**Doubting Peter**

(Acts 10:17-22)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A married couple who worked for the circus wanted to adopt a child, but the adoption agency was doubtful that a circus environment would be a good place to raise a child. So the couple assured the adoption agent that they would hire a tutor to teach the child as they traveled, and a nanny to watch it while they were busy working. Hearing that, the agent was satisfied, so he asked them, “What age child were you hoping to adopt?” They replied, “It doesn’t really matter, as long as he fits in the canon.”

 Well, while the adoption agency doubted that circus life would be good for a young boy, as we return to our study of Acts 10, we see the Apostle Peter doing some doubting of his own:

 **“Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate” (Acts 10:17).**

If you know the context of our text here in Acts 10, you know what “vision” Peter was talking about. God had showed Peter a vision of some unclean animals and told him to eat them—something Peter’s *Bible* told him *not* to do. That’s why it says Peter had his doubts about this vision.

 And in the Bible, the word “doubt” is the opposite of the word *believe,* as we see when the Lord said,

 **“…whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not *doubt* in his heart, but shall *believe* that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23).**

Can you see how that verse defines the word “doubt” as the opposite of “believe”? And the word *believe* is the verb form of the noun *faith.* That’s why Matthew’s version of the Lord’s words there quote Him as having said,

 **“If ye have *faith*, and *doubt not…*if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matthew 21:21).**

Isn’t it wonderful the way the Bible will define its own words if you let it?

 But that means when it says Peter *doubted* what the vision should mean, it’s not saying he didn’t *understand* what it meant. I mean, what’s so hard to understand about an order to eat some bacon? If you told me that, you wouldn’t have to explain what you meant. No, it’s saying that Peter didn’t want to *believe* what the vision should mean, for it meant disobeying the Word of God.

 And may I remind you that that’s a good attitude to have if someone tells *you* to do something that is contrary to what the Bible says. When that happens, put that someone on the pay-no-mind list. I don’t care if he says he saw a vision like Peter did, *ignore him—*for that’s what the Bible *says* to do:

 **“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams…saying, *Let us go after other gods…*and let us serve them; *Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet,* or that dreamer of dreams…” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).**

Now God often used *dreams* in Scripture to give men *visions,* as we see when Moses wrote,

**“If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him *in a vision*, and will speak unto him *in a dream”* (Numbers 12:6).**

So if someone comes to you and says, “I have a dream that all God’s children should di the opposite of what the Bible says,” *do what the Bible says instead.* And listen, these days there are *plenty* of people running around saying they had a dream, or a vision, or that God spoke to them in some way *other* than the written Word of God. Don’t give people like that the time of day.

 Now you may be thinking, “But Peter didn’t hear about this dream from some false prophet, *he himself* saw this vision. Well, that’s why Verse 17 says that he “doubted *within himself.”* When his vision contradicted his Bible, he refused to believe it *even though he’s the one that dreamed it.*

 And if his doubts sound familiar, it is because they are the same doubts you hear from Christians when you try to do what God was trying to do here with Peter. You see, with that vision God was trying to introduce Peter to the dispensational change He made back in Acts 9 when He saved Saul and ushered in the dispensation of grace—a dispensation in which we are not under the law that says you can’t eat bacon (Rom.6:14,15). Can I get an amen on that?

 And if you’ve ever tried to introduce another believer to dispensational truth, I’m sure you’ve seen the same kind of doubts that Peter had—because I see those same doubts *every week of my life.* Not a week goes by at *Berean Bible Society* where I don’t get an email that says, “What do you mean we don’t have to keep the sabbath?” Or, “What do you mean water baptism has no place in God’s program for today?” Or, “Do you mean to say you don’t believe God is still giving the gift of tongues, or the gift of healing?”

 Thankfully, every month in our *Berean Searchlight* magazine we feature letters from people who *at first* had their doubts about dispensational change, just as Peter did, but who ended up recognizing the Bible’s dispensational changes, as Peter also did. I share this with you to encourage you to *keep sharing dispensational truth,* because if you will, you too will find people who will accept it.

 But as Peter doubted, Verse 17 says that the men from Cornelius arrived and made enquiry for Simon’s house, for Peter was staying in the home of a tanner named Simon (10:6). You may remember that Cornelius had *also* seen a vision, instructing him to send for Peter. And Simon evidently had a house with a fence and a gate. I guess that means tanning hides paid pretty well in those days! But since they didn’t have intercoms back then, the men from Cornelius stood before Simon’s gate and did what it says as we read on in our text:

**“And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there” (Acts 10:18).**

 Now here I want you to remember what Peter was doing when he was given that vision. Acts 10:9,10 tells us that he was *praying.* And in our last lesson, we saw evidence that he was praying about *reaching the Gentiles.* And while he was praying, God answered him right away *by sending him three Gentiles.* Now if that kind of *immediate* answer to prayer sounds familiar, it’s because of what we read in Isaiah 65:24:

**“…it shall come to pass, that before they call, *I will answer*; and while they are yet speaking, *I will hear”* (Isaiah 65:24).**

Now I know that there are Christians who are quick to quote this verse when God answers their prayers quickly. But when they pray for weeks, or months, or years, and *don’t* receive an answer to their prayers, they wonder why God isn’t keeping His promise—or at least they should if they are consistent.

 But you’ll notice that Isaiah said that “it shall come to pass” that God will answer prayer that way. That means it *wasn’t* coming to pass back when he wrote those words, but it *would* come to pass sometime in the future. And you know he wasn’t thinking of *today,* for he went on to say in the very next verse,

**“…while they are yet speaking, I will hear. *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together*, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. *They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,* saith the Lord” (Isaiah 65:24,25).**

If that’s what you see when you go to the zoo, I want to know which zoo you go to, for that would be the worth the trip to see!

 But if you wouldn’t expect to see that at the zoo, why would you expect God to answer prayer that way? There’s a reason the zoo keeps those critters in separate cages, and the reason is that the animals are not going to act that way until Christ returns and establishes the kingdom of heaven on earth. And *that’s* when God will start to keep His promise to answer prayer *instantaneously.*

Of course, I can just hear someone object, “But Peter’s not in the kingdom!” And that’s true, but God was giving him a *taste* of the kingdom to assure him that while Israel may have *rejected* the kingdom *the kingdom was still coming.* God wasn’t about to let man stop His plans from coming to fruition.

 And Peter is *also* getting a taste of what that kingdom will be like when *another* of Isaiah’s prophecies comes true, the one we read about in Isaiah 2:2,3 when

**“…it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains…*and all nations shall flow unto it.* And many people shall go and say, Come ye, *and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord*, to the house of the God of Jacob; *and He will teach us of His ways…”***

When those Gentiles from Cornelius came knocking on Peter’s door, that was God’s way of assuring Peter that someday Israel will receive her kingdom and Gentiles will come knocking on Jewish doors to learn how to be saved, just as these men were doing.

 Now Peter still doesn’t know that these three Gentiles are downstairs at the gate. He’s still up on the housetop thinking about his vision, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee” (Acts 10:19).**

Of course, nowadays people have surveillance cameras at their gate or front door to let them know who’s come to see them. There a video online taken by such a camera near BBS that shows a *cougar* walking up to the picture window of this house, placing his paws on the windowsill, and peering inside before trotting off. That reminds me of some good advice I heard many years ago: If you hear a panther, *don’t anther!*

But who needs cameras or intercoms when you’ve got the Holy Spirit to tell you who’s come to call as Peter did? But when Verse 19 says that “the Spirit *said”* to Peter that three men were there to see him, you know the Spirit doesn’t talk out loud today, don’t you? If you’re hearing voices today, I’d seriously advise you to seek professional help. Perhaps you heard about the psychiatrist who told his patient, “Turn off your cell phone, your GPS, and your Bluetooth headset and then let me know if you still hear the voices”!

Now It’s true that Isaiah said there’d come a time when men *would* hear the Spirit speak aloud. He wrote,

 **“…*thine ears shall hear a word behind thee,* saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it*…” (Isaiah 30:21).**

But again, the question is: *when* is this supposed to happen? And the answer is found in the rest of Isaiah’s prophecy in that passage:

**“This is the way, walk ye in it…*Moreover* the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold…*”* (Isaiah 30:21,26).**

Now I don’t care how bright the sun and moon are where you live, this prophecy is obviously not being fulfilled today. And the Spirit is not speaking aloud today either! There’s a reason God ties His prophecies together like that, so you’ll have some clues when you seek to know when those predictions will come to pass.

 But that means you shouldn’t be listening for voices telling you what to do. I always say that if you hear a voice behind you these days, it’s probably saying, “Give me your wallet!”

 Now I’m having fun with this, obviously. But just last week I received an email from a Christian woman who said that she listens for “a still small voice” when she’s trying to decide what to do (I Kings 19:12). But if you’ll study that passage you’ll see that God was telling Elijah that He wasn’t in the wind and or the earthquake or the fire that God showed His prophet, He was in *Elijah’s* still small voice, the voice that he was using to speak God’s Word in Israel. That verse has nothing to do with hearing a voice in your head telling you what to do.

 But I’ll tell you what. If you’ll study the Word of God enough, there is a sense in which you *will* hear the Spirit speaking to you in your head. Because if you’ll *saturate your mind* with God’s Word, your mind will start to *quote* what the Spirit said *in the Book He wrote* and tell you which way to walk. I hope that’s why you study the Word and attend a Bible-teaching church—to make God’s Word come to you like second nature in every situation in life.

 Now the reason God made sure Cornelius sent three men to Peter was that He had given Peter the vision *three times* (Acts 10:16). So when *three Gentiles* knocked at his door he’d be sure to make the connection that the Lord wasn’t just telling him that *bacon* was no longer unclean. He was telling him that *the Gentiles* were no longer unclean. Peter knew that that’s the reason God had made certain meats unclean in the first place (Lev.20:24,25).

 And if you want to know how Jews felt about Gentiles in those days, look what happened when Paul told some unsaved Jews who the Lord sent him to minister to:

 **“…He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. *And they gave him audience unto this word,* and then lifted up their voices, and said, *Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live”* (Acts 22:22).**

They listened to what Paul had to say right up until he said the word *Gentile,* and then the gloves came off and they were ready to relocate his head from the rest of his body. And Peter had lived his entire life in that sort of environment. Does that give you any idea of the kind of doubts that Peter was having when the Lord invited him to eat a BLT, knowing that meant that Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean? Do you see the kind of natural resistance he would have had to a message like that? It’s almost as bad as telling Bears fans that Packers are no longer unclean!

 Well, knowing that Peter was doubting within himself that the vision meant that Gentiles were no longer common or unclean, look what the Spirit went on to tell Peter in the next verse in our text:

 **“Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Acts 10:20).**

Now the reason the Spirit had to tell Peter to go with those men “doubting nothing” is that the Spirit knew that once Peter got downstairs and saw that his callers were Gentiles that he wasn’t going to want to go with them.

 This reminds me of something that happened when I was still in high school many years ago. A friend and I had stayed after school to work on a class project and missed the bus home, so I called an older friend who had a car and he came to help us. But once he saw my friend he probably didn’t *want* to give him a ride home, for he was a racist—and my friend was black. Well, he drove my friend home, then teased me about how I’d tricked him.

 But I’d been witnessing to him for some time, and bringing him to church. And a few years later God gave *me* a taste of the kingdom when he knocked on my door and said, “I think it’s time I got saved.” He trusted Christ as his Savior that day, and I’m happy to say that he is no longer a racist. This change in his natural resentment didn’t come automatically once he was saved, of course. It takes an infusion of Bible doctrine and spiritual growth to effect changes like that.

But I share this with you to encourage you to keep witnessing to your unsaved friends and maybe that’ll happen to you too. The way to fix racism isn’t with marches and protests of that nature. The way to fix racism is to lead people to Christ and teach them God’s Word.

But Peter’s natural resistance to Gentiles was about to start to change, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?” (Acts 10:21).**

Now there’s something I should mention here that you may have been wondering about, and that is—what’s Peter doing on the roof? I know he’s been praying, but who goes on the roof to pray? If you live in a rural area, or you’re a suburbanite like me, the reason might not be readily apparent. But do you remember the 1962 song by The Drifters, “Up On The Roof”? It’s a song about how the rooftop is the only place that city dwellers can go to get away from “the hustling crowd, and all that rat race noise down in the street.”

Well, if secular history can be trusted, we know that the city of Jerusalem was about the same. If you lived there, you had no yard in which to go out and pray, like I do at night to get away from the noise in the house. The houses were all “joined hard” to one another (Acts 18:7). That is, they shared a common wall, and the only place you could find a quiet place in which to pray was on the housetop.

And if the great Apostle Peter thought it was a good idea to get away from people to pray, you probably should too—no matter how much you love your family’s noise! Make some time in your life to pray, and it will make a difference in your life, and in the lives of those for whom you pray.

Well, let’s finish by reading what the men from Cornelius said to Peter in Acts 10:22:

**“And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee” (Acts 10:22).**

And the “words” that the angel wanted Cornelius to hear weren’t just any words. Later when Peter was telling the story of what happened that day on the rooftop, we learn that the angel told Cornelius,

**“Send men to Joppa, and call for…Peter; who shall tell thee words, *whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved”* (Acts 11:13,14).**

The words that Cornelius needed to hear were *the words of the gospel.* Of course, as a Gentile he didn’t *qualify* to hear the gospel and get saved until after all Israel was saved first. We’ve seen this in previous studies, so here I’ll just say that this explains why Elijah the prophet was so insensitive when a Gentile widow told him that she and her son were out of food and were about to dine on their last meal, and Elijah told her,

 **“…make me thereof a little cake *first*, and bring it unto me, and *after* make for thee and for thy son” (I Kings 17:13).**

 Now if you didn’t know anything about the Bible, you’d say that Elijah wasn’t just a Jewish racist who hated Gentiles. You’d say he was a selfish monster, for only a selfish monster would tell *any* widow, Jew or Gentile, to feed him before feeding herself and her son. But if you *do* know your Bible you know that as a Gentile she didn’t qualify for *any* kind of blessing from God until *Elijah* was full of God’s blessing *first.*

And that’s the kind of thing that Cornelius did! The reason Verse 22 says that he had a good report among all the nation of the Jews was due to what we read about him back in Acts 10:2, where it describes him as

  **“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.”**

You may remember we discovered that “alms” consisted of aid given to poor people to help them, and “the people” to whom Cornelius gave *his* alms were *the people of Israel.* So he *did* qualify to hear the gospel! And in our next lesson, we’ll see Peter share the words of eternal life with him.

 But if you’re not saved, you don’t need to bless the seed of Abraham in order to *be* saved. You just need to know you’re wrong if you think God will let you into heaven if your good works outweigh your bad works.

 Stop and think for a moment. Does that seem fair? that God would send you to hell for all eternity because you told one too many lies, or coveted your neighbor’s possessions once more than someone who got to go to heaven? That certainly wouldn’t be fair to you, and it wouldn’t be fair to God to allow someone with one less sin into heaven, and have His paradise filled with people who hadn’t *paid* for their sins.

 Doesn’t it seem more likely that God only lets people into heaven who believe that *Christ* paid for their sins, and that He is their only hope of salvation. That’s not only more reasonable and logical, it’s the truth of the gospel of salvation for today. Why not “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).