

LIVING HOPE
STUDY GUIDE:
BOOK OF ACTS

Acts 10:1-11
Matt. 28:18-20
Acts 1:8

Peter & Cornelius

GLOBAL OUTREACH



I: INTRODUCTION

As the church grew, the outreach of the story of salvation grew with it. Often the growth of the church was directly connected to persecution and martyrdom. When we quickly read over the stories Stephen, Peter and John, Paul and more, we need to remember that the growth of the church will never be without challenges and even persecution and death. Satan will not rest and continues to use his power anywhere the church is growing and alive, anywhere someone lives every moment of their lives for Jesus, anywhere God's people are a people of prayer, anywhere where the outreach of the gospel is the focus of the church.

In Acts 1: 8 Jesus, just before His ascension, makes a promise to His disciples.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and to the ends of the earth.”

It is a command coupled with a promise.

In Matthew 28: 20 Jesus adds “and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

The church is always empowered by the Holy Spirit and accompanied by Jesus Christ. The command Jesus gave His disciples is also a command he gives to us. The early church was called to an ever-widening circle of evangelism. So, we are called, in Abbotsford, in Canada and to the ends of the earth. God uses people, ordinary people.

II: GOD'S CALL TO PETER—'FEED MY SHEEP'

Throughout the book of Acts, we read stories of people called to certain situations, for specific reasons, often known only to God. The story of Peter and Cornelius is one such story.

Peter, the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ spent time in prayer as he had so often seen Jesus do. While he was praying, he fell into a trance, and he saw a sheet come down from heaven with a variety of animals in it. Animals had always been a significant part of the life and culture of the Jews. Some animals were a large part of people's livelihood while others were used for various offerings. Animals were classed as clean or unclean. Leviticus 11 records a detailed description of the boundaries around unclean animals and Peter was familiar with the requirements, which were

carefully adhered to by most Jews. When God spoke and said: “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat,” Peter was horrified. His refusal is very clear in his response to God. However, God’s answer to Peter’s protest rings down through the ages. “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10: 5).

We, like Peter, can be so definite in our judgement of what is clean and what is not clean, what is acceptable and what is not. Peter had to learn that even a Roman centurion was acceptable to God and claimed for Jesus Christ. Perhaps we may need to learn to be open to all people who are called into the Kingdom of God, even if they are not “quite right” or do not “fit”.

Three times Peter was confronted with the collection of animals. It reminds us of the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus (John 18: 15 – 27) and the three times Jesus re-instated Peter after His resurrection (John 21: 15 – 19). The words Jesus used to re-instate Peter were “Feed my lambs”, and “Take care of my sheep”, and “Feed my sheep” and finally “Follow Me”. Jesus shares with Peter that his journey will not be an easy one. He gives him no itinerary, no destination, no promise. He just gives him the command to follow. In this story of Peter and Cornelius, Peter is called to feed God’s sheep, specifically Cornelius.

III: PETER AND CORNELIUS

Cornelius’ heart had been prepared by the Holy Spirit. He was a Roman Centurion representing an oppressive power. He and his family were God fearing and he was generous to the poor. What is interesting is that, like Peter, Cornelius often prayed. It is in prayer when God moves hearts and increases understanding.

Cornelius, in a vision, is told by an angel to send for Simon Peter, who lived in Joppa, about 35 miles from Jerusalem. Cornelius obeyed, and Peter listened and accompanied the servants to Caesarea. Peter had no idea what God was doing, but he went. It was against the law for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile, but Peter had learned a major lesson – do not call unacceptable anyone created in the image of the living God. When God changes our insight, we are made able to change the world where we live. Peter’s insight changed the young church forever. Walls were broken down, and barriers were removed so all can come in.

Cornelius had gathered a crowd to hear Peter. He knew that the angel’s message was of God. Peter’s “sermon” to the people resulted in a celebration of salvation, a mass baptism, and a new awareness for the church – salvation is for all who call on the name of the Lord. “To the ends of the earth” took on new meaning.

God continues to grow His church. It is everywhere, sometimes beside a little stream, sometimes under a tree in a dry land, sometimes hidden in basement rooms and sometimes in huge cathedrals. The church is the body of Christ and it will become everything the book of Acts points to by God’s design and in the power of the Holy Spirit. His word does not return empty. We are His ambassadors until Jesus returns in victory and makes all things new.

1. What is it about being a member of the church that brings you joy and fulfillment?

2. What do you see in Peter's life that reminds you of yourself?

3. How does the church in the Western World succeed in being a light to those who do not believe in Jesus Christ? How does the church fail?

4. What, do you think, the church needs to be so people are drawn to the fellowship of believers?

5. Why do people leave the church? How should we minister to them?