

1. The Gospel Creates Humility Which Identifies With the “Unclean” (9:32)
 - a. Yet, the thing that Luke wants to let us know about this stay, even though Tabitha had been raised from the dead, and there must have been more going on, was that Simon stayed with a man named Simon
 - b. And he is particular about this Simon, "a certain Simon Bursei", or "Simon who prepares animal skins for use as leather, i.e. a tanner or a leather dresser"
 - i. Now, ancient tanning techniques were very malodorous - they stunk.
 1. The process involved soaking raw animal hides and pounding them to remove fats and flesh from the skins, stretched and scraped.
 2. Then, they had to remove the hair from the skin. This could be done in a few different ways, but none of them pleasant. They could soak them in urine for a number of days or let them putrefy for a few months then dip them in a salt solution.
 3. After the hair was removed, they would pound either dung or animal brains into the skin to make it softer and supple. This was often put into a solution in a large vat and kneaded by the tanner's feet for 2-3 hours
 4. Urine and feces had to be collected in order to be used to tan the hides
 - ii. Because of the odiferous nature of the tanner's industry, they were only allowed to have tanneries outside of town.
 1. According to the Mishnah (BB 2:9) a tannery should be situated on the east side of the town only, at least 50 cubits from the outskirts.
 2. Like an outhouse and a bathhouse, the tannery was exempted from having a mezuzah on the door post (Yoma 11a-b).
 - a. A mezuzah is a small scroll of Scripture, usually the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), attached to the doorframe.
 - b. So, tanners were not to attach the Scriptures to their doorframes because their work was deemed to be "unclean" and "unfit" for the Word
 - c. By extensions, tanners were also treated as such
 3. The residents of an alley or lane could prevent one of their neighbors from becoming a tanner (Mishnah, BB 21b).
 4. A synagogue building could not be sold for use as a tannery (Megillah 3:2).
 5. Like fullers and coppersmiths, tanners are exempted from appearing at the Temple on pilgrimage festivals because their unpleasant odor prevents them from going up with all the men (Ḥaggadah 7b), and forming a separate group is forbidden.
 6. The tanner's trade was among those from which neither king nor high priest might be appointed, not because the tanner is ritually unfit, but because his occupation is despised (Kid. 82a). Maimonides adds (Yad, Melakhim 1:6) that whoever has worked at this trade for even one day is unfit for the high offices.
 7. In the words of the Talmud: "The world can exist neither without a perfume-maker nor without a tanner – happy is he whose craft is that of a perfume-maker, and woe to him who is a tanner by trade."
 8. According to Ketubbot 70b (Talmud), a tanner (as well as a collector of dung for tanning), whether he plied his trade before marriage or took it up afterward, may be compelled to divorce his wife if she demands it.
 - c. The Kingdom of God is not found in the comforts of this world, but in the honor of the King and the identification with all of His beloved brothers, even those in the outskirts
 - i. All of this implies that Peter chose to stay with a poor, undignified, smelly man on the outskirts of Joppa "for a considerable number of days"
 - ii. It is recognized that Peter, having raised Tabitha from the dead, could have raked in considerable wealth, honor, privilege, comforts
 1. God did not ordain gold dust in his pocket, materialize jewels in his hands, or show His favor with a private jet - He sent him to stay with a tanner, to love that man well, to honor him by staying with him.

2. Consider: how many people wanted to stay with Simon the tanner? Would you?

2. The Gospel is For Unclean People: Enter Cornelius (10:1-2)

- a. in Caesarea
 - i. center of Roman administration in Roman Syria, which included Palestine
 - ii. center of Gentile influence, both military, political, and religious
 - iii. Herod the Great built many projects there
- b. a centurion
 - i. a junior officer over 100 men
 - ii. wide gap of social status between centurions and senior officers
 - iii. most centurions were non-commissioned officers who would gain Roman citizenship after 25 years of service
- c. of a cohort from Italy
 - i. a cohort is 600 men
 - ii. the phrase rhymes in Greek: the Italian Battalion
- d. Pious God-fearer
 - i. his entire household also had such piety
- e. alms-giver to the "people"
 - i. "people" refers to the Jewish nation
- f. beseecher of God
 - i. through all times

2. God is the Initiator to Call Outsiders to Salvation: The Vision to Cornelius (10:3-6)

- a. He saw a vision during evening prayers
 - i. 9th hour was the hour of the evening prayers at the Temple in Jerusalem
 - ii. This shows us how "pious" Cornelius truly was in regard to His knowledge and love of the LORD, the God who had revealed Himself to Israel
- b. This vision of an angel was "clear"
 - i. Luke uses a word to indicate the clarity, or openness, with which Cornelius apprehended this angel
 - ii. In other words, this wasn't a guess or a wonder – He knew that an angel was speaking to him
- c. He saw an angel from God
 - i. This angel "came up to him" and spoke to him
 - 1. This directional term indicates that the angel didn't just appear out of nowhere, but rather walked up to him, or entered the room
 - 2. Angels are messengers, it's what angel means
 - 3. This message was for Cornelius, specifically
 - ii. He addressed the angel with reverent fear
 - 1. He inquired like a servant, though he was a centurion
 - 2. He knew what it meant to be a humble submitter
 - 3. He recognized his powerlessness in the presence of the powerful
- d. The angel tells him to send for Peter
 - i. First, he encourages Cornelius by informing him that God has heard him
 - 1. God sees and knows that you love Him
 - 2. There is an intrinsic reminder that he does not need to be afraid, but that God is answering these prayers
 - ii. He refers to his prayers and generosity as a "memorial" before God
 - 1. That is, his prayers and works of mercy "reminded" God of His promise

2. Memorial, like the word ‘remember’, when related to God’s covenant promises, are not used because God has forgotten, but are used when God is taking action based upon those promises
 - a. “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42) does not mean, in case you forget, but rather act towards me as a king and I as your citizen.
 - b. “Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your merciful covenant love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD” (Ps 25:7)
 3. So God is informing Cornelius that He is moving to fulfill the promises which He made but had not yet fulfilled
 - a. Promise to bring in the nations as His inheritance? (Isa 55:5)
 - b. Promise to cleanse the people? (Isa 66:19-20)
 - iii. Cornelius is to send and bring Peter to Caesarea
 1. Why is this detail important?
 - a. Peter was to come to him, not him to Peter!
 2. The Lord is working a far greater conversion than merely that of Cornelius and his household
 - a. He is working the conversion of the Jewish Church into the global Church!
 - b. He is doing a great transformation into a Church unified not by cultural tradition, but solely on the works and fulfillment of Jesus Christ and His headship over all
 3. God divinely reveals that Peter is open to “unclean” people
 - a. He mentions, through the angel, that Peter is living with a tanner by the sea
 - b. This information is not merely geographical, but sociological – Peter is pushing the radical boundaries of certain relationships here (while toeing the party line in others, see Galatians 2)
 - iv. God doesn’t give Cornelius any details about why Peter, whom he doesn’t seem to know, is to come to him.
 1. A little like Abraham’s calling to go into a land that he did not know, Cornelius is being asked to send for a tanner’s friend whom he does not know.
 - a. He is being asked not to send for a rabbi, or a priest, or a synagogue leader, but for a tanner’s friend
 - b. The only thing that he could deduce is related to God’s hearing of his prayers as a memorial and the covenant promises related to such a thing
 2. It does show, however, that whatever Peter will say or do is necessary for God’s fulfillment of His promises for which Cornelius prayed
 - a. Though he was a pious man, he still NEEDED to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - b. Thus, this vision and Cornelius’ obedience to it, sets in motion the very means by which he would receive the gospel and therefore the Spirit of God in salvation
3. Faith Responds to God’s Call With Obedience: The Journey of Obedience (10:7-8)
- a. He calls faithful men
 - i. Two household servants
 - ii. One ‘right-hand soldier’
 1. Pious
 2. This was a fellow soldier who had a common faith as him in the LORD
 - b. He explained everything that he had seen to them

- i. He trusted them
 - ii. He entrusted them
 - c. He sends them to Joppa to find Peter
 - i. Just as he was told
 - ii. The essence of faith – the faith which obeys

- 4. God Cleanses the Unclean by Grace Through Faith in Jesus: The Vision to Peter (10:9-16)
 - a. Peter was praying the next day at noon
 - i. This was not normally a time of prayer, but rather a time for a meal
 - ii. Thus, he gets hungry
 - b. While waiting for his food, he “fell into a trance”
 - i. An “ecstasy” – an astonishment at what one perceives to be true
 - ii. There is an implication that both physical hunger and spiritual hunger (prayer) were the context which made him receptive to this particular vision “to kill and eat”
 - c. The vision which Peter receives is about God’s work to cleanse and welcome what has been called unclean and unwelcome
 - i. Four-cornered sheet
 - 1. Four corners of the earth
 - ii. All kinds of animals
 - 1. Directly from Genesis 1:20-24
 - 2. “birds” and “four-footed animals and reptiles”
 - a. God made them all – nothing is avoidable
 - i. 1 Tim 4:1-5
 - b. God made all people – nobody is avoidable
 - iii. He is commanded to kill them and eat them
 - 1. “kill” here has a note of sacrifice to it – to make this an offering to the Lord
 - 2. “to eat” was something which the Mosaic Law forbade – the eating of unclean animals
 - 3. Thus, the command is to eat something which Peter considered to be, and God had commanded Israel to distinguish itself by doing, an unclean animal as an offering to the Lord
 - iv. Peter refuses to do so by revealing his own righteousness in this area
 - 1. I think that Peter assumes that this is a test from the Lord to see if he will obey the Law
 - 2. He staunchly affirms his kosher commitment
 - v. God reorients the authority for what makes something clean: God does
 - 1. **If God makes something clean, it is clean**
 - 2. This had to be repeated three times for Peter
 - a. This brings to mind Jesus’ words about food, “It’s not what goes into the mouth which makes a person unclean, but what comes out of the heart.”
 - b. What was implicit in the teachings of Jesus now is made explicit in regards to people
 - 3. The thrice-repeated vision corresponds to the three men who arrive at Simon’s door immediately after the vision
 - a. Peter seems to understand that the food animals in the vision really corresponded to persons
 - b. V28 – “God has shown me that I should not call any person common, or unclean”
 - 4. The cleanliness laws of the Mosaic code were temporary to distinguish Israel from the nations around her, but with the coming of the Christ, the distinguishing mark is the Holy Spirit, not food or nationality or adherence to Mosaic customs

- a. More of this will be complicated in chapter 15 with the particularly Jewish rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant vs. the Spirit as the sign of the covenant based upon faith
 - vi. Both religious and irreligious people receive the forgiveness of sins and sanctification of the Spirit on the same basis: faith in Jesus Christ
 - 1. “cleansing” – *καθαρίζω*
 - 2. See Acts 15:9-11
 - a. God “cleansed their hearts by faith”
 - b. “Why do you put God to the test by placing a yoke on them which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”
 - c. “On the contrary, through the grace of Jesus Christ we believe to be saved, just as the manner of those”
 - 3. The events which follow Peter’s vision make it clear that God is declaring Gentiles to be clean through faith in Jesus, not by becoming Jewish proselytes before they can benefit in the Messianic promises.
5. Faith Responds to the Call to Welcome Outsiders With Obedience: The Vision to Peter Leads to the Welcome of Gentiles (10:17-23a)
- a. The men show up “while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision might mean”
 - i. Peter didn’t immediately understand it!
 - ii. The men seek him out, as God had directed Cornelius
 - b. The Spirit speaks to Peter while he is confused
 - i. “Look! THREE men are looking for you.”
 - ii. The Holy Spirit clearly indicates the number of men, which corresponds to the number of times the vision was given to Peter
 - c. The Lord reveals that He has sovereignly sent them
 - i. Peter is, therefore, to go with them without delay
 - ii. Here is the word “rise up” again, by the way
 - 1. Get up and go!
 - 2. BECAUSE I have sent them”
 - a. The “I” is emphatic
 - i. The impetus for Peter’s expediency in going with them is the work of God’s Spirit behind the scene
 - 3. Peter doesn’t yet know why, but He does know that God has sent them
 - a. We don’t always need to understand why God has commanded something, we only need to know what He has said.
 - b. God has not called us to comprehensively understand why He does things, only to believe that He has done them and to act accordingly
- d. Peter gains knowledge of why they came
 - i. They inform him that they are from Cornelius, a Gentile centurion who loves God and the Jewish people
 - ii. This clarified what the vision meant for Peter – He now understands that God is making “unclean” people “clean” through “what you have to say”
 - 1. The angel told Cornelius to have Peter come to his house!
 - a. This is a bold request, to ask a Jew to come to a Gentile house as a guest
 - b. Why? – Unkosher foods presumably made Gentile homes unclean
 - 2. It was their request to hear what Peter had to say that made it clear to him that God was calling Peter to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to Gentiles
- e. Upon hearing what God is doing (making the unclean clean) he welcomes them as guests
 - i. This was an unexpected invitation
 - 1. The odd word “entertain guests” has a double-meaning in the active form
 - a. The second meaning is “to surprise, wonder, at something unexpected”

- b. Thus, Luke is conveying by this word that such an invitation, to be guests in that house, was not expected by the three men
 - c. Peter is thus moving towards Gentiles unexpectedly, as a symbol of acceptance and honor towards them as guests
 - ii. A Jewish man has invited Gentile people into his house as guests
 - 1. While this act was not unlawful, for Levitical law required provision of food and clothing to the traveler (Deut 10:18-19)
 - 2. This would be lawful, for Peter could provide the “clean” food and clothing to the travelers
 - 3. Yet, it would become more problematic in Cornelius’ house, where the food was of Gentile tradition, not Jewish

Conclusion:

Peter is progressively learning this truth: that we were all, both Jew and Gentile, religious and irreligious, godly and pagan, four-footed creeping things, unclean and objectionable to the holy God. God has shown favor to us precisely because He does not show favoritism! God has cleansed us precisely because we were unclean! What we must never forget is that we were all unclean, sinners, enemies of God who boasted of our own filthy rags as if they were works of righteousness. The only way you and I became clean was because God cleansed us by his sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. If God didn’t clean us, we wouldn’t be clean. Thus, anyone whom we assume to be unclean is within the realm of salvation. The gospel is for all who will come.

Harry Ironside tells a story about this vision of Peter. When his father was dying, he kept muttering something which his family could not understand. Finally, somebody understood what he was trying speak. He was thinking about this vision of Peter, saying, “A great sheet and wild beasts and, and, and...” He couldn’t quite get the last part out loud, so his friend bent over and spoke into his ear, “John, it says, ‘creeping things’.”

“Oh yes!” he said. “That is how I got in. Just a poor good-for-nothing creeping thing, but I got in – saved by grace.”

So go you, and so go all the stinkers who were expelled to eat under the magnolias alone, but who close to Christ Jesus by faith.

And why? Why can we receive such an inclusion though we were so unclean? We are included because Jesus was excluded. We gain the perfume of heaven because Jesus was drowned in the filth of our death. God scraped the shame of our sin from his body. God pounded the offensive waste of our smut-loving lives into the soul of the Holy One! Why? “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved...” (Eph 2:4-5) Because He loves you to redeem you from all that guilty stain! What wondrous love and extravagant mercies! Today you are clean, because He bore your shame, and now God has raised Him up to inexorable glories and absolute authority over all things. In all gratitude, may we, the former odiferous orphans now made the fragrant sons and daughters of God praise Him. He is worthy of our praise! He is worthy of our gratitude! He is worthy of our honor, who saved a wretch like me.

- 6. The Journey of Obedience, Part II (10:23b-24)
- 7. The Vision to Cornelius Leads to the Welcome of Jews (10:25-27)
- 8. The Gospel of God’s Welcome Through Christ is Applied to All (10:28-48)