

Theme: As You Are Going: The Church on Mission

Message: The Vision – Acts 10:1-23

Aim: God wants to change our hearts toward the lost.

Intro: I wonder if you recognize the difference between “the” & “*the*?” It’s simply a matter of semantics & emphasis. If I ask you if you heard the news today, I am asking if you listened to a newscast of general news. If I ask if you heard *the* news, I have a specific news item in mind. The English language is strange like that, isn’t it? “Did you watch *the* game today?” has a very different emphasis than simply “Did you watch the game today?” That 1st game was evidently something special to see. “On July 2nd, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence, and two days later delegates from the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence, a historic document drafted by Thomas Jefferson. From 1776 to the present day, July 4th has been celebrated as the birth of American independence.” *The* original 4th of July is celebrated on the 4th of July every year. The difference between “the” & “*the*” is a matter of emphasis & importance. Theme: As you are going: the Church on mission. In today’s text we have an account of 2 visions, 1 “the” vision & “*the*” vision. Acts 10:1-23 [READ] I) **The Vision** which changed Cornelius’ life (& that of his family & friends). There are 2 Caesarea’s in Israel – Caesarea Philippi is to the north, bordering Lebanon & Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. According to Strong’s “it was provided w/a magnificent harbor & had conferred to it the name Caesarea in honor of Augustus (Caesar). (picture) The majority of its inhabitants were Greeks.” There is where we find Cornelius, a Roman soldier & officer, a centurion, in charge of 100 soldiers, of what was known as the Italian Cohort. RCH Lenski wrote: “32 such Italian Cohorts were stationed in the different provinces of the empire. They were made up of Italian volunteers & considered the most loyal Roman troops.” Luke described him as “a devout man who feared God...gave generously to the people & prayed continually to God.” R. Kent Hughes wrote: “As a typical Roman he had been exposed to the Roman gods (Jupiter, Augustus, Mars, Venus, etc.) but found he had been exposed (as well) to the

enlightened concepts of Judaism & had become devoutly monotheistic.” As David Gudzik wrote: He “loved he God of Israel & was sympathetic to & supportive of the Jewish faith, yet he did not become Jewish,” a proselyte. To this Cornelius, God gave a vision which would result in his conversion to faith in Christ. According to Strong’s, a vision is “a sight divinely granted in an ecstasy or in a sleep” – it was out of the ordinary. Cornelius had a vision of an angel of God appearing to him. It was at the 9th hour (3 PM) when he would usually be praying. Thru the angel, God said to him, in essence, “Cornelius, I’ve noticed you & hear your prayers.” It wasn’t that he earned God’s notice but he was a man seeking God, & God’s promise is “You will seek Me & find Me, when you seek Me w/all your heart” (Jer.29:13). In reality, God had been preparing Cornelius’ heart to receive Christ by faith, just as He prepares the hearts of all who believe; but they still need to hear the gospel. “Faith comes by hearing...” (Rom.10:17). God told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter, asking him to come to Caesarea. We’ll see next week the end result of that encounter, which would indeed change Cornelius’ life forever, for eternity. Cornelius immediately sent 2 servants & “a devout soldier” to Joppa to find Peter. Evidently Cornelius’ faith in God was contagious. I wonder how many other soldiers were “devout” as well. II) **The Vision** which changed Christianity. Joppa was about 30 miles from Caesarea, down the coast. The angel told Cornelius that Peter was staying w/one Simon, a tanner (picture of what is supposed to be Simon’s house). The men sent by Cornelius were nearing Joppa when Peter went up on the rooftop of Simon’s house at noontime, to pray, while he was waiting for lunch. We should note that praying is a part of going. As we are going, we must be praying. Prayer is a major part of the work of making disciples. Pray for the lost; pray for an open door for the gospel; pray for God to give us words to say at the right times; pray that the beauty of Jesus will be seen in us; pray that Jesus will spill out of us. Luke tells us that as Peter was praying & waiting for lunch, he was hungry, which I think is very important for what he experienced next. While waiting hungrily, Peter “fell into a trance.” Again, according to Strong’s, a trance is “a throwing of the mind out of its normal state; although awake, the mind is drawn off from all surrounding objects & wholly

fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms & images lying w/in, & thinks that he perceives w/his bodily eyes & ears realities shown him by God.” Certainly, Peter shared this vision w/Luke, who recorded it for us. Peter saw “the heavens opened & something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its 4 corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals & reptiles & birds...” Peter heard a voice saying to him, “Rise, Peter, kill & eat.” “You’re hungry – help yourself.” PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) would not like this vision! Peter didn’t like it either, for different reasons. Peter was a devout Jew who would never eat anything unclean or non-kosher. “Kosher” comes from Kashrut, Jewish dietary laws “dealing w/the foods Jewish people are permitted to eat & how those foods are to be prepared according to Jewish law. Food that may be consumed is deemed kosher.” The Kashrut has its origin in Scripture, specifically Leviticus 11. I believe God was protecting His people especially during the Exodus from eating that which might make them sick. W/out hesitation, Peter replied, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” If this was a test, Peter would be sure to pass. But the voice came again,\: “What God has made clean, do not call common.” This happened 3 times. When anything is emphasized in Scripture 3 times, you know it is intended for emphasis. “Holy, holy, holy;” “Woe, woe, woe.” God gave this vision to Peter 3 times to drive home the importance of what He was saying. Yes, I think it does apply to meat from animals, most of which can be properly stored & cooked today & is safe to eat. But that’s far from the intended meaning of Peter’s vision. God was referring more to people than to animals. Up to this point the Church was comprised of all Jewish converts to Christ, except for the Ethiopian eunuch, who wasn’t nationally Jewish but a converted Jew who then came to faith in Christ. God’s message to Peter & the Church was that the gospel was not just for the Jews but for the Gentiles, too! Of course, they remembered that Jesus had said “You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem & in all Judea & Samaria & to the end of the earth.” But in their Jewish minds that meant wherever Jewish people lived. Peter & the others weren’t used to dealing w/non-Jews except for being under their authority. They didn’t eat w/or associate w/Gentiles. You stay in your space & I’ll stay in mine.

But God was beginning to expand Peter's heart. James Montgomery Boice wrote: "By the time the drama had acted out the 3rd time, Peter must have begun to get the idea that God was trying to tell him something, even tho he didn't [yet] know what it was." As Peter was mulling all this over, guess who showed up for lunch? The men sent by Cornelius stood at the gate, asking if Peter was there. What a coincidence! It was then that the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, whether audibly or in his spirit, we're not told. "3 men are looking for you. I want you to get up, go down to them & go w/them w/out hesitation." That phrase "w/out hesitation" means "making no distinction." This is important because, again, the 3 men were all Gentiles & one a soldier. Peter would not have normally invited them in or gone w/them. Peter received the 3 Gentiles because the Holy Spirit told him to & because of *the* vision which he hadn't fully figured out but was beginning to. "I'm the one you're looking for," Peter said; "what's up?" The men told Peter the story of Cornelius' vision & of his invitation to come tell them what he had to say. The only thing Peter had to say was about Jesus. That was God's intention. As Jonah fled God's call from Joppa, so Peter followed God's call from Joppa. The next day Peter went w/the 3 men, not knowing just what to expect, but realizing that God had made the arrangements & would make it clear when the time came. The gospel would go out beyond the Jews. The rest of the world was waiting for the good news & Christianity & the Church would be changed forever! III) **Sometimes God has to change our hearts** in regard to those around us in need of the gospel. Are there any individuals or groups of people about whom you may think, "they'll never believe," "they don't want to hear it," "they hate God/the Church," "their kind don't want God, don't want Jesus as Savior/Lord." If you think of any in that way, shouldn't we rather consider, "they need Jesus," "why not them?" "I must pray for them." Will you pray that God will change your heart toward the lost, whoever they may be? Will you follow His call? As we are going, let us be a church on mission.