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GOD'S GREAT REVELATION ON THE HOUSETOP OF SIMON THE TANNER

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 38
ACTS 10:5-16

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We are studying how God prepared Simon Peter to go with the message of salvation to a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Keep in mind that Cornelius was a Roman aristocrat. He had great ability as a young man and somewhere along the way he developed a positive attitude toward God. Since Cornelius desired to have relationship with God, God assumed the responsibility to give him the message of salvation. God begins to operate on the mind of a man who was thirty miles away to prepare him to visit Cornelius. God is laying the ground work for the coming of the Gentile Pentecost and is preparing to break the Jewish monopoly on the Kingdom.

It all began when God called Abraham into Canaan. Abraham crossed over and became the first Jew. The Jewish race was built on the principle of regeneration. Abraham had a son named Ishmael who was not saved and was not a Jew. He had another son named Isaac and he was saved and a Jew. Isaac had two sons, Esau who was unsaved and a Gentile, and Jacob who was saved and a Jew. Please note this difference. Every other nationality was formed on natural generation, but the Jewish nation was founded on regeneration. Later it came to be that people who had in them the genes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were called Jews. This holds true until this day. In 721 B.C. the ten northern tribes were taken into captivity, then in 586 B.C. the two remaining southern tribes were taken into captivity. Seventy years later the captives were returned from Babylon and under Bible doctrine the Jews had their golden age until the time of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. In 63 B.C. the Jews were captured by Rome and finally in 70 A.D. their nation was destroyed and they were scattered to the nations of the earth. Now Pentecost came about 30 A.D. and was a Jewish monopoly. The church was in one locality. Very quickly God began to scatter believers and soon the church was spread to all the nations of the earth. Therefore we are studying here in Acts 10 the program God followed to get the message of redemption out to the whole earth, and this means that Gentiles must be included in the plan of salvation as well as Jews.

Notice This Emphasis in Galatians 3

GALATIANS 3:22 "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." This verse says that all men have an old sin nature. They are born this way. "Under sin" is singular and refers to the old sin nature. The promise is that all who have faith in Christ will be identified with Christ. "Believe" is for all, Jew and Gentile.

GALATIANS 3:23 "But before faith came, we were kept under the law shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." This was man's condition before Christ came while the people lived under the law of Moses.

GALATIANS 3:24 "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Though the law of Moses couldn't save, it had a very definite function. The law was a school bus to bring people to Christ. In other words, the place of the Mosaic Law was to point out the fact that sin was a reality, and man needed a Saviour. The law of Moses was divided into three parts--

1. Codex 1--The Ten Commandments. These say that man is a sinner and needs a Saviour.
2. Codex 2--This is the part of the law that gives a complete Christology. The offerings and ordinances and all the Tabernacle functions pointed directly to Jesus Christ.
3. Codex 3--These were the social codes and gave directions to the nations as how they might live and function.

So on the day of Pentecost there was a Jewish Monopoly, but God is going to change this.

GALATIANS 3:25-27 "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school-master. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This was Paul's conclusion and it pointed out the fact that to be a Christian one must put on Christ. We are born into the family of God the moment we are saved. We are entered into union with Christ and baptism means identification.

GALATIANS 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." People are not born equal in ability or potential, and the only place where they are equal is through faith in Jesus Christ. So God removed all racial, social, and sexual distinctions and made it quite clear that men become equal through redemption.

Let us now study this story in Acts 10

Here we have Cornelius, a Gentile aristocrat, and Simon Peter a rather low class fisherman Jew. Cornelius was a soldier of high rank, and Simon Peter a peasant fisherman. Cornelius had a positive volition toward God. Simon Peter was already a believer. Cornelius was attached to the Roman Empire and as a soldier was living in Caesarea. Simon Peter, at the time of this story, is spending some time in the house of Simon the Tanner at Joppa. Two people couldn't be any farther apart in culture, training and temperament.

ACTS 10:5 "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter" This was the instruction God gave to Cornelius. Please notice that God's instruction was always definite.

ACTS 10:6 "He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." God never gives more instruction than necessary.

ACTS 10:7 "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;" Please notice that the obedience of Cornelius was immediate. Cornelius picked out two trusted servants and sent them on their journey to get Simon Peter.

ACTS 10:8 "And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa" Cornelius briefed them concerning the importance of their trip. It was a thirty mile journey and would take quite some time on foot.

ACTS 10:9 "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 sixth hour" Let me call your attention to the timing of these events. You have heard me often say, "God's clock is never one minute fast or one minute slow". This is illustrated right here. While God was working on Cornelius, he was also working at the other end of the line on Simon Peter. In those days the people had their gardens on the roof and Simon Peter had gone up there to pray. The house of a tanner stinks and possibly this was the only place Peter could go to get away from the smell.

ACTS 10:10 "And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance" Being very hungry, Simon Peter fell into a trance. In this trance God explained to Simon Peter the significance of the Gentile Pentecost. A trance was one bonafied means God used in that time to transmit information. When the complete Canon of Scripture came, then it was not necessary for God to use this means any more. In these next verses we come to the content of this vision.

ACTS 10:11 "And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:" Simon Peter had already overcome some of his earlier prejudice by the fact that he was staying in the house of a tanner. But he still has prejudice toward Gentiles as a whole. This "certain vessel" that was let down from heaven was something like a food locker or food storage container. It was like a great tablecloth tied up at the four corners.

ACTS 10:12 "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." In this container there were all kinds of animals. Now God was not trying to turn Simon Peter into a big game hunter. But every animal in this container was forbidden for Jewish diet in the law of Moses. The dietary laws in that time protected the Jews very closely.

ACTS 10:13 "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." The commands from God were very emphatic--Rise--Kill--Eat. Each one is an aorist, active imperative. This means each is a command and Simon is asked to obey it immediately. It is a command from God versus the Mosaic command he had always followed.

ACTS 10:14 "But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." Peter said quite instinctively and definitely--"No, No, I will not eat those things". You see, the Mosaic law had ground this idea into his mind. Just like many believers today who build their ideas on legalism and say "No" when they are confronted with the Word of God. You see what God was saying was built on God's grace and Simon Peter was just not ready for that. So Simon Peter said, "No, I can't". It is even sharper than that for he said, "No, I won't do it". Eating animals like that was contrary to his Jewish upbringing and he couldn't do it.

ACTS 10:15 "And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Here we have a repetition of the vision and God added, "What God hath cleansed don't call common". Now here is a principle--Legalism always defiles what God has cleansed. He is telling Peter that the Mosaic law has been superceded by a truth which is much more advanced. The middle wall of partition has been broken down. It was Peter's mental attitude that was defiling what God had cleansed. Mental attitude is the worst kind of defilement. It may be hate or jealousy or pride or fear or lack of trust. These mental attitude sins are the worst kind of sins. In a way, Peter's mental attitude is judging God as if God didn't know what to do.

ACTS 10:16 "This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven." Why was this vision repeated three times? Because people learn by repetition. He didn't get the meaning the first time because he was shocked. He didn't get it the second time because he was standing on the tradition and background of prejudice. The third time was the first time the real meaning of the message sank into his mind and the real message came through loud and clear. All his life he had lived on the idea that the Mosaic law told him he could not eat those animals. Now a high voice was speaking and Simon Peter was trying to adjust his hearing aid so he could pick up the tones of the new message. But in a very few hours Simon Peter was going to learn what the Gentile Pentecost was all about.

Legalism Defiles What God Has Cleansed

The Doctrine of Unlimited Atonement means that when Christ went to the cross and died, all the sins of all men were judged. He took the cup and drank every sin of every man. This is called the baptism of the cup, for Christ identified himself with every sin of every man in the world. But legalism won't accept this. Legalism says that man has to do something, like feel sorry for his sins, or mourn over his sins, or join a church, or be baptized. Legalism says a man must live by the golden rule and fit into a certain mould of morality. But remember--in GRACE God does the work, man

does the receiving, and God gets the credit. Under LEGALISM man does the work and God is supposed to receive what man does, and man gets the credit. Legalism comes along and says, "No, you can't be saved just by grace alone. Man has to do something. Man has to help God."

Under the plan of the grace of God there is no place for man to take any credit or do any work to gain favor with God. Spirituality is not being moral, or showing up at church every Sunday, or tithing or anything else you may do to get favor with God. Sometimes the worst hypocrite can look pious and put on a "sweet" front. But remember human sweetness does not denote spirituality. Spirituality is not respectability. Legalism makes you believe that you gain favor with God by what you do. The important thing is not what you do, but who controls your life while you do it. You can't buy freedom from a guilt complex by being good, giving money or saying prayers and looking pious.