to give an **object lesson**.

God is good at giving object lessons.

God is going to take Simon Peter to school... again!

If you're not there yet, turn with me to Acts 10 as we begin in verse 9. As we looked last week, God had already sent an angel to tell Cornelius that God was pleased with him.

The angel also instructed Cornelius to send some folks down to Joppa to find Peter, so he will come and *tell you what you must do.*" So now we are at Acts 10:9...

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.

Before we go further, let me set the scene for you.

Peter had felt led by the Holy Spirit to move around *all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.* Lydda was a small town on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Joppa. Joppa being a port city of Judah on the Mediterranean coastline. It was here that he healed a man by the name of Aeneas, *bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.*

It was about this time, 11 miles away, over in Joppa that a woman by the name of Tabitha (aka Dorcas) became sick and died. The disciples there in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, so they went to get him and brought him to Joppa. He prays over Tabitha and she is raised from the dead. An amazing miracle of God...

⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. ⁴³ So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

So, one day around noon, while he's at Simon's house, waiting for his falafel sandwich to be prepared, he's up on the rooftop praying. While he's waiting for lunch and during his prayer, *he fell into a trance 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."

Now you need to understand that Luke doesn't tell us that these are unclean *animals, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.* But, we see from Peter's response that they most probably were at least some of those creatures that were determined to be unclean by the Levitical Law.

¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

Like any good Jew of his time, Peter knew what was clean and what was not clean. God's Word was very clear on these things. He had been trained since childhood. As a fisherman, he knew which fish were clean, thus able to sell to the Jewish community and which ones were unclean and should be thrown back into the sea. Peter was definitely not ignorant of these things.

His response was very... shall we say *Logical*. **But the problem is, sometimes our God does not move in human logical ways!!**

In his refusal to obey what the Lord was telling him to do, God spoke to him again.

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 don't know if you remember or not but Peter **always seemed to have this habit of having a better plan that God...** anyone else ever have that problem??

Back in Matthew 16 when Jesus was telling the disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and **suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be arrested and crucified.** Well, it was our man Simon Peter who took Jesus aside privately...

²² ...and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" ²³ But Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

In the Upper Room on the night Jesus was betrayed, John tells us in his Gospel account that Jesus began to wash the disciple's feet – giving them an object lesson on servanthood. But, ol' Peter himself balked at that idea...

John 13

⁸ Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Then Peter, instead of being quiet, **decided he still had a better plan,** "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!*"

It was Peter who makes the brag, *"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"* Yet, he was the very one cursing and swearing as he denied even knowing the Lord. He was the one who determined to do it his way instead of the Lord's way, **as he swung his sword** and took of the High Priest's servant's ear there as they arrested Jesus.

It just seems he always had a better plan than the Lord. Sad isn't it, some guys just never learn... **do we?**

I mean I look at some of these things and I wonder, Lord... Really? You're still going to use a guy like that?

That's when I hear the Father's kind and merciful words come to me, as He says, ***"I'm still using YOU, aren't I?"***

Okay, let's move on...

¹⁵ And a voice spoke to (Peter) 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.

There's a lot of discussion as to why Peter received this vision three times. I feel it was probably a reminder of his denial, a very clear reminder that his plans are not God's plans and his ways are not God's ways. I believe that it was simply **one more of God's gentle lessons** to this man whom He loved so much.

God wanted to use Peter for the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. God loved Peter so much, He wanted to give him a chance to succeed in life and ministry. So, God would continue to give Peter these gentle reminders to submit and trust the Holy Spirit.

It's no wonder that later, as Peter continues to mature in his faith and obedience to the wooing of the Holy Spirit that he writes to the Church –

1 Peter 1

³ *(It's God's) abundant mercy which has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Peter finally grows to the understanding that it's not his plans. Peter knew it wasn't his power. **It is, was and always will be** *the power of God through faith.*

That's why as he writes in his letter, he is reminded of the words of Isaiah the Prophet and so he reminds us –

1 Peter 1

²⁴ *"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, ²⁵ but the word of the LORD endures forever."*

But here on Simon the Tanner's roof, while he was still wondering what the lesson was that God was trying to teach him, the men from the home of Cornelius, the Centurion from Caesarea arrived at the front gate...

Acts 10

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."*

Even before the word came up from downstairs, the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter about the three men waiting for him. God was working in and through all things to make His will and plan known, both to Peter and to these three men. The Holy Spirit clearly told Peter...

²⁰ *Arise therefore, go down and go with them, **doubting nothing**; for I have sent them.*

Funny, but **we don't see Peter argue with God any more after this.** It would appear that maybe, just maybe God is finally getting through to this stubborn fisherman.

Ac 10

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.*

When God had told Peter, *"Arise therefore, go down and go with them, **doubting nothing**; for I have sent them."*

That whole emphasis on ***doubting nothing*** is going to be the hallmark of God's next miracle work. These men were probably still standing outside the gate. Although Simon the Tanner had a job that as a Jew, would make him regularly unclean, he was doing this as his occupation. But inviting these men, who undoubtedly were recognized as Gentiles and thus unclean, to invite them into his house would have been a major step. But Peter came down to them to hear their story – two Gentile household servants, and one Gentile Roman soldier...

*"...**doubting nothing**"* is what the Lord had told him.

"Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God... A Gentile, a Roman soldier... and he is a just man, one who fears God."

*"...**doubting nothing**; for I have sent them"*

And, this common Gentile, this despised Roman soldier... *has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews."*

"What God has cleansed you must not call common."

On top of that, an angel of the Lord had spoken to him, and he, Cornelius, *"was divinely instructed by the holy angel to summon you Peter to his house, and to hear words from you."*

I feel it is at this point that Peter is at a loss for words. Suddenly the vision of the sheet with the creepy bugs was making sense. The message of God was coming clear as he stood before these men and heard their story. How could he doubt at this point? He might not have understood everything at this point, but I believe the Holy Spirit was giving him assurance that Peter wasn't the one in control at this point... God had a divine appointment. Peter simply needed to be found obedient.

²³ Then (Peter) invited (these Gentile men and this Roman soldier) in and lodged them.

Can you imagine the conversations that night? Half-way questioning, half-way amazed by what God was and had been doing in Cornelius's household. Peter's eyes are going to be opened in a powerful way and it will change things for him, for these men and for the Church.

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

We're going to stop there today and pick-up this exciting chapter in the history of the Church next week.

But before we close there are a couple of things I would like for you to take away from what we've seen this morning.

Cornelius was a man of faith, a praying man, a good man and a generous man. **But, he was also a lost man.**

It would not have been sufficient for Cornelius on the Day of Judgment to speak of his good merits, his devotion, and his generosity. Cornelius was a man who was **ready for, and needed to hear the Gospel.**

How absolutely ignorant we are of the scriptures when we say that a man of devotion and generosity, a man who is good to his fellow man is a man who has salvation and eternal life in the presence of Almighty God. God's Word will not allow us to have that wrong doctrine.

We see time and again throughout the Word of God where "good men" are still required to have faith in Christ.

Nicodemus, the **rich young ruler**, even **Saul of Tarsus**, righteous men in their own right or understanding, yet each were called to take that **full step of faith and trust in Christ**.

We do men **eternal damage** when we let them be satisfied with a **piety which does not include faith in Jesus Christ**. Jesus Christ, as the only and full sacrifice for their sins.

**Cornelius was a good man,
but he was a lost man
outside of Christ.**

Secondly, Peter had to get over a prejudice that was much more than **a Religious Law**. We are going to find shortly that he and other Jewish Christians had a really difficult and personal struggle in believing that Gentiles could actually become the recipients of God's forgiveness directly through faith in Christ alone, without jumping over religious barricades to faith.

God was beginning to move in a way that Peter wasn't familiar with..., a way that he wasn't comfortable with.

Do you have built-in prejudices from past experiences, family history, or unfortunate cultural encounters?

Do you fully believe that the blood of Christ cleanses ALL who come to Him in faith, from ALL unrighteousness?

Do you fully understand that the love of God extends to every tribe tongue and nation?

Or, do you limit the love and forgiveness of God, not realizing that God calls all men everywhere to repentance?

Lastly, in the words of Warren Wiersbe,

"Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and as such will find the seeking sinner (Jer. 29:13). Wherever there is a searching heart, God responds. This is why it is essential that we as God's children obey His will and share His

Word. You never know when your witness for Christ is exactly what somebody has been waiting and praying for.”¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 446.