

I Have a Dream (part 1)

(Acts 10:1-23)

Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Big Idea: Jesus prepares us for big things by leading us first through small steps of obedience.

Respond to what Jesus has already revealed [Acts 10:1-8]

1. [1-2] Introduced to Cornelius
 - a. [1] Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea.
 - i. Centurion: Commander over 100 soldiers; part of a cohort of 600 stationed there.
 - ii. He makes 5 times the income of the average soldier; he's rich, powerful, and socially prominent.
 - iii. Caesarea: 31 mi north of Joppa; regional headquarters of Roman government in Judea.
 - b. [2] He's a non-Jewish person who has come to believe, honor & worship the God of Israel.
 - i. [2a] He led his whole family and household to faith & worship of the one true God.
 - ii. Though a "God-fearer", he has not yet been saved by faith in Jesus.
 - iii. [2b] Expresses his faith through generous giving to the poor (like Tabitha; cf. 9:36) & constant prayer.
 - c. Application: Do you respond to God's love & work in your life by generously blessing others & seeking Him in prayer throughout your day?
2. [3-6] Cornelius receives a vision from Jesus
 - a. [3] 3 PM, Cornelius sees an angel calling him by name.
 - i. Angel: "Messenger"; supernatural spirit being, sent by God to speak for Him to people at times.
 - b. [4] The reason for the vision: God responds to Cornelius' limited faithfulness.
 - i. [4a] Cornelius is terrified, and inquires about the purpose of the visitation.
 - ii. [4b] The angel responds: Cornelius' prayers & giving please God.
 - iii. Cornelius obeyed what little he knew about God, so the Lord responds to reveal more.
 - c. [5-6] God's instruction: Send men to get Simon Peter in Joppa.
 - i. Why? So he can hear the good news about Jesus from Simon Peter.
 - ii. Why doesn't the angel tell him? Jesus empowers His followers to be His chosen vehicle of the gospel.
 1. Jesus also wants the first believing Gentile household to be confirmed by an apostle.
 - d. Cornelius is God-fearing & ethical, but even "good" people can only be saved by hearing the gospel.
 - i. However, God affirms Cornelius' acts of worship/seeking, & leads him discover more about Jesus.
3. [7-8] Cornelius' response
 - a. He immediately obeys, informing & sending out his servants and a soldier.
 - b. Before Cornelius can experience the most important change in his life (faith relationship with Jesus), he had to respond in little steps of obedience to what Jesus already revealed to him.
 - c. Application: Before we can experience more of Jesus, respond in obedience to what He's already revealed.
 - i. For Jesus to entrust with big things (plans/changes), are we faithful with little things (cf. Matt 25:23)?
 - ii. We do not experience more because we fail to respond to what Jesus already revealed for us to do.
 - iii. What are some little steps of obedience Jesus has laid out for you this week?

Jesus overcomes our cultural prejudices for the gospel [Acts 10:9-23]

1. [9-16] Peter receives a vision from Jesus
 - a. [9] 12 PM, Peter is praying on the roof, where it's relatively peaceful & private.
 - i. Hebrew culture: Flat roof area where regular household activities occur (drying fruit, clothes, etc).

- ii. So common, God provides Mosaic Law for roof railing to prevent injuries (cf. Deut 22:8).
 - b. [10] Peter gets hungry at lunchtime, but falls into a vision trance
 - i. [11-12] Cloth from Heaven (from God) filled with animals (clean & unclean; Lev 11:2-47) descends.
 - ii. [13] Peter is instructed by Jesus to sacrifice & eat them.
 - c. Peter & Jesus' responses
 - i. [14] Peter's response: No way! He always followed the Mosaic Old Testament Law regarding food.
 - ii. [15] Jesus' response: What God has made clean, don't call unclean/unholy/common.
 - iii. [16] Peter resists, so the vision is repeated for a total of 3 times.
 - d. Even when God speaks, it's hard to change the culture (customs, habits, preferences) we grew up with.
- 2. [17-20] Peter's dilemma
 - a. [17-18] Peter's confusion
 - i. [17] Peter ponders what the vision means; it's not just about one's diet.
 - ii. [18] The 3 Gentile visitors find where Peter is staying & call out for him.
 - b. [19-20] The Holy Spirit instructs Peter to get up & go with the ones He sent "without hesitation."
 - i. **Without hesitation**: Literally, do not separate yourself from them (as superior); make distinction between them & you; pass judgment on them (based on preconceived notions).
 - c. [21] Peter obeys this first step, meeting the visitors & inquires about the purpose of the visitation.
 - d. [22] They're sent by Cornelius (a Roman centurion), directed by an angel, to bring Peter to his home.
 - i. Reason to fear: Their government oppresses his people; their soldiers killed his Lord & Master.
 - ii. Reason to trust: Cornelius worships God, has a good reputation with the Jews, & was sent by God.
 - e. In their culture, Jews are not allowed to eat unclean food (cf. Lev 11), nor with "unclean" people who do.
 - i. They have additional man-made, cultural rules/religion (not in the Bible):
 - ii. [M. 'ohol 18.7] "The dwelling place of Gentiles is unclean."
 - iii. [Jubilees 22.16] "Separate yourself from the nations; do not eat with them. Do not according to their works; become not their associate, for their works are unclean, & all their ways are uncleanness."
- 3. Jesus overcomes cultural prejudices for the sake of the gospel
 - a. What does the vision mean? Is it really just about food?
 - i. Jesus is doing something new: Taking all the food/cultures/people considered separate, unclean & unholy, and by faith in Him, making them clean, joining them into His family/body/church.
 - ii. What separates Jews & Gentiles has been removed; all may come to Jesus by faith.
 - b. God isn't just dealing with external behavior/customs, but internal condition of Peter's heart toward "outsiders"
 - i. Before Peter & Jesus' followers can take the good news to Gentile cultures/peoples, Jesus must overcome their cultural prejudices for the sake of the gospel.
 - c. [23] Peter's response: He obeys Jesus.
 - i. [23a] He invites them into his home.
 - ii. [23b] He goes with them to stay in Gentile Cornelius' "unclean/unholy" home.
 - iii. Jesus changed his perspective, preferences, prejudices to move the gospel beyond his comfort zone.
 - d. Jesus calls us as the Church to take the Gospel & Kingdom of God into the world/cultures around us.
 - i. Like Peter, we must go to them "without hesitation": Without separation, making distinction between them/us, judging based on preconceived stereotypes that we rationalize as acceptable.
- 4. **Application**: Before we can take the good news to all peoples/cultures, Jesus must overcome our cultural prejudices.
 - a. What cultural biases/prejudices is Jesus telling you to face? That you need Him to root out of your heart?
 - b. What needs to change in your attitude, assumptions, preferences & treatment of those different from you?
 - c. How do you need to embrace people culturally different than you, as fellow believers & family in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28; Rev. 7:9)?
 - d. Will you welcome them into your church or home? Without hesitation, separation, discrimination?

Conclusion

- 1. This is one of the major turning points in Acts; from here on out, everything changes.
 - a. The disciples' understanding of grace changes: It is for everyone who will believe, regardless of culture.
 - b. It changes who the church will be, what the church will do.
- 2. We don't follow any one leader's vision for the church; we must follow God's dream for the church.
 - i. It is obedience to Jesus' command to take the gospel from our personal/cultural Jerusalem, to the end of the earth & people of every background/culture (cf. Acts 1:8).
 - b. It starts with asking: Lord Jesus, what's the next thing You want me to do?
 - c. As He opens our eyes to His great redemption story for people of all cultures, repent of our prejudices.