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NEW ZEALAND BIBLE CLASSES

PREACHING THE RISEN CHRIST

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Study #7: The vision of Peter and Cornelius - The bringing of the truth to the unclean Gentiles

Reading: Acts 10:1-16

Thank you brother chairman and my dear brethren and sisters and my dear young people.

In Acts 10 then, you'll recall, in fact, in the last verse of Acts 9, on the occasion of our last study, which was several weeks ago now, the record told us there in the last verse of chapter 9 that, 'it came to pass, that Simon Peter tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner'. You'll remember that we made the comment that after the wondrous miracle that he had performed in that place, he could have chosen any place to stay in Joppa and the doors would probably have been opened to him, for this was a miracle worker! Peter was a man who could raise from the dead, and yet the place where he chose to stay was with one Simon a tanner, a man involved with an unclean occupation, the skinning of animals and the tanning of those animals. The Jews despised the tanners, any tanner had to live a certain distance beyond the city limits; the law of the Levirate marriage could be put to one side, if it required a woman to marry a tanner; the tanner's judgment in certain matters was set aside, as being unacceptable as a witness in certain cases; so with this man associated with unclean things, Peter stayed in Joppa on this occasion, almost as a clue, to what was going to now be outworked in the story of Acts 10, and the bringing of the truth to the unclean Gentiles.

Well Acts 10 verse 1 then says, 'There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band'. Now the Caesarea here of chapter 10, of course, is not Caesarea Philippi but Caesarea Augustus or Caesarea Straconitis which is the Caesarea on the coast. This particular city had been given by the Romans initially to Herod, he built it as a classic Roman city with a Roman amphitheatre, with a temple devoted to the emperor and to the gods, and eventually Caesarea became the centre of the Roman administration in the land of Palestine; and as the centre of Roman administration it was the place where the Roman governor was stationed here on the sea coast at a place called Caesarea. So when it says in verse 1, that this man Cornelius was a centurion of a band called the Italian band, the reference to that is this; that this centurion was no centurion of any ordinary organization of Roman soldiers, he came from the band or he belonged to the band called the Italian band, now the

significance of that is that the Italian band, (for which, by the way, inscriptions have been discovered to show that this band was indeed in this region at this very time) was made up of only Roman soldiers. They weren't drawn from any other part of the empire, they are pure Romans, and they were members of this particular **cohort** as this word 'bands' should be translated, are voluntary members of the cohort. So they were Romans and they were voluntary, they served the Roman army for love of their country and for dedication to the emperor. Therefore, the particular cohort stationed in Caesarea that were responsible for the guardianship of the Roman governor, were drawn from the Italian band for what obvious reasons? because being voluntary soldiers they were regarded as particularly dedicated and absolutely devoted to the cause of the Romans. The Roman governor would feel safe, being guarded by members of the Italian band above all other bands. Cornelius is the leader of this particular cohort that was stationed at this particular time in Caesarea.

In the year BC 82, one of the most famous Roman houses, known as the house of Skippo-Sula, the leader of that Roman house was a man called Cornelius Sula; and in BC 82 he emancipated 100,000 slaves and gave them their freedom, and as a result of their gratitude for the generosity of this particular man, they all took his name. So a 100,000 slaves went forth into the Roman empire all known as Cornelius, in celebration of the fact that Cornelius Sula, the leader of this famous Roman house had given them their freedom and from that time forth Cornelius became a very common and a very popular Roman name.

Well, this man however he got his name is called Cornelius, he's a leader of this devoted band and here he is stationed in Caesarea where the Roman governor had his residence. Yet for all that, verse 2 says, 'he was a devout man and one that feared God with all his house, which give much alms to the people, and prayed to God always'. Now we're not told in Acts 10 verse 2, what it first was that turned this particular centurion towards the matters of the truth, and towards the things of the bible. I would like to suggest at least 2 different possibilities. The first possibility is this one here (and I'll just read a reference to you), 'and when the centurion and they that were with him watching, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly saying, truly this was the Son of God'. We know of a centurion in Matthew 27 and verse 54, present in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion of Christ, who was so moved by the events of that day, that he glorified God, and said, 'truly this man was somebody special, He was a righteous man, He was the Son of God'. So one wonders whether possibly, the centurion now stationed in Acts 10 verse 1, whose name was Cornelius, was he perhaps the centurion, who stood at the foot of the cross of Christ, and witnessed the remarkable events transacted in Jerusalem on that day. So that's one possibility!

The other possibility is, if you come back to Acts 8, we read at the end of Acts 9, remember, that after Philip had taken the truth to the region of Samaria, Acts 9 verse 40 says, 'But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea'. By the way, I don't think Acts 8 verse 40, means that he

stopped preaching when he came to Caesarea, but that his preaching continues throughout all that area, and therefore, it may be that the centurion called Cornelius, came into contact with the truth through the preaching work of Philip, who the record says, has already got to Caesarea and was obviously an evangelist for the truth in that particular city.

So, it could be either of those possibilities, or it could be a combination of both, we can't be absolutely sure, how Cornelius first came to a knowledge of the truth! But obviously, he had been affected because Acts 10 verse 2 says, 'he was a devout man, he feared God with all his house, he gave much alms to the people and he prayed to God always'. In fact, if you hold your hand in Acts 10, and come back to Matthew 6, so here's a connection now for the special coming ecclesial camp, God willing, for this weekend to come, in Matthew 6 we're told, remember this concerning the spirit of the truth that needs to be shown, that we might exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees! Matthew 6 talks about verses 1-4 the giving of alms, 5-15 the offering of prayers, and verses 16-18 the observance of fasting, do you remember those three things? the giving of alms, the offering of prayers and the observing of fasting. These were the marks amongst the Jewish people of righteous life, and of righteous behaviour; now come and have a look at Acts 10 verse 2, what do we know concerning Cornelius? Verse 2, he gave much alms, the end of verse 2, he prayed to God always, and in verse 30 it says, four days ago I was fasting until this hour. So Cornelius was a man given to alms, given to prayers and given to fasting; he wasn't a Jew but he was a singularly devout man even measured by the standards of the Jews themselves. Unlike the Jews, we believe that Cornelius did not do these things out of mere ceremonial observance, or the keeping of ritual, but that he was absolutely genuine about the actions he committed himself to.

Not only was he genuine but, you see the spirit of the man because verse 2 of Acts 10 says, 'he did this **with all his house**'. You know, an excellent cross reference to that is Genesis 18 verse 19 because this was the spirit of Abraham, wasn't it? You'll remember in Genesis 18 verse 19 says, 'For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Yahweh to do justice and judgment. So here is a man who is thoroughly Abrahamic, not only is he devout himself, but he's influenced his household so that his whole house is involved in this matter. Verse 7 says, 'he called two of his servants and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually'; but by the time Peter finally gets to meet the man, we're told in verse 24, that Cornelius had called together his kinsmen and his near friends. So you see, one of the great lessons surely of Cornelius is that he had a wonderful spirit of spreading the truth to others. He influenced his household, he converted the soldiers that he was associated with, he had spoken to his relatives and he got his friends involved. He was a devout man, but he wasn't a private man; he was quite public about the things that he believed in, and he spoke to all and sundry concerning these matters. He's thoroughly Abrahamic in that spirit of influencing his house for good.

Verse 3 of Acts 10 says, 'He saw in a vision evidently about the 9th hour of the day, an angel of God coming into to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius'. Now, of course, the

Jews reckoned time in a slightly different way than ourselves. But what we do know from Acts 3 verse 1, is that the 9th hour was, in fact, deemed to be one of the hours of prayer. It was at the 9th hour that Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, says Acts 3 verse 1, being the 9th hour'. So when in Acts 10 verse 3 it says, 'he saw in a vision evidently about the 9th hour of the day', and we're told in verse 30 that, in fact, Cornelius was indeed praying at that very moment of time. By the way, that's about 3 o'clock in the afternoon - the 9th hour is 3 o'clock in the afternoon and therefore, one could imagine therefore, the consternation that Cornelius felt in the 3rd verse, when he saw a vision in the middle of the bright day, and yet he saw what appeared to him as an angel of God coming in to him and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy **prayers** and thine **alms** are come up for a memorial before God'.

So prayers and alms are come up for a memorial. Now if you come back to Leviticus 2, there is, of course, an excellent connection with the 'minchah' offering here, in this word 'memorial' that's used.(234, 3422) We're told, in effect, that the actions of Cornelius were so consecrated as to be acceptable to the Father as a freewill and sanctified offering in His service. Because in Leviticus 2 which is the chapter concerning the 'minchah or meal offering' it says this in verse 1, 'When anyone would offer a meal offering', now by the way, most of you will know that the 'meat offering' in Leviticus ought to be translated '**meal**', it's not a meat offering, it ought to be translated 'meal' and you can work that out by the ingredients of the meal offerings. 'His offering shall be of fine flour, he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon: He shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests, and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof, and the priest shall **burn** the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire'. So the minchah offering represented the principle of consecration; the labours of one's own hands offered to God, burnt as a memorial with oil and frankincense, so that it ascended to the Father as typical of the devotion of this particular person. So when the angel says to Cornelius in Acts 10 verse 4, 'thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God, what it's saying is that the actions of Cornelius were of such a pure heart and proper spirit, that they were truly accepted by God as a meal offering of devotion to Him, even though he was a Gentile, God accepted the spirit of those prayers which, in fact, Cornelius was offering. He was clearly a highly devoted man!

So we're told in Acts 10 verse 4, that when Cornelius saw the angel he was, of course, afraid, as well he might. But the reassurance of the angel comes to him to say that God has accepted him, but there were certain things that he needed to do. So verse 5 says, 'And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do'. So a couple of interesting things therefore here, about the circumstances of verses 5 and 6. The first is to remind ourselves that Peter is dwelling at Joppa, and the second is to notice therefore, the significance of the phrase in verse 6, that the particular house he dwelt in was by the seaside at Joppa, by the seaside. So what does that remind us of? of course, that takes us back to Jonah, a man at Joppa by

the seaside.

So let's just come back and have a look at that, shall we? because clearly there's an allusion here to the circumstance of the prophet's day, and what we're told in Jonah 1 verse 1, 'Now the word of Yahweh came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and he went down to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish so he paid the fare therefore'. So here we had a man of God at Joppa, by the seaside, determined to avoid the charge of God upon him, that he must take the truth to the Gentiles because that's what Jonah's being asked to do! He was being charged with the responsibility of taking the truth to the Gentiles and in Joppa he made the fateful decision that he would not do so, that he would, in fact, run away from that responsibility and he made that decision by the seaside at Joppa. Then, here in the New Testament is a man called Simon, and isn't it one of the other gospel records that calls him, son of Jonah? and here he is at Joppa, by the seaside, at the very place where Jonah made his decision and now Simon will make the decision, 'shall he take the truth to the Gentiles or no? because that will be the great challenge of Acts 10. So that little phrase in Acts 10 verse 6, which tells us that he lodged by the seaside, takes us all the way back to the circumstances of the prophet Jonah and the drama of that struggle as to whether the truth should be taken to Gentile nations Well, that story was going to be outworked here again in Acts 10, but this time, Peter would, of course, be it with a struggle, would make the right decision and the truth would now advanced to its next stage in the purpose of God.

Now there something tremendously powerful about the circumstances of the balance of verse 6, in fact, I have a whole summary box here, based on the rest of Acts 10 verse 6 when it says, 'he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do'. So you see, there's a tremendous lesson that emerges from the story of the conversion of Cornelius here. The lesson is this, this man was kind, verse 2, he was pious and he was generous and therefore, he had a truly excellent spirit; he worshipped God, he offered prayer, he helped others and the lesson of Acts 10 is that, **that wasn't enough**. Although he was a good man, he had to learn those saving truths that alone could deliver him from sin. Any man or woman, b&s, no matter how good, judged by the world's standards of goodness, does not have enough to liberate themselves from sin and death unless they know the saving truths that God requires them to know. Do you see what verse 6 says? despite how good Cornelius was, verse 6 says, 'you go and find this man and he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do'. He already was a good man, he already prayed, he already gave to others, 'he shall tell thee what **thou oughtest to do**'.

Have a look at chapter 11 verse 14, which is the same spirit when Peter accounts the story later on back in Jerusalem. Because Acts 11 says reading from verse 13 for connection, 'and he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, **who shall tell thee words** whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved'. Unless Cornelius heard those words, he could not be saved, no matter how good he was. You

know, sometimes we even hear that in the truth, 'oh he's a good man, you know' or 'she's a good woman you know'; that's how the world judges acceptability, and if we were good and kind to others then God really ought to accept us! Not so! this is the great lesson of Cornelius that there are certain vital truths that we must understand if we are to obtain deliverance. Not only must we understand them but having learnt the divine requirements, we've got to humbly submit to them. So we've got to do two things: 1. We've got to find what it is that is the truth of God, then 2. we've got to submit to it, and without that, there is no salvation for any man or woman.

There's a fantastic parallel with Cornelius isn't there? in the Old Testament. Now what might that be? who might that be? another man in great authority, leader of an army, highly respected, but he needed desperately to be saved; his name was Naaman! Now come and have a look at 2 Kings and see the parallel with Naaman and Cornelius. Hold your hand in Acts 10 and look at the spirit of Naaman in the Old Testament now in 2 Kings 5, because isn't this the very lesson of the house of Cornelius? Naaman had to go through exactly the same circumstances! Now firstly, have a look at 2 Kings 5 verse 1, so here's the man we're dealing with, 'Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and **honourable** (and Green's translates the word 'honourable' as '**highly respected**'), because by him Yahweh had given deliverance unto Syria: he also was a **mighty man** of valour: but he was a leper', and for all the greatness that Naaman had and the excellence of character that he had, he was in desperate need of salvation.

Do you know how that salvation came to Naaman? it came by the words of a little Israelitish maid who told words as to what it was **that he ought to do**. What it was that he ought to do, was that he was to present himself before Elisha the prophet and so verse 9 says, 'So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, go, and wash in Jordan 7 times and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean. Naaman was wroth and went away, and said, I'm not prepared to do that, and verse 12 says, he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants said, verse 13, 'My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash, and be clean? Then he went down and dipped himself 7 times in the Jordan (and here's the phrase) **according to the saying of the man of God**. then his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child'. He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do, he shall tell thee words whereby thou mayest be saved. And when he did according to the saying of the man of God, and humbly submitted to the divine requirements, **then** he found salvation. To me, there's a fantastic parallel between Cornelius in the New Testament and Naaman in the Old, who both learnt that tremendously important lesson, that true conversion in the truth is based on knowledge of divine principles and humble submission to those requirements; there is no other way and there never has been! It doesn't matter how important you think you are, unless we submit to the divine requirements, we remain lepers.

So Acts 10 verse 7 says, 'And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was

departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow as they went on their journey and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the 6th hour'. Now if the 9th hour is 3 o'clock then the 6th hour, verse 9, is obviously 12 o'clock. So we would say it's lunchtime although the Jews didn't really have lunch at 12 o'clock, normally they had a light meal in the middle of the morning and then a much more substantial repast in late afternoon. But nevertheless, we're told that Peter, in fact, was hungry at this particular time, verse 10, and would have eaten, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance'. So the cooking was going on downstairs and while he waited for the food to be prepared, he was upstairs upon the housetop in order that he might give himself to prayer. Again, in verse 9, we're not told what it was that Peter was praying about, but you wonder, don't you? because we know that Peter was given the responsibility of taking the truth to the Gentiles, and one wonders whether Peter was praying on this occasion for the divine guidance as to what he should do! where he should go? maybe he was looking out over the sea and thinking of the boats, as they travelled abroad, should I be on one of those boats? how will I take the truth to the Gentiles? Lead me, O God! and here in this place he is praying to the Father, presumably for guidance in some particular matter when all of a sudden in verse 10, he falls into a trance and he sees heaven open, verse 11, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it have been a great sheet, knit at the four corners and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air'.

Can you imagine Peter's amazement as he fell into a trance and he saw a sheet coming down, a sheet coming down out of heaven and it wasn't until he could peer over the edges, because it was tied at the corners, it wasn't until the sheet came down low enough, then he could peer over and down there was all these different animals, sitting inside the sheet that was knit together at the four corners. There was everything there, there were four footed beasts, wild beasts, creeping things, fowls of the air, and all those divisions, by the way, in verse 12, they go all the way back to the Old Testament, don't they? these are the great divisions of the animals that go way back in Old Testament times. Peter's thinking and his attitudes were thoroughly Jewish and went back to the provisions of Old Testament times as to what was acceptable or not acceptable as far as these were concerned. So when in verse 13 there came a voice to him saying, Rise, Peter, kill and eat! And Peter said, 'not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'.

So just hold your hand in Acts and come back to Leviticus 11, because here's the spirit of the law which Peter is obviously referring to, and despite the fact that he'd been living, noted for the uncleanness of his occupation, when he was asked concerning these particular animals and the possibility of eating them, all the Jewish prejudice that Peter had in his very being, rose up and his instinctive reply was, 'not so, Lord', Leviticus 11 puts it this way, verse 44, (and you can at least have some sympathy with Peter on this occasion), 'For I am Yahweh your God: ye shall therefore sanctify

yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am Yahweh that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth. To make a difference between the clean and unclean; between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten'. That was the training and that was the background, and that was the teaching that Peter knew as a Jew, so the very division of the animals of verse 12, probably took Peter's mind straight back to Leviticus 11: **I am holy, ye shall sanctify yourselves; ye are to make a difference between clean and unclean; between the beasts that may be eaten and the beasts that may not be eaten.** Between beast and fowl and living creature and all things that creep upon the earth. All those he saw wriggling around on the sheet together, and said, 'not so, Lord!' In fact, if you come back to Ezekiel 4 verse 14, that spirit was so strongly in the Jews throughout all times, because Ezekiel was given the same question and, in fact, gave exactly the same answer as Peter on an earlier occasion. Verse 12, 'Thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. And Yahweh said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. Then said I, ah, Lord God behold, my soul hath not been polluted; from my youth up even till now, have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself; or is torn in pieces, neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth'. The abominable flesh, of course, relates to those animals that were unclean, improper for a Jew to eat. So the reaction of Peter in Acts 10 verse 14, is thoroughly typical of the Jewish view based on the teaching of the Law, and the clean and the unclean animals, by the way, taught the Jew that there were clean and unclean nations; the clean animals were symbols of Israel, the unclean animals were symbols of the nations roundabout Israel and their unclean practices and their unclean ways!

But Acts 10 says in verse 15, 'that the voice spake unto Peter again the second time, 'what God has cleansed, that call not thou common; this was done thrice'. Now there are several interesting things about the words of verses 15 and 16; the first is, did you notice what it says? it says 'what God **hath cleansed** (past tense), whatever distinction was going to be annulled here between clean and unclean as far as the voice was concerned, that distinction had already been cancelled. **What God hath cleansed**, it's already happened, Peter, there is no longer a difference between clean and unclean from that point of view. The Law **no longer applies**, so the question is, when did God cleanse? when did God annul the distinction between clean and unclean? well, the funny thing is that if Peter had listened to the teaching of Christ carefully enough, he would have found that his Lord Himself had said that this distinction had already been taken away. If you come back to Mark 7, and we might just look at a couple of reference here concerning the teaching of Christ in the matter of clean and unclean meats.

The disciples probably just hadn't believed Christ, or they certainly hadn't heard Him, because Christ's teaching was, in fact, quite clear on this matter. We're told in verse 18

of Mark 7, it says, 'And He saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entering into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And He said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man'. Now, I'm going to read the RSV for verse 19 because I think it's a good translation: it translates it as follows, 'Do you not perceive that whatsoever thing from without entering into the man, it cannot defile him; then the RSV says, 'Since it enters not his heart, but his stomach and so passes on, thus He declared all foods clean'. That's what the RSV says, I'll read that again, 'Since it enters **not** his heart, but his stomach and so passes on, thus He declared all foods clean'. So if Peter had listened to the teaching of Christ, he would have understood that that distinction between clean and unclean had already been done away with. Come and have a look at Luke 10, here when the Lord sends out the 70 that they might go on their work of preaching the truth, He tells them this, and by the way, the events of Luke 10 and the sending forth of the 70 appear to envisage the idea of the truth being sent forth to the Gentiles; this relates to the formation of Gentile ecclesias. We're told there in verse 7 of Luke 10 that the Lord's specific teaching was, 'And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give; for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you'. **Eat such things as are set before you**, was the teaching of Christ, even if they went into a Gentile house and were given therefore, unclean meat according to the Law, the teaching of Christ was that they were to eat such things as were set before them, on that particular occasion. Then finally, if we come to Romans 14 we'll find that the apostle Paul's teaching was thoroughly consistent with the teaching of the voice in Acts 10 and the spirit of Christ in Mark 7 and Luke 10, because Paul likewise, who would be, of course, the great champion to the Gentiles says this in Romans 14 and verse 14, he says 'I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean'. **There is nothing unclean of itself**, says Paul! and by the way, see what the word 'unclean' is translated in the margin as in Romans? there is nothing **common** (2839) of itself. So that's the force of the word 'common' back in Acts 10, isn't it? when he says, I've never eaten anything common or unclean, it has to do with that idea in verse 14 of Acts 10, that it did not conform to the requirements of the Law concerning clean and unclean animals.

So coming back to Acts 10 verse 15 then, when the voice said to him the second time, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common', here was the express teaching now to Peter that a **new era had arrived**, and that distinction which once separated the Jew and Gentile, symbolized by the clean and unclean animals was now at an end. This is all, as it were, going back to Genesis 1, when all things were deemed by the Father to be 'very good'. Clearly, Peter understood that lesson, because he says in verse 28, 'ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean'. So Peter understood that the meat in the sheet was symbolic of **men or people**, that they were not to be considered common or

unclean, verse 28. The animals were symbolic of the nations themselves.

Do you notice what it says, verse 16, 'this was done 3 times', now when something is done twice in the bible it's for emphasis, when something is done 3 times it means it's extremely important! I think that one of the reasons why this was done 3 times was to try and help Peter overcome his Jewish prejudice that he held so strongly; by the way, I think he did, I think he did overcome and I think he went and ate meat with them immediately, it wasn't till Galatians 2 when certain came from the Jerusalem ecclesia that he suddenly stopped eating with the Gentiles. Up to that time, he had changed! from Acts 10 onwards he did eat meat with the Gentiles. By the way, do you see the significance of all this? you see, to the Jew, the eating of food was an act of fellowship; now if the Jew met with the Gentile and their foods were different, the Jew could not eat with the Gentile, and if a man can't eat with another man, then he's not really in fellowship with him. How could people be in fellowship but not eat food together at a common table? So although you might think it strange that the vision concerned animals and the eating of food; really it's absolutely related to the notion of '**fellowship**' between people. To eat together is a symbol that we are in fellowship together. What's being overcome here, was the notion that Jew and Gentile could not fellowship, because one was clean and the other was unclean, that's all clearly seen to be annulled here and, in fact, that's what we're being taught, therefore, concerning the animals and the sheet.

What do you think the 'sheet' represents? Well, the **sheet** is the **ecclesia**, and the teaching of the vision is, that the ecclesia will contain all races and all classes without distinction. And how wide is the ecclesial sheet? b&s, well, verse 11 says, it goes right out to the four corners, and you'll know the phrase 'four corners' is reminiscent of the four quarters of the earth, the four corners of the earth, the uttermost parts of the earth; the sheet is big enough and wide enough to reach out to all nations, and inside that sheet is everybody without distinction. Do you know what the proof of that is? verse 16, the vessel, the sheet with all the animals was **received up again into heaven**. And the force of that phrase in verse 16 that the sheet with all those animals was received up into heaven, is teaching us that **Almighty God accepts that sheet, and all the animals therein**. If God accepts that sheet then how could Peter on earth say, that he wouldn't partake of the animals in that place. The taking up of that sheet into heaven, was the proof that Almighty God Himself approved of the fact that now there was no distinction and that all races and all peoples would be embraced within the common cause of the truth, in the great sheet knit together at the four corners.

Well, that's the beginning of the story by which Cornelius is going to be converted, and Peter is going to march forth, in fact, he wasn't sure what it was all about, and yet providentially we're told in verse 19, 'while Peter thought on the vision the Spirit said unto him, there are three men outside. Arise, get thee down and go with them nothing doubting for I have sent them'. Obviously, you see the wisdom of God here, that you've got 2 men praying: you've got one man praying in Caesarea, you've got another man praying in Joppa. The one man is saying, 'what do I do to find the truth?' the other

man is praying, 'what do I do to take the truth to the Gentiles?' and while the one man is praying, the answer is being worked out in the second man; and while the second man is praying the men from the first man are already on route to him and by the time the second man finishes the prayer and receives the vision, and wonders what it is all about, there's a knock at the door, and the men from the first man are there at the door, and in the providence of God it was all beautifully brought together so that Peter would have no doubts whatsoever, that that was the meaning of this dream. He went forth gladly to take the truth to the Gentiles and to preach to them the risen Christ!

So in these chapters, b&s, in Acts 8, 9 and 10, we've got this great central pivot of the Acts of the apostles; we've got the full completion of the work of Peter, we've got the launching of the work of Paul, and in between these two great men we have the bridge between them who is Philip the evangelist. The truth to the Jews through Peter, the truth to the half Jews through Philip and now the truth to the Gentiles which will be taken up by Paul, begun by Peter but brought to its fullness by the apostle Paul in the balance of the book to come. Here in half of the book, in Acts 8 to 10, we truly have the spirit of the risen Christ that will be preached to all nations. How thankful we should be for the story of Cornelius, b&s, because the conversion of this devout and just man, was the beginning of a story that has reached down through the rest of history, and finally caught all of us here in this room tonight, in that great sheet. We should be thankful that the four corners have been wide enough to reach here, even to New Zealand in the far isles of the Gentiles, that we also might be embraced with that same calling as Cornelius was given that night, to believe in the risen Christ and go forth and declare Him to all the nations.