

## WEEKEND Edition 16/17 July 2022 "A Sheet Vision?" (Acts 10:9-23)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends on this mid-July weekend,

*When was the last time someone extended an invitation to you that simply overwhelmed you or maybe confused you thinking surely the invite was intended for someone else?* Or perhaps, the invitation frightened you as you contemplated what you were being invited to?

Let's rejoin the apostle Peter in Joppa, as he's been spending a few days visiting the Jesus followers in this seaside town. *What Peter doesn't know, of course, is that he is about to be invited into one of the most significant events of his life!* We find it in Acts 10 in the Bible. Yesterday I left you watching three men nearing Joppa, having traveled from Caesarea. They were on a mission, sent by Centurion Cornelius, Commander of the Italian Regiment, a special group of soldiers in Caesarea. No, these men were not on official Roman government business, nor were they sent to arrest Peter for wrongdoing. Centurion Cornelius was also a devout worshiper of God and two days ago he had an angelic visitation which we looked at yesterday. While no explanation was given to Cornelius by the angel as to WHY he should send this delegation to Joppa to bring Peter back to meet with him, Cornelius did as he was told and was simply waiting and praying, hoping to have clarity by the time Peter arrived.

The record says: ***"About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city of Joppa, Peter went up on the roof of the house where he was staying, to pray."*** (Acts 10:9) Perhaps you are wondering why Peter didn't just pray inside, especially in the heat of the day? I don't know for sure but remember he's staying with "Simon the Tanner whose house is by the sea." From that rooftop, I imagine Peter has a beautiful view of the Joppa harbor, the ships, the waves, all the activity of a busy seaport. While Peter perhaps thought he would enjoy praying with such a beautiful view, I think the Holy Spirit guided Peter there so his heart and mind would be thinking about our big world and what Jesus was doing as He directed these apostles, from His throne room in heaven, in taking His message to the world.

***"Peter became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. Peter saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told Peter, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat.'***

***Peter replied to the voice, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'***

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

***This happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven."***  
(Acts 10:10-16)

Now my 'Walking with Jesus' friends, when you read something like that, how does your heart and mind respond? I'm sure you have had dreams, as I have, that seem so real that when you wake up from the dream it takes a little while to figure out that you are no longer actually living in that dream, right? I'm thinking it was something like that for Peter with this 'vision' in the middle of the day. *As the vision ends for him, and he continues to look out over the Joppa harbor, Peter struggles both to reorient himself back to reality and also try to figure out what the vision meant?!* Peter was evidently a good Jewish man, who had been very self-disciplined in trying his best to obey all the commands and laws of the Old Testament, even those which very clearly described what Jewish people should NOT eat. Those dietary instructions had been given by God to Moses and recorded in Leviticus 11, nearly 1400 years before when they were at Mount Sinai. Peter had been taught by his parents, from his early boyhood, what foods to stay away from as good Jewish man. So when Peter answered his vision with a confident **"Surely not Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean"** I'm sure Peter felt very good about his diligence and determination to not defile himself by what he ate or drank, very much like Daniel, remember his Old Testament story?

The record says: ***'While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found Simon the tanner's house and stopped at the gate. They called out asking if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there...the Holy Spirit said to Peter, 'Simon, three men are looking for you... Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them to you.'*** (Acts 10:17-20) Now my friends, I wonder what you think as we read these early chapters of Acts and people are having visions and visits from angels and receiving very clear instructions from the Holy Spirit? What is your explanation? Do you doubt the accuracy of what is recorded in Acts, or do you conclude God worked in different ways back in those days? May I give you two thoughts to ponder?

First, the apostles, the deacons and many Jews, both men and women in the first century were, by our modern religious standards, VERY devout! These men had as boys, all studied daily with the Rabbi of their hometown Synagogue, until they were old enough to pursue a vocational trade. They all, both men and women, knew very well the history of their Hebrew ancestors and God's involvement in Israel all the way back to Abraham. They faithfully honored the Sabbath every week, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, taking great care to keep the Sabbath a holy day in all ways. And they attended Synagogue on Sabbath, no matter where they were, unless they were deathly ill. They all prayed multiple times per day, and if they were in Jerusalem, they prayed in the Temple courts area if possible. With that level of religious fervor, they were much more attuned to spiritual events than most people are today.

But also, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Jesus movement in the first generations of Christians was THE distinguishing element in their spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit helped people understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and led them to recognize their need for a Savior.

In response to their repentance, the Holy Spirit birthed in them a new spiritual nature. They were 'born again'! The Holy Spirit filled and empowered them in the face of persecution which was sometimes brutal. The Holy Spirit drew them together in the first "Church" as Jesus had promised. *The Holy Spirit was doing miracles, signs and wonders through the apostles and deacons and others, as validation that this movement was a work of God not simply an emotional movement nor some type of cult.*

So, friends, let me ask you. If God were to give you a vision or an angelic visitation or very strong and specific guidance from the Holy Spirit, would you recognize what was happening as an encounter with God? How would you respond? Is your relationship with God mature enough, authentic enough that God can speak to you, and you understand what God is saying and you obey Him? So, let's look at what Peter did as he received this very clear instruction from the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:21 says **"Peter went down from the rooftop and said to the three men, 'I'm Simon Peter, the one you are looking for. Who are you and why have you come?'"** **The men replied, 'We have come from Cornelius the centurion in Caesarea. He is a righteous and God-fearing man who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told Cornelius to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.'** (Acts 10:21,22) Now instantly Peter has a big problem! Cornelius is obviously a Gentile! God honoring Jewish men had as little to do with Gentiles as possible, and the very last place Peter, as a God-fearing Jew, would go is to a Gentile home. I'm sure Peter thought, *'I can hardly imagine a Roman Centurion being a true worshipper of our God...'* *But in Peter's mind two things were exploding.* The vision of the sheet with animals and the voice from heaven, which he experienced on the rooftop, and then very clear words of the Holy Spirit spoken to Peter: **"Do not hesitate to go with them for I have sent them to you."**

Look at Peter, rubbing his chin, looking intently at these men, one of whom was a soldier. I don't know if Simon the tanner was home at the time, or if he had any family or servants at the house but what the record tells us Peter did next is amazing and shows his deep respect for communication from God: **"Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests."** That means they would have been treated to a meal and washing of their dirty feet, and they'd even be given a place to sleep for the night! Hospitality, even to strangers, was a high value among God's people, the Jews, and was a big part of the 'Jesus' movement.'

Can you imagine what that evening was like in Simon the Tanner's house? A tanner, an apostle of Jesus, two servants of Cornelius and a devout soldier! And what do you suppose they talked about that night my friends? I doubt they discussed politics or sports or the latest news from Caesarea. *I'm confident they talked about the God who had brought them together!* And I imagine Peter talked the most, don't you think so? Telling his stories of his many months with Jesus, long into the night. Come on, let's sit with them and just watch and listen.

Are you fascinated with Jesus my friends? *Do you have some personal God stories you love to share when sitting with friends? Stories that explain the power of God and His personal involvement in your life?* I urge you to thank God right now, for all that HE has done in your life, and here's a wonderful song to help you celebrate!

**Today's Scripture is Acts 10:9-23.**