

Acts 10 - John Karmelich

I'll start by asking a question we all have to wrestle with. How do we overcome prejudice? How do we think differently about a person who's not like one of us? A good start is personalizing the relationship. Spending time with those of a different culture reduces fears and helps us to see people as well people! In Chapter 10 the gospel spreads from only Jewish people to non-Jewish ones. Of course God wants all people to repent and accept the Gospel message. For that to occur here, it meant those Jewish-Christian disciples had to get past their prejudice against non-Jewish people. The lesson for us is on how to deal with people that we're not used to dealing with on a personal basis!

I'm well aware that for many Christians this isn't the same problem that it was a generation ago. Many of us go to church with people from all backgrounds. We're living in a time with heightened awareness about racial issues. We can argue till we're "blue in the face" or we can do what God calls us to, which is to live a life pleasing to Him. As I've stated, my morning prayer includes praying for wisdom as I go through my day and I pray for the boldness to be a good witness for God. The same concept should be important with our dealing with people of all backgrounds. It occurred me a long time ago I will spend an eternity with people of all races and backgrounds. Therefore I should learn to get along with people of all backgrounds the best I can as that's our eternal destiny!

One of the reasons this chapter is included in the bible is because it deals with prejudice. Specifically it focuses on Peter as he was chosen to first lead non-Jewish people to Jesus. The story involves moving Peter along with other witnesses to the home of a Roman official for a "prearranged bible study". God is the one who arranged it and Peter was going to be the speaker even though God did miracles for this to take place. We get a lot of details about how this event took place because it takes a while to get past old habits to do God's will! As I've stated in the past, God works with our personality as we are. At the same time, He wants to change our behavior in ways that are not pleasing to Him. That includes what's our views on people from other cultures.

OK then, time for the chapter specifics. The story opens focusing on the man that Peter will witness to: A Roman captain (in charge of 100 men). Before this meeting, as he was stationed in Israel. This man became a believer in God and prayed to Him. In this chapter, God said to him (Cornelius) in effect, "Hi there! I know you're praying to Me. Since you're heading in the right direction, I'll help you draw close to Me!" Specifically God said to Cornelius to send one of his men to where Peter was! (Peter was in a town called Joppa). Cornelius was stationed at a nearby city called Caesarea. They never met until God arranged this meeting. All Peter knew at this point was the Romans were in charge, so if a captain over a hundred soldiers says "Come visit me", Peter could lose his head to refuse that request!

Meanwhile God was working on Peter as well. While he was waiting for lunch to be cooked, he fell in a trance (consider it a God ordained vision). In the vision he saw all sorts of animals on a sheet. Those animals included ones Jewish people were refused to eat. One reason God limited the Jewish diet is so they could act "differently" from the nations around them. Yes there are other reasons. My point is the vision of good and forbidden animals was to teach Peter that everything God makes is good. It was His way of saying God's people included those of all nations. So why not just say so? Why the weirdness? I suspect it was done this way so it'd sink into Peter that's its ok to associate with those of another race. By telling Peter to "kill and eat" animals forbidden on the Jewish diet was a way to grasp that it's ok to be with people other than those he was comfortable being around.

OK John hold your horses for a second. Most of us have to work with people we disagree with or even spend time with family members we don't see eye to eye on. Of course, that's part of life. I am not one to "bash a bible on people's head and say believe or else!" Our job is to be a good witness for Jesus. It is His job to convert people's hearts. All I'm saying is a purpose of this section is to help us see past say our own little world so we can be an effective witness for Jesus even to those people who belong to say a group not like our own! That's what God did to Peter and that's what He wants to do with us.

That leads me back to Peter. After the vision ended (repeated three times by God), then three men sent by the Roman soldier came knocking on Peter's door. Yes the "three times and three men" were meant to be a connection for Peter to get. Bottom line is the next day Peter along with some witnesses that he took went with the soldier's men and off they traveled by foot from one town to the other.

When Peter got there, the first thing he said was, "You know us religious Jewish people aren't allowed to socialize with non-Jewish people. However God said that's wrong so who am I to argue?" Yes that is a paraphrase but you get the idea! Anyway, Peter and Cornelius swap their "God encounter stories" and their God ordained bible study began! How did it go? Let's just say the same way tongues came down on Jewish people back in Chapter 2, repeated here as Gentiles got the same "show" here.

Why the drama? To show Peter non-Jewish people can be a part of the church the same way a Jewish believer in Jesus can. This was such a big deal, Peter had to deal with it more in Chapter 11 as he had to explain his actions to the other Christian-Jewish believers in Israel. What's important is we're seeing God drop the prejudices people have about people different from themselves. It is a start of the spread of the Gospel to non-Jewish people and in effect will continue for the rest of the book! Obviously the important thing for us is lessons about dealing with people different from us. God calls all of us to be a witnesses for Him even to people we're not comfortable being with!

On the same page where you downloaded this summary is a detailed lesson on Chapter 10. That is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John