

Acts 10:1-23

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[0 : 00] Okay, so this morning we are going to look at the first part of the account of how Cornelius and Peter are used by God.

! So I'm going to read to you from Acts chapter 10. I'll put it on the screen there. Yeah, that's good. So at Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision.

He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, Cornelius. Cornelius stared at him in fear. What is it, Lord? he asked.

The angel answered, your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.

[1 : 03] He is staying with Simon the Tanner whose house is by the sea. I love the detail there. When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants.

He told them everything that happened and sent them to Joppa. About noon the following day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

He became hungry. He wanted something to eat. And while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, get up, Peter, kill and eat. Surely not, Lord, Peter replied.

I've never eaten anything impure or unclean. And the voice spoke to him a second time. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. And this happened three times.

[2 : 11] And immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. And while Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and they stopped at the gate.

They called out, asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there. And while Peter was still thinking about the vision, the spirit said to him, Simon, three men are looking for you.

So get up and go downstairs. Don't hesitate to go with them, for I've sent them. Peter went down and said to the men, I'm the one you're looking for.

Why have you come? The men replied, we've come from Cornelius the centurion. He's a righteous and God-fearing man who is respected by all the Jewish people.

A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say. And then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

[3 : 14] What an amazing event. What an amazing event. I just think God is so wonderful in the way he directs us, but also the detail in terms of what he says. And the detail in terms of ensuring that Peter is going to respond to him favourably.

So here is Cornelius, a devout man. He was a Gentile, a Roman centurion, a man who feared God, who prayed regularly.

And he was generous in giving to those in need. So God sends an angel to Cornelius, telling him to send for Peter. Telling him where he is.

Telling him about somebody else called Simon of Tanner. I assume that was so they didn't get them mixed up. It was a pivotal moment. It was vital for the gospel to be preached to Gentiles.

And Cornelius was obedient in responding to God. And eventually reaching out to those who did not know God. And then God gives Peter this vision.

[4 : 20] At the same time as the angel appears to Cornelius, Peter receives a vision in Joppa. Where he sees this sheet filled with animals clean and unclean. And a voice telling him to eat.

And this vision is vitally important. Not just for that moment. Not just for that instant. But this was part of God's preparation for the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.

This was a turning point in terms of the people knowing that God was there for them. Not just for the Jews. God's plans for us are wonderful and amazing.

God had a plan for Cornelius. At the same time, God had a plan for Peter. Simultaneously. God had a plan for those who were Jewish.

God had a plan for those who were not. The Holy Spirit's power was to be God's proof. That the Gentiles could accept Jesus just like the Jews had.

[5 : 29] Everyone was special to God. So our God has a plan for each of us. Whoever we are. Whatever we're doing.

Whatever we have done or have not done. God's plan for us may be quite small. Or maybe something that's going to grow. And go into something maybe enormous.

Perhaps it's something that only involves us. Or maybe it's something that involves others around us. Or something even bigger. A fire can be started by a single match.

But it can develop into a massive fire. What God starts as something you may see as something small. Almost insignificant. May become something which is enormous.

We don't know what God will do with small beginnings. Look at Peter. He didn't even know what was going on. He couldn't comprehend. But he knew that he had to be available to God.

[6 : 34] He had to be ready to obey God when God spoke. He had to be ready to dispose of. To get rid of anything that would prevent him from being obedient to God's calling.

He was faithful to what God was saying. Even when it seemed impossible to understand. So we too need to be available to God.

We need to be a listening people. Listening to what God says to us. And also we need to sift through so we get rid of any thoughts or ideas that are not of God.

That could prevent us from hearing what God is wanting to say to us. And just think about Peter. He saw the picture. He heard God's voice.

He didn't easily understand what God was showing him. And what Peter didn't know was that Cornelius' story was absolutely crucial. Because God was ready to show Peter his plan for salvation for all who would recognize God.

[7 : 43] For all who desired a relationship with God. Extending the gospel. To all people. Regardless of their ethnicity. Their background.

Their lifestyles. Their past behavior. Their beliefs which were perhaps anti-God. God extended the gospel. To every single person.

And I just imagine if Peter or Cornelius had just said. Ah, it was just a bad dream. We don't have to deal with this. This can't be right. Forget it. It can't be anything important.

Why would God be saying this to us? It doesn't make any sense. And they could easily just have dropped it. We're not doing anything about that. If God wants to say something. They can come back to me again.

I'll just leave it. God has always made clear. That we should obey him. That we should understand his word. And keep his word.

[8 : 41] And it's no wonder why God chose. To speak to him three times. And even then. Peter was still struggling. Peter was still struggling. With what God was saying. Sometimes we also struggle.

With knowing what God is saying to us. What God desires for us. As individuals. Or as groups. We can often push things away. That God desires.

So we can learn from Cornelius. We need to hear what God is saying. Understand. And obey. God's angel brought a vision to Cornelius.

We need to recognize God's vision for us as individuals. As his body. We need to be ready. We need to be ready to seek God. To hear what he's saying. And then to be ready to act on what he says.

It's vital. What is God's plan for us? God reveals himself to those who are seeking him.

[9 : 44] Those who desire to serve him. Those who are prepared to listen. Those who are prepared to be obedient. Even if it's tough. We need to be available.

We need to make sure we also get rid of anything in our lives. That is unhelpful. That causes distractions. Or hinders our relationship with God.

Have you ever found that sometimes when you're focusing on God. Possibly at home. Suddenly other things come into your mind. And those things suddenly seem to be important. And they distract us.

And we've moved away from what God was saying to us. And we can lose heart of something. We can lose that understanding of what God is saying to us. We need to listen carefully.

We need to really focus on what God shows us through his word. Maybe it will be through a dream. Maybe a moment when he really stirs our hearts about something.

[10 : 44] We need to be constantly making sure we are in line with what the Bible says. Especially if we have responsibility. Especially if we are leading others. We do need to trust God.

But we also need to make sure what we're hearing is of God. I'll give you an example. Sometimes we can get it seriously wrong. After spending some time back in the UK.

When Clem and I came back from the Congo. We began to seek God. Should we be going to return to the Congo at some stage? Should we be taking our children back to the Congo?

I went for an interview with the Baptist Missionary Society. Who we were working with before. I really believed that God was calling us back to the Congo. I felt that in my heart.

That's what we should be doing. I sat in front of a committee of about 13, 14 people. Around a big table. We went over everything. They asked me lots of questions.

[11 : 48] And then they said at the end. We don't believe it's right. We don't believe that you should be going back to the Congo at the moment.

And you think. Well how do I get it so wrong? How did I mess that up? It took me quite a while. To unravel that. To understand what God was saying to us.

But the thing that I held on to all the time in that situation was. God loves to speak into our lives. But we need to listen.

And we need to listen carefully. When he speaks to us through others. Who are close to God. We need to listen. And it's also absolutely fine to ask God.

To speak into situations again and again. If we're not clear about what God is saying. Be careful who we listen to. We need discernment.

[12 : 49] We need to pray. We need to listen. We need to be ready to step out. We need to be ready to seek others. To pray with us. That we trust.

If you're not sure. About something. Find somebody you trust. That you can pray with. You can seek to hear what God is saying. So God is always speaking today.

To each of us that knows him. He speaks to us in various ways. He may show us words or passages in the Bible as we read. He may speak to us when we're listening.

When we're doing the washing up. Or when we're fast asleep. And I must admit. That's probably the time when God often speaks to me. Is when I'm fast asleep. And four or five in the morning. He wakes me up.

Actually. I really cherish those times. And I'm a much better listener actually. At that hour. Than I am at nine o'clock in the morning. We all need to be ready to listen. To be ready to hear.

[13 : 50] To be ready to obey. And if we are ready to be obedient. Ready to listen. I do believe that God will speak to us. We will hear from God. And I know that some of us say.

Well. I never hear from God. God never speaks to me. Well we have really busy lives. Don't we? We need to be intentional. We need to be intentional.

God is gracious. He can speak to us in any circumstances. But we must need. We do need to take time. To listen. We need to be ready.

We need to be having that conversation with God. Asking about our lives. What do you desire God? Either long term or short term. What is it God you don't like about what I do?

How can I be more available to you? How can we have listening ears? And sometimes we hear it unexpectedly. We're not expecting something to happen.

[14 : 49] And suddenly we feel that God has spoken to our lives. And sometimes we hear because we are expectant. We want to be ready. We want to be available to God. And sometimes we get to a situation.

Where we think something should have happened by then. And it just doesn't seem to be happening. We sort of get that feeling of. Well it never really happens to me. This isn't going to

happen. In spite of what I've tried to do.

This isn't going to happen. I really believed. As a deputy head in a school. That I would be ahead at one stage. And I really felt God saying that to me.

That he wanted me to be in a school. Where I would be able to establish a positive Christian environment. And it turned out to be a long journey. So I had several interviews.

Over about eight or nine years. Of applying for a headship. And often coming second. That's probably the worst place you can be. When you go for an interview isn't it?

[15:50] To come second. You think. What did that guy or woman have that I don't have? And you get to the point where you think. I can't be bothered to apply anymore. Because it takes so much effort. So much work. You think. I just give up.

And I thought it would never happen. And I thought it was. Probably me that got it wrong. And in that situation. God spoke to me. And he opened a door.

To a headship. In a church school. Not just any church. And this is where I think. To me. God has a great sense of humour. Not just any church. But the Greek Orthodox Church.

Who had a vision to establish. The only Greek Orthodox school. In the UK. In the Greek community. In North London. And. The CEO I was working with.

Said. I want you to apply for this. Because I think this is the right place for you. But I went and spoke to our church leader. At the time. And I prayed about it that night. Because I had to reply by the next day.

[16:49] And I felt God saying. This was what he wanted. He'd opened a door. And that took me so much. God taught me so much. About my relationship with him. But also.

About working in that school. I had a big say. In how the school would have a real Christian ethos. And as it was a new school. I was able to interview and appoint.

Every single member of staff. I had one to one meetings. With the Archbishop. Greek Orthodox Archbishop in London. I met Orthodox priests. Who were spirit filled.

I celebrated Eastern Christmas. With the Greek community. I had freedom. To talk about God. And his plans. And to enjoy something. Absolutely unique. In him. It also meant.

Finding a new church for us. And we joined. Jubilee Church in North London. A church of several thousand members. Where we learned so much. About growing a massive church in God.

[17:46] So God did have something. Brilliant in store for me. And he still does have things. All the time that he's doing with me. That I feel so thankful. And so grateful for. So we often don't understand.

God's timing. But when we hear his voice. And listen. He can enable us to achieve. Wonderful things. Both small. And big in him. But it's in his time.

We often want to rush things. Or push things through. Because we want it in our time. But God says to us. Hold on. When I say yes. That's the time it will be. We need to be brave.

We need to be open to his calling. We need to be ready to say yes. Even when it seems. That God is talking about the impossible. So God prepares the way for us.

To serve him. God will go before us. When he sends us. He will prepare the way. He was preparing something. Incredibly wonderful. For Cornelius and Peter.

[18:45] Reaching out to people. Who until then were seen as unclean. And not part of God's plan. But God showed them his desires. His big plan.

His purpose. His way he had prepared for them. All they needed to do. Was to be obedient. How does God prepare the way for us? Sometimes it's subtle.

Sometimes it's really unexpected. Unusual events. Unusual time. When we're not even thinking about something. Sometimes through partners. Through friends. Sometimes in a loud voice.

Because we're not listening. Sometimes quietly. And slowly. Sometimes just over a few days.

Sometimes over months. And months. And years. But are we always ready.

To respond positively. Maybe easy. Maybe tough. It may seem to be impossible. Or it may seem obvious.

[19:43] And doable. God speaks today. As he has always done. He hasn't changed. And God chooses. Many of his people.

To be his instruments. To share. If I can turn the page over. To share his gospel. To share. His word. To enable people to listen.

And respond to God. To co-labor with him. Because we can't do it again. Do it alone. So we need to be ready. To recognize his voice.

To seek to understand. What God is planning for us. To seek about. What he is saying to us. And then as we hear his voice. To make sure we are really listening.

And really being obedient. We have been praying for Vinnie and Diana this morning. Please keep praying for them. As they continue to seek God. To ensure that they can hear.

[20 : 40] What God is saying to them day by day. So they can be obedient to him. In their new adventure. And let's also be encouraged. I have been really encouraged. By their determination.

To do God's will. Not just to find. A way out of a tricky situation. But to seek God. And to know in their hearts. What is God saying to them. Sometimes God is preparing for us.

For something. That is well into the future. We may believe that God is leading us. In a certain way. And we know that God. Has spoken to us. But nothing seems to happen.

But we need to be. To carry on being good listeners. We need to be ready to respond to the Holy Spirit. He guides us. And probably the most difficult one.

We need to be patient. To wait on God. He knows us inside out. He is perfect. And his timing is perfect. God wanted to use Peter.

[21 : 39] For his glory. Peter had to learn obedience. In order to be powerful. And effective. He had to be challenged by God. And corrected. So that he could be the disciple.

That God wanted him to be. He was part of God's plan. A very significant part. Of God's plan. So friends. God calls each of us.

I really do believe. That God has a purpose. For each of us. Whether it's small or big. I believe that God has a plan for me. A plan for each of you.

A plan for us as a church. Harvest Church. And we need to be open. To what God is saying to us. Like Peter. We need to hear God's voice. So we can know what we need to do.

So we can be obedient. When he speaks. So we read his word regularly. And let God's word. Speak to us. Heart to heart. Ask God to reveal himself.

[22 : 38] To us through his word. The account of Cornelius and Peter. Shows us that his desire. God's desire. Is always to see. People of all backgrounds.

All ages. Coming into his kingdom. Having a personal relationship with him. So let's make sure. We are continuing to reach out. To those who don't know him.

So they too can discover. New life in Christ. God loves to hear us pray. It's no surprise is it.

That God spoke to Peter. As he prayed. We need to really understand. How important it is for us. To be praying. Fervently. And listening carefully to God. Listening to his plans for us.

As individuals. Plans as a church. And again. Some of them might be quite small. And apparently insignificant. But we do not know. How important small things may be for God.

[23 : 36] The smallest of things can be vital. In terms of God's kingdom. God loves us. And he also loves those. Who don't yet have a relationship with him. God can use anyone.

He can be anywhere. When he is wanting to achieve his purposes. And we need to make sure. That our prayer life. Is strong. We need to be praying regularly.

Friends. We need to be praying alone. Pray with our family. Pray in our life group. Pray in church. Pray without ceasing. And as we pray.

Let's expect God to speak to us. We're talking to him when we pray. We're having a chat with him. We're looking to ask him about things.

Because we want to know what he wants for us. As we sense God is speaking. He may be speaking to us about ourselves. Or he may be speaking about others. Let's share. What God is saying.

[24 : 32] I sincerely believe. That we are in a time. When we have work to do. Which will have results. Beyond our expectations. Already we see.

How God is graciously growing half his church. But in a sense. This is only a beginning. As we pray fervently. I think God will speak to us.

Continue to speak to us. To prepare us. To prepare the way for us. And to challenge us. We don't know. Perhaps yet.

What God will call us to. As individuals. And as a church. But just like Peter. I believe God is wanting to do great things. Through us. Through each of us. Nobody's left out of that.

God is calling all of us. Each of us. To be able to do great things with him. So let's not miss the opportunities. That God has given to us. To see his kingdom continue. To grow.

[25 : 29] And to grow. Let's just pray. There's a very short prayer. That was attributed to Augustine. Breathe in me Holy Spirit.

That my thoughts may be holy. Act in me. Oh Holy Spirit. That my work. May be holy. Draw my heart.

Oh Holy Spirit. To love. What is holy. Father. I just want to. Thank you. For all that you've done. In each of our lives here. Today Lord. Where. You have spoken to us. Where you have directed us. Where you have encouraged us. To do.

So many different things for you. Lord. Clarify our minds. Help us to hear your voice Lord. When we pray Lord. We pray Lord. You would speak into our hearts.

[26 : 24] And that we would be able to receive that. And be doers. Lord. We won't just sit and feel. That was nice. That was great. To say that prayer. But Lord. That we might hear.

And obey. And Lord. That our obedience. Won't be just. Transient Lord. But it will be day by day. Being obedient to you. A wonderful. Wonderful Lord.

Bless us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.