

## Lesson Text

### Acts 10:19-33 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

<sup>21</sup> Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

<sup>22</sup> The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” <sup>23</sup> Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. <sup>24</sup> The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

<sup>27</sup> While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup> He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup> So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

<sup>30</sup> Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me <sup>31</sup> and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. <sup>32</sup> Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ <sup>33</sup> So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

#### Today’s Lesson Aims

- **Learning Fact:** To evaluate Peter’s reaction to the visions of unclean/forbidden animals.
- **Biblical Principle:** To understand that the Christian faith is intended to be universal.
- **Daily Application:** To pray for opportunities to present the gospel cross-culturally.

Power Hour Lesson  
Summary for August  
27, 2017

**“Called to Be  
Inclusive”**

Lesson Text:  
Acts 10:19-33

Background Scripture:  
Acts 10

Devotional Reading:  
Psalm 15

## Introduction

### Steadfast or Stubborn?

What are the non-negotiables of your congregation, spoken or unspoken? A set order of service? A particular style of worship music? A certain Bible translation? A specific time for services? The mode of baptism? Home small groups? Type of clothing? Leadership qualifications?

Non-negotiables that involve Bible doctrines we can call *matters of the faith* (with “the faith” referring to the body of doctrine to be believed; compare Titus 1:13; Jude 3). The things some may consider to be nonnegotiable but which have no basis in Scripture can be called *matters of expediency*. Typically, these are changeable methods of making ministry happen.

The matters-of-the-faith list is, of course, the more important. As we ponder our lists, we should ask this question: *When is “standing firm” valid and when it is merely lifeless legalism?* Being steadfast in following God’s will is one thing; stubbornly insisting on our own will, which we think to be God’s will too, is another. Let’s look at how Peter dealt with this dilemma.

### Lesson Background

**Time: A.D. 35**

**Places: Joppa, Caesarea**

Following the account of Saul’s conversion, the focus of the book of Acts shifts back to Peter. Persecution had subsided, and Peter enjoyed freedom of movement (Acts 9:31, 32). He healed a bedridden man in Lydda, which resulted in mass conversion to Christianity (9:33-35).

Called hurriedly to nearby Joppa, Peter encountered the grief of those whose friend Tabitha had died. Mass conversion resulted yet again, as God brought the dead woman back to life through Peter’s ministry (9:36-42). A welcome reception resulted in a stay of “many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner” (9:43). The fact that Peter would stay there for any length of time is interesting given that tanners were regularly “unclean” because of contact with animal carcasses (Leviticus 11:26-28).

Joppa is a coastal city of central Palestine, situated on a bluff overlooking a small natural harbor. It is about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem. A well-traveled thoroughfare connected the two cities, for Joppa effectively had served as the Mediterranean port city for Jerusalem since the time of Solomon (see 2 Chronicles 2:16).

About 30 miles north of Joppa was the newer city of Caesarea Maritima (Caesarea by the sea), rebuilt by Herod the Great and named for his patron and friend Caesar Augustus.

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Herod created Caesarea according to the pattern of grand Roman cities, with broad streets, landmark temples, an aqueduct water supply, and a spacious theater. These features made Caesarea Maritima (not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi [Mark 8:27]) the preferred residence for Roman officials stationed in Palestine. When compared with hot, dusty, and trouble-prone Jerusalem, we can see why!

Centurions, one of whom Peter encountered in Caesarea, were professional, career soldiers. A centurion commanded a unit known as a century, which consisted of 100 soldiers and support personnel. There were six centuries in a band (or cohort), and 10 bands in a Roman battle legion.

The centurion Peter encountered in the current lesson is said to have been part of “the Italian Regiment” (Acts 10:1). The designation *Italian* indicates that the unit’s constituents were men primarily from Rome and its surrounding regions. The men were not provincial auxiliaries from allies or conquered territories. This was an elite group, as Roman as Roman could be. The word regiment may indicate that the troop strength in Caesarea was at least 600 soldiers.

Acts 10:1 also tells us that the name of the centurion Peter encountered was Cornelius. He seems to have been a most unusual Roman! Rather than despising the Jews of Palestine (as most Romans did; contrast Luke 7:1-5), he was attracted to them and their religion. He is described as devout: one who feared God, gave to the poor, and prayed (Acts 10:2). His lifestyle and attitude had not gone unnoticed either by God (10:4) or by the Jewish people (10:22).

### What Do You Think?

- How should Christians respond to those who fear God but have not yielded to Jesus?
- In what unusual ways have you seen God open doors for the gospel?
- How might God answer prayers to help us take the gospel across a cultural barrier?
- What can your church do to make its outreach more inclusive? What limits to inclusiveness, if any, should be maintained in the process?

### Points to Ponder

1. Personal encounters with Christ can change the plans and direction of our lives (Acts 9:10-12).
2. We should not allow fear to alter the assignments God has given us (vs. 13, 14).
3. God can direct the greatest opposition into a zeal for His service (vs. 15, 16).
4. Fear is overcome by faith as faith is put into action (vs. 17, 18).
5. The foundation of gospel preaching today should remain as it was in Paul’s ministry – Jesus is the Son of God (vs. 19, 20).

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## Conclusion

### Just for You

The spokesperson in an insurance company commercial offers an excellent deal to a customer. The grateful response is, “You’d do that just for me?” The spokesperson replies, “Just for you ... and everyone else.” A turning point in history occurred when God revealed to Peter that Jesus was just for him ... and everyone else.

The Christian faith is intended to be universal. The church Jesus established is to stand apart from the ethnic or national ties that characterize so many other religions, whether in the first century or in the twenty-first. The church is not just for those who dress as we do or share our taste in worship music. The church has no second-class citizens. The church is not just for those of a “targeted demographic.” Jesus expects us to invite everyone from everywhere. See Matthew 28:19, 20.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father of all, we thank You for including us in the church Your Son established. May the Holy Spirit empower us to ensure that others are included as well. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

May we heed God as He teaches us where to stand and where to stretch.

### ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week’s lesson is **“The Rainbow”** and explains God’s covenant with Noah to never again destroy the earth with a flood. Study Genesis chapters 8 and 9.

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