**The Answer to Peter’s Prayer**

(Acts 10:9-16)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 One Sunday a faith healer was praying over people, and “healing” them of their different diseases, when a rather healthy-looking young man stepped up to him. When he asked the young man, “And how can I pray for you?” he replied, “I’d like you to pray for my hearing.” So the faith healer cupped his hands over the young man’s ears, prayed some mumbo jumbo in tongues, and then asked, “Did that help your hearing?” The young man answered, “I don’t know, my hearing isn’t until Tuesday.”

 Speaking of praying, we know that the Apostle Peter was a praying man, for we’re about to catch him praying in the first verse of our text:

 **“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” (Acts 10:9).**

Now as you can see, as Peter was *about* to pray, some people were on their way to see him. And if you know this passage, you know who they were! Earlier in Acts 10, God appeared in a vision to a Gentile named Cornelius and told him:

 **“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 sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:5,6).**

And these men are the men who are now arriving to see Peter in verse 9. And I think that they are the answer to Peter’s prayer.

Now you may be wondering, “How do you know what Peter was praying?” Well, I can’t be sure, of course, but look at what it says about Peter as we read on in our text:

 **“And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance” (Acts 10:10).**

 Now a *trance* is the same kind of thing as the *vision* that Cornelius had. We know this to be so for later, when Peter was relating the story, he said,

 **“I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a *trance* I saw a *vision*…” (Acts 11:5).**

So God gave *Cornelius* a trance vision to instruct him to send for Peter, and now He’s giving *Peter* a trance vision to prepare him to *receive* those men. God wanted to make sure that they were all on the same page!

 And when it says that he was *hungry* before falling into this trance, I think that his hunger gives us a clue as to what he was praying about. I say that because Peter’s *Lord* was hungry once, and it is easy to see how *His* hunger was symbolic of something that *He* had been praying about. Do you remember this account?

**“Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and…on the morrow *He was hungry:* And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves…And Jesus answered and said unto it, *No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever”* (Mark 11:11-14).**

Now the fig tree is a type of *the nation Israel* (Hosea 9:10), and there in Mark 11 the Lord was just finishing up his three-year ministry to the nation, so His hunger was symbolic of his hungerfor spiritual fruit in Israel! And since He too was a praying man, I think it is safe to say that He’d been *praying* for fruit in Israel.

 But all this fig tree had was *leaves.* And we know that fig leaves in the Bible are symbolic of *religion,* for after Adam sinned and he and the missus went into the seamstress and tailoring business, they sowed fig leaves together *to try to hide their sin.* And that’s all religion is—man’s attempt to cover up his sin, the way Adam and Eve tried to cover theirs.

 And as the Lord looked at the nation of Israel, He saw plenty of fig *leaves—*plenty of religious activity, for the Jews were very religious—but their religion wasn’t producing spiritual fruit. That demonstrates the power that man has to corrupt things, for in this case men were able to take a God-given religion and render it bereft of spiritual fruit.

 But that’s why the Lord cursed the fig tree! And if you don’t understand that, and you’re what the world calls a “tree-hugger,” that passage is going to give you *fits,* for you are bound to ask,“Why would that mean ol’ Jesus curse an innocent tree just for not bearing fruit?”

 And there was *another* reason the Lord cursed the tree. That fig tree *lied* to Him. Did you notice that Mark said when the Lord found that the tree had no fruit, “Jesus *answered* and said unto it…” That tree *said something* to the Lord, and what it said *was a lie.*

You see, most trees have leaves before they have fruit, but fig trees are the very *opposite.* They bear fruit and *then* they bear leaves. So when the Lord’s fig tree had leaves, it was telling Him that it had fruit. It was saying, as it were, “Come satisfy your hunger with fruit from my branches.” So He cursed the tree for lying to Him.

 And that lie was symbolic of the lie that Israel’s religious leaders were telling the Lord with all of their religious activity! They were telling the Lord, as it were, “We have leaves. That means we must also have fruit. We have religious activity, so we must also have spiritual fruit.” *But they didn’t.* And few things got the Lord angrier than empty religion.

 Take some time to study the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ as we read of it in the record of the four gospels and you’ll see that he was very *patient* with sinners like publicans and harlots, but He gave *scathing and withering rebukes* to religious hypocrites like the scribes and Pharisees.

 But if the Lord’s hunger for spiritual fruit reflected His *prayers* for spiritual fruit, then I think *Peter’s* hunger here in our text reflected *his* prayers for spiritual fruit in Israel as well. Remember, he and the other eleven apostles had just finished tacking on yet *another* year of ministry to Israel, and *still* those unsaved Jews weren’t bearing any spiritual fruit. And he was *hungry* for it, and was no doubt *praying* for it as well.

 And I think he was *also* starting to hunger for fruit among *the Gentiles*. Don’t forget, before the Lord ascended into heaven He *sent* Peter to the Gentiles, saying:

**“Go ye therefore, *and teach all nations…”* (Matthew 28:19).**

The problem was that the Lord had *also* told him

**“…that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:47).**

We’ve seen many times in our studies that this meant God’s plan was to get the nation of Israel saved *first,* and then use that nation to reach the *other* nations, as God told the Jews in Isaiah 49:6:

**“*I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles,* that thou mayest be My salvation *unto the end of the earth”***

But the nation of Israel “hinted” that they didn’t *want* to get saved when they crucified the Lord and stoned His prophet. And I think that left Peter *hungering* to get on with his commission for fruit among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews. After all, why should the Gentiles not get to hear the gospel just because the nation of Israel didn’t receive it?

 And the reason I think that Peter was thinking about the Gentiles is that he was in *Joppa,* which was by the sea side (Acts 10:5,6). And what did we learn in our last lesson about the sea? The sea is a symbol of the Gentiles, as we saw when God told the Jews,

**“…the abundance of *the sea* shall be converted unto thee, the forces of *the Gentiles* shall come unto thee” (Isaiah 60:5).**

So I bet that being by the sea side had Peter thinking about the Gentiles—*and* of how he came to be in Joppa in the first place. In case you forgot what brought him there, let’s back up to Acts 9:36-38 and review:

 “**Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.**

 **“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.**

 **“And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.”**

Peter was minding his own business in Lydda when a Jewish damsel died in Joppa—a damsel who we saw represented *saved Jews*. Jews were saved by faith plus works under the kingdom program, and this damsel was “full” of good works. So when Peter proceeded to raise her from the dead, that was a type of how someday saved Jews will rise from the dead in Israel’s resurrection.

 And do you know what’ll happen then? That’s when the Gentiles will be “converted,” as the prophet predicted in that verse we just considered in Isaiah 60:5. So I think that God brought Peter to Joppa to raise a Jew from the dead and minister to a Gentile to assure him that the Gentiles *will* be reached someday and bear spiritual fruit *after Israel rises from the dead.*

If you’re thinking, “Well that’s a stretch,” just wait; hear me out. Because—at the risk of sounding like an infomercial—“Wait! There’s more!”

 The city of Joppa isn’t mentioned too often in the Bible, but when Solomon started to build the temple, a Gentile named Huram offered to help him:

**“Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the Lord…And Solomon sent to Huram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, even so deal with me. Behold, I build an house to the name of the Lord my God…And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods….Send me…cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees…Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great… Then Huram the king of Tyre answered…we will cut wood…as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in *floats* by *sea* to *Joppa;* and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem” (II Chronicles 2:1-16).**

Now you’ll notice that Huram said he’d “float” his timber down to Joppa. If you can remember learning about the logging industry in school, you know that loggers have always chopped down trees and then used water to transport the logs whenever it was available. And Joppa was the closest seaport to Jerusalem! So Huram told Solomon, I’ll float the logs for the temple to Joppa, and from there you can carry them to Jerusalem.”

 But can you see why being in Joppa might get Peter to thinking about Gentiles like Huram, since that’s one of the few times Joppa is referenced in Scripture?

 But wait! There’s more! When saved Jews rise from the dead and get their kingdom, Gentiles like Huram are going to do what Isaiah 60:5 *said* they will do—get “converted” *and send their valuables to Jerusalem to build up the temple,* just as Huram did, as we see in a fuller quotation of Isaiah 60:5:

**“…the abundance of the seashall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee…*they shall bring gold…and I will glorify the house of My glory*…Surely the isles shall…bring…their silver and their gold …Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles…the fir tree…to beautify the place of My sanctuary…” (Isaiah 60:5-16).**

That means what Huram did to help beautify the temple was a type of what Isaiah says Gentiles will do in the kingdom.

 So I think God bought Peter to Joppa to remind him that someday saved Jews will rise from the dead and the Gentiles will hear the gospel at that time and bear the spiritual fruit in Israel that he was hungering and praying for.

 But God has *also* brought Peter to the sea side to let him know how God planned to reach the Gentiles *in the meantime.* You see, He just saved Saul back in Acts 9, and later we learn what the Lord told Saul that day on Damascus Road:

**“I have appeared unto thee *for this purpose,* to make thee a minister and a witness …Delivering thee from…the Gentiles, *unto whom now I send thee…”* (Acts 26:16,17).**

The Lord had just sent Saul to the Gentiles, and here in Acts 10, God is about to prepare Peter to *introduce* Paul’s new ministry among the Gentiles by sending *him* to a Gentile named Cornelius! But despite Peter’s hunger for fruit among the Gentiles, we’re about to see that Peter didn’t want to *go* to the Gentiles!

And that’s kind of interesting, because Saul didn’t want to go to the Gentiles either! So when the Lord *sent him* to the Gentiles, he headed to Jerusalem to preach to the Jews instead. To get him to change his mind, God put *him* in a trance, and gave *him* a vision too, as we see in Acts 22:17-21:

**“…when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, *I was in a trance;* And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, *and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem:* for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death…And He said unto me, Depart: *for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles”* (Acts 22:17-21).**

So now we have to ask why Saul didn’t want to go to the Gentiles. Well, there were a couple of different reasons.

 First, do you remember what happened to Saul after the Lord saved him?

**“…he was three days without sight, *and neither did eat nor drink”* (Acts 9:9).**

Do you think maybe Saul was *hungry* after not eating for three days? Here we have *yet another* hungry guy! And his hunger was *also* symbolic of *his* hunger for spiritual fruit in Israel, a hunger he expressed later when he wrote:

**“…my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, *that they might be saved”* (Romans 10:1).**

And we know that reaching unsaved Jews was even the desire of Paul’s heart from the time he was first saved, for the Lord had to appear to him in a vision to convince him to leave the Jews in Jerusalem to go to the Gentiles. You see, after Saul learned that he’d been wrong in telling his countrymen that Jesus wasn’t their Christ, he *longed* to minister to them, he *hungered* for fruit in Israel.

 And *that’s* why he didn’t want to go to the Gentiles. He wanted to go to the Jews instead!

 But there was also *another* reason. He knew God’s plan to reach the Gentiles included getting Israel saved first! We know that he knew this for he *quoted* this plan to a synagogue full of Jews in Antioch, saying:

 **“*I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles,* that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).**

As you can see, Paul quoted the verse from Isaiah that we considered earlier, the Isaiah 49:6 verse that made it clear that God would use the Jews to reach the Gentiles.

 So when Saul told the Lord that he didn’t want to go to the Gentiles, he was actually standing firmly on the revealed will of God as expressed in the Word of God.He told the Lord, as it were, “Your Word *says* the Jews have to be saved first, so I don’t want to go directly to the Gentiles.” That’s the only reason a God-fearing Jew like Saul would ever have the *chutzpah* to stand there and argue with God Himself.

 Did you know that that’s the same reason *Jonah* didn’t want to go to the Gentiles when God sent *him* to preach to them in Nineveh? He too was standing firmly on the written Word of God.

 You may be thinking, “But Pastor, in our last study you said that Jonah didn’t want to preach to the Gentiles because they’d slaughtered untold thousands of Jews, and Jonah wanted them to get what was comin’ to them, *not* get saved.” And that’s true! But where do you think he *got* an idea like that? He got it from the Word of God in Genesis 12:3, where God told the father of all Jews,

**“I will bless them that bless thee, *and curse him that curseth thee.”***

God *said* that He’d curse people who cursed Israel, as those Ninevites did when they slaughtered the Jews. So when Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be *cursed* and not saved, he was just wanting God to give them what He *said* He would give them!

 Did you know that Genesis 12:3 spawned an entire genre of psalms called the imprecatory psalms? Psalms where David and other Jewish writers prayed things like: “Get ‘em, Lord! Smite those nations!” People criticize the Bible for verses like that, but those people don’t understand what the prophet said to Israel in Zechariah 2:8:

**“…he that toucheth you *toucheth the apple of His eye.”***

The reason there was nothing unspiritual about imprecations such as we often see Jews express in Scripture is that troubling Israel involved *troubling God Himself!* Let me ask you: On the day the Lord saved Saul, did He ask him, “Why are you persecuting *My people?”* No! Instead He asked him, “why persecutest thou *Me?”* If you messed with God’s people, *you messed with God!*

 So when Jonah wanted to see the Ninevites *dead,* not saved, it wasn’t just because they persecuted his people. It was because they had persecuted his *God.* That’s why it wasn’t inappropriate for him to stand firmly on God’s Word and say to Him, as it were, “Your Word *says* you’d curse them, so I’m not going to go preach to them!”

 And all of that brings us back to Peter. You see, God is about to send *him* to a Gentile named Cornelius, and Peter isn’t going to want to go either!And *he too* is going to stand firmly on the Word of God to make his case, as we see as we read on in our text. After hearing that the Lord put him in a trance, we read what he saw in that vision:

 **“And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:**

**“Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.**

 **“And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.**

 **“But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:11-14).**

Now first, I should mention that whenever I picture this sheet full of animals, I always envision those pictures we see of the stork delivering a sheet full of baby. Isn’t that the kind of sheet that you picture here? By the way, do you know why storks don’t deliver babies with diapers on? It’s because when they arrive, God wants them to be *stork naked!*

But do you know why Peter *refused* to rise, kill and eat those animals? It’s because there were “all manner” of animals in that sheet. That means there were some clean animals and some animals that were *unclean* according to the Word of God in Leviticus 11. So in refusing the Lord’s command to kill and eat those unclean animals, Peter was standing firmly on the written Word of God, just as Jonah did before him.

 And let me remind you that verse 10 says he was “*very* hungry.” That means that even though he knew what the Bible said about eating unclean animals, he was *very* tempted not to obey it.

 Ever been there? You know what the Bible says about lying, and stealing, and lusting, and coveting, and losing your temper, but you find yourself tempted to sin those sins anyway? When that happens, why not do what Peter did *and stand firmly on the Word of God—*the Word of God that Paul wrote us in Colossians 3:9,10 when he said,

**“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; *And have put on the new man,* which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.”**

When tempted to lie to someone, just say, “God doesn’t see me as a liar any more, He sees me as a new man who *cannot* lie, so I’m not *going* to lie!”

Of course, one of the reasons that Peter refused to eat unclean animals is because of the reason that God said those animals were unclean in the first place:

**“I am the Lord your God, *which have separated you from other people.* Ye shall *therefore* put difference between clean beasts and unclean…for I the Lord am holy, *and have severed you from other people*, that ye should be Mine” (Leviticus 20:24-26).**

God told Jews to consider some *meats* unclean as a constant, daily reminder that *the Gentiles* were unclean. That means that Peter knew full well what God was trying to tell him with this vision, as we see later when Peter explains it to Cornelius in the next chapter:

**“…Peter…said…*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 shewed me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean” (Acts 10:26-28).**

So Peter didn’t want to go to the Gentiles for the same reason Jonah didn’t want to go. He was standing on God’s Word! God had said in His Word that those animals and Gentiles were unclean, so he wasn’t going to eat those animals, and he certainly wasn’t going to go to the Gentiles!

 But as we read on we see how the Lord *answered* Peter’s Scriptural argument:

 **“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15).**

As you can see, God was implementing *a dispensational change,* a change wherein unclean animals would no longer be considered unclean, and unclean Gentiles would *also* no longer be considered unclean.

But this is one of those verses where the most important word in the verse is one of the *smallest* words. See that word “hath”? That word is *past tense.* That means that God *had* cleansed unclean animals and Gentiles sometime *prior* to Peter’s vision. And what He’s talking about, of course, is how He cleansed them back in Acts 9 when He saved Saul and inaugurated the dispensation of grace wherein *many* of Israel’s laws were negated.

 And the reason I say that this small word is important is that many Christians believe that the change in God’s diet laws came here in Acts 10 with Cornelius. But the truth is that this is just where Peter *found out* about this dispensational change. It’s not where the dispensational change was made.

 But if you know anything about Peter, you know that he was a little on the thick-headed side! So it is not surprising to see how our text ends in Acts 10:16:

 **“This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”**

The Lord gave Peter this vision three times *to make sure he got the message.*

And that wasn’t the only time the Lord had to speak to Peter thrice. If you’ll compare the different gospel narratives that describe how the Lord called Peter to follow Him, you’ll find that He had to call him three times before the ol’ boy started to follow Him! Then when the Lord told Peter that he would *deny* Him, He knew Peter wouldn’t believe that, so He predicted that he’d deny Him *three times.* The law said that every matter had to be established by two or three witnesses, and Peter fell more into the “three” category.

 I mention that because—maybe you do too. Maybe *you too* are a little on the thick-headed side like me, and you too need to be told things three times before they sink in. If so, that’s okay. There’s certainly worse people to be like than Peter! And if God could use *him* mightily, then there’s hope for the likes of us as well.

 But the main reason the Lord gave Peter this vision three times is found in something we read earlier in this chapter:

 **“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” (Acts 10:7,8).**

So how many men did Cornelius send to Peter? Three! So when the Lord told Peter three times that unclean animals are no longer unclean, and then three Gentiles showed up at his door, that was just the Lord’s way of making sure that His thick-headed apostle made the connection and understood that *the Gentiles* were no longer unclean.

 Now in closing, I should mention that just this past week I read a Bible commentary that suggested that Peter was a Jewish bigot for not wanting to go to the Gentiles. But we can prove that wasn’t the case, either for Peter or for any of the other Jewish kingdom saints who were “preaching the word *to none but unto the Jews only”* (Acts 11:19). Look what those Jewish kingdom saints said after Peter told them that God had sent him to the Gentiles:

 **“When they heard these things, they held their peace, *and glorified God,* saying, *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”* (Acts 11:18).**

Those Jewish saints *rejoiced* when they heard that God had sent Peter to the Gentiles! That doesn’t sound like the reaction you’d expect to hear if they were racial bigots!

Of course, as we shall see, they gave Peter grief when they first heard about it, for they too understood that Jews were supposed to be saved before salvation could go to the Gentiles. But once they heard that God had lifted that restriction and Gentiles were getting saved, they rejoiced!

 You say, “How come Christians don’t rejoice when I tell *them* about dispensational changes in the Bible?” Well, as we’ll see later in our study of Acts, not *all* Jews rejoiced in the change. Unsaved Jews were displeased, and they caused a lot of trouble for Paul’s new Gentile converts in Galatia, and in other places as well.

 In the meantime, you need to make sure that people know that these Jewish saints weren’t racists by explaining what they were doing in ignoring the Gentiles. I say that because, as of this writing, there is a lot of racial tension in the United States, and Muslims are seeking to capitalize on it. I saw a billboard recently that announced that the Koran *forbids* racism, and then quotes one of its verses to prove it.

 And you know why they put that message up. It is to attract people who are looking for the answer to racism. Well, the Bible *has* the answer. It is salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ! The oneness shared by members of His Body is the only answer to the disunity and animosity found among the races. And the Bible doesn’t treat women as second class citizens like the Koran does either.

 Racism *of any kind* should have no place in your life. I say that because people sometimes ask me how I can continue to watch professional football now that some of the players have chosen to kneel during the national anthem that precedes NFL games. While some Christians might agree with the way they’ve chosen to protest racial inequality, but I know some sports fans who have quit watching football because of it.

 And while I have nothing but respect for their position, I personally refuse to judge *all* NFL players on the basis of the actions of some of them. In my mind, that’s just another form of racism, or stereotyping, or whatever you want to call it. But whatever you call it, it’s not fair to the rest of the players who are *not* kneeling during our national anthem.

 Of course, when I express this position, I sometimes hear: “But the team *owners* aren’t doing anything about it!” But Jerry Jones, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, told his players that they’d be disciplined if they did not respect our flag. So why judge all *owners* by the actions of some?

 You know, the Apostle Paul used examples from sporting endeavors in his own day to illustrate spiritual truths, and I’m sure that not all of those athletes were exemplary role models when it came to morals or values or any thing of that nature. And yet Paul felt comfortable in citing those athletes and their competitions, something I don’t think he would do if he felt the need to judge all of them based on the actions of some of them.

 And I say all so you know how *I* feel about this issue, and you won’t be disappointed if I allude to football teams or players in my lessons. But I also mention these things to get you to thinking of areas where *you* might be judging other groups of people based on the actions of a few of their members as well. Racism is an insidious evil that can rear its ugly head in ways that often go undetected without careful consideration, and I’m sure that God would have all of His children give that kind of consideration to others in all areas of life.

 If you do, you’ll be eternally glad you did.