

In our Scripture this morning, we see that Peter has a vision where a blanket full of different kinds of food and a voice announces, **Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.**

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replies. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

Peter is very careful about what he eats, and with that in mind, today we are going to start with a short quiz this morning, a quiz about food safety.

Number One

How hot should the inside of a hamburger be before you take it off the grill?

100 degrees Fahrenheit

160 degrees Fahrenheit

210 degrees Fahrenheit

160 degrees Fahrenheit - According to the FDA.

Number Two

How much of a time window do you have between leaving the grocery store and refrigerating your food?

30 minutes

2 hours

3 hours

You have two hours to get everything into the fridge. But, if it's more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit out there, you have only one hour. (Not a problem we will ever run into here in Anchorage)

Number Three

What's the highest safe temperature for your refrigerator?

32 degrees Fahrenheit

36 degrees Fahrenheit

40 degrees Fahrenheit

Bacteria multiply most rapidly between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, so your fridge should always be below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Number Four

What's the safest place to defrost food?

- in the microwave
- on the counter
- in the refrigerator

The FDA says you should always defrost in the refrigerator to keep those nasty bacteria at bay.

Number Five

Which of these foods can you use to heal a burn?

- butter
- bananas
- honey

We now know that many old home remedies for burns, like butter, don't really work all that well. But, studies have shown that you can use honey on minor burns.

And Finally

If there's just a little mold on top of something you just dug out of the refrigerator, can you just scrape it off and eat the rest?

- yes
- no
- sometimes

It depends on the texture of the food -- scraping is probably OK with hard cheeses and firmer fruits and vegetables. But, if the mold is on sauce or bread you never know how far the bacteria has spread. The FDA says, "When in doubt, throw it out!"

Anyone get every single one right?

In our day to day life we have to be concerned about food safety - who wants to get a case of food poisoning from poor food handling? But, our concern in eating safe food is not at all the same as Peter's concern in eating the right food. We are concerned with bacteria and creepy crawlies; Peter is concerned with ceremonial clean food.

At this point you're thinking, "Peter, are you really going to talk about food this morning?" Well....Yes....and no, because this passage is about our freedom to eat all kinds of animals, but it really isn't about food is it? I mean, it is about food, but it is not really about food, the food is about the food, but the food is also, not about the food - God is trying to teach Peter something more than the joys exotic cuisine.

If it is not just about food, what is going on here?

Now, one of the first thoughts that may come to mind as you look at this passage is that it is teaching us about racism, and you know, there is an element of racism here, there is an element where Peter is at some level racist toward the Centurion because the Centurion is not of the same ethnicity as Peter is, but, that is really a small element here.

It is also true that there is a cultural element here too. The Centurion and Peter are worlds apart, to Peter, the Centurion represented the oppression of Israel, restriction of freedom, and abhorrent pagan practices that would disgust any good Jew. From Peter's viewpoint there wouldn't be anything he had in common with the Centurion, in fact, it wouldn't even occur to Peter that association with the Centurion was even an option. All that is true, but, this is more than overcoming another's culture.

All these elements are here in this passage, but God is teaching something at a deeper level than all the things we have just mentioned. All the things that we have already mentioned (what food we can eat, racism, and culture clash) are all social behaviors, they are about how we interact on the human level.

We however, do not only operate on the human level do we? For if you and I only operate on the human level, than how are we living our life any different from our neighbors who are not Christians? Remember, Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have had the Holy Spirit come upon us at the time of our conversion and we now have two natures, the old nature - who we have always been, and the new spiritual nature - the new you, given to you by Jesus Christ.

Peter, like any new Christian, is learning about living by his new spiritual nature, and so God moves him through this experience so Peter can learn about living by the Spirit.

This passage is in actual fact about spiritual discernment. It is about proper Christian discernment, it is about NOT operating in ways I have always operated, using my intellect, intuition, and emotion, to come to a conclusion, but instead relying on the Holy Spirit to come to a conclusion - above everything else we learn in this passage, we learn about spiritual discernment.

See, Peter is called upon to make a judgment: Is this man, the Centurion for real, or not? To accurately make the decision that is before him, Peter must set aside the ways he has discerned before, and he must step out in faith.

It is not primarily about food, it is not primarily about race, this is not primarily about a culture clash, this is about discernment of another's heart.

Let's take a closer look at our Scripture:

Cornelius, was a very common name at the time, so this man was one of thousands with this name. As a Centurion Cornelius would be nominally in charge of at least 100 men. Though his status was like a non-commissioned officer, his responsibilities were more like those of a modern army captain.

Now in verse 1 we see that Cornelius was part of the Italian Regiment. The Italian Regiment would have been originally raised in Italy, but in due time as men were replaced over the years, the unit would have been made up of men from the provinces instead of from Italy.

In the regular Roman army a regiment was a tenth part of a legion and had a strength of 600 men on paper. But, there were no legionary troops in Judaea between 6 - 66 A.D. In Judaea the governors commanded auxiliary forces. An Auxiliary Regiment had 1000 men on paper. Most of the men in auxiliary forces were from the provinces and were awarded roman citizenship upon completion of their service. So though Cornelius could have been in charge of as few as 100 men, most likely he would have been in charge of more. Cornelius isn't some schmuck, he is a very accomplished man.

This isn't the first time we have seen a centurion interact with the Gospel. Remember, the first Gentile to interact with Jesus in his earthly ministry was a centurion. We read in Matt 8 that Jesus was astonished at that particular centurion's faith. We see Jesus saying in, Matthew 8:10, "When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, **"I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."** Peter was there when Jesus said these words, perhaps Peter remembers these words as he discerns who the Centurion is.

Cornelius the Centurion along with his whole family are devote and God fearing who give generously to people who pray to God regularly. (verse1) This would tell us a few things: First that he helped out anyone who believed in the Lord God, including Jews, and second that he is a believer in the Lord God Yahweh, but third, Cornelius for all he is, he is not a believer in Jesus Christ.

Many gentiles, while not prepared to become full converts to Judaism, were attracted to the worship of the true God over the empty worship of their own national gods. They would pray at appointed times, attend a Greek speaking synagogue, adhere to biblical morals and even follow Jewish dietary codes. Cornelius is one of these kind of Gentiles. He is, a very Jewish Gentile.

Well, Cornelius is praying and an angel appears to him. Cornelius didn't ask for this, God initiates this, and notice that his acts do not go unnoticed and are described as a a rising before God. In other words, how Cornelius is living his life is quite pleasing to God. I want to note that it is not the just deeds, doing stuff, no, this is concerning his heart behind the deeds. Cornelius is not doing these deeds to make himself look good, but out of genuine concern for others, that is what pleases God, not just doing stuff.

I have a friend who is a pastor at a church in the lower 48 who was telling me about the flowers in his church. His church, like ours, will take the flowers that were in the worship service that morning, and give them to shut ins or someone who is in the hospital.

He said he started getting these calls from some of the folks who were receiving the flowers from the church. They were saying, "Pastor, Lucy delivered some flowers yesterday, and she said that the flowers were from her and her husband, but, they sure

look like the ones we get in church.” My friend told them, that they must have heard wrong for certainly Lucy would never do something like that.

But the calls kept on coming, “Lucy gave me flowers today, and she told me they were from her and her husband, but they sure look like the flowers from church.”

This lady really was telling these people a bold face lie that the flowers were from her and her husband. That my friends is doing deeds to make yourself look good, and that my friends will also get the attention of God....

Cornelius sends three people to get Peter as commanded by the Angel. While they are on their way, it will take about a day to get to Peter, Peter goes up to the roof to pray.

Simon the Tanner, where Peter is staying would have had the typical house of the region and would have had flat roof that doubled as a roof top patio. Noon is not one of the appointed times of prayer, but many Jews prayed three times a day and many would pray at noon. (psalm 55:17)

While Peter is praying he has a vision of a sheet being let down from heaven and on the sheet, verse 12, “It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.” So we have on this sheet what Genesis 6:20 classifies in three divisions, the animal world: birds, cattle, every creeping thing of the ground. On the sheet before Peter in this vision are animals that were lawful for a Jew to eat, mixed in with animals that were forbidden for a Jew to eat.

To eat here, is literally taste. Lev 11:2-47 - lays down the laws distinguishing the clean from the unclean. So, placed in front of Peter is a mixture of animals, some that are considered clean, what Jews would eat, and others that were not considered clean, what Gentiles would eat.

God, tells Peter to “Kill and Eat” - Peter refuses.

This is not surprising, Peter is a stubborn man. Remember Peter denies Christ three times; Jesus asks Peter three times, “do you love me”; And here Peter is asked three times to kill and eat. This is reminiscent of Ezekiel 4:14, “Then I said, ‘Not so, Sovereign LORD! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or

torn by wild animals. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth.'" The focus on food here is no accident - there is a direct connection between the levitical food law restrictions and the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. For it was in large measure, the gentiles eating of unclean foods that defiled them and made association with them a source of defilement.

But remember, this isn't really about food, it is about something deeper, spiritual discernment, and let me just say a side note here anyone who tells you or tries to sell you that eating this kind of food, or not eating that kind of food will somehow make you more spiritual, is feeding you a bunch of baloney, for Jesus settles this in Mark 7:19 when he says, "'For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.'" (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")" Tofu doesn't make you holy, and Twinkles don't make you unholy - food is irrelevant to your spiritual life. It is a matter of the heart.

Take a look at verse 15. "'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

How would Peter call something unclean? By his sense of judgment. Peter would use his experience, education, intelligence and intuition to make a judgment about something or someone whether they were clean or unclean - just like he always had, just like everyone around him always had. But, now, as a Christian, Peter is called upon to make a judgment in a new way - and so are you and I.

Let's look at how this happens: God initiates, He speaks to Peter (13, 15), He tells Peter about making all things clean; The Holy Spirit confirms the teaching (19, 20), He tells Peter three men are looking for him; Physical confirmation (21, 22), three men stand in front of Peter.

God initiates, Spirit confirms, Physical confirmation.

Notice, that if we look back at Cornelius receiving instructions at the beginning of the chapter, notice that there is no confirmation by the Holy Spirit. Cornelius is not a believer in Jesus Christ, he is not a Christian and therefore does not have the Holy Spirit and cannot receive confirmation from the Spirit. Peter on the other hand, is a new Christian and so he does receive confirmation from the Spirit.

Now Peter must make a decision. What is the next step? He has had this vision, which he clearly does not understand, but the Spirit has spoken to him and then physically confirmed what was spoken. So, there stands Peter. The men want him to go with them to Caesarea see a Roman army commander. His experience, education, intelligence and intuition tell him, no, but the Spirit has told him to go (20). A good Jew would never go with these men, yet the Spirit has told Peter to go.

Being obedient to the movement of the Holy Spirit is not a one time decision, it is something that must be reaffirmed at each step of the way. Now when Peter gets to Caesarea, he will again receive confirmation through what Cornelius tells him, people of the world would call it coincidence, but what it is, is confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me say that it is common for people to be listening for an audible voice or some kind of dialogue that they hear in their head - this is not necessarily how we hear the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we do, but many times we know in our spirit what to do. We will address that topic a little more next week.

For now, let's start with the sequence that we see here in Acts 10: God initiates, Spirit confirms, Physical confirmation. Be assured, God will not leave you hanging on a limb, the Holy Spirit will confirm any direction given to you. If there is no confirmation, be careful of assuming it was the Holy Spirit - we'll explore that as well next week.

Now this whole incident raises a host of questions: How do I know it is the Spirit speaking to me and not myself or something else? The Holy Spirit would never contradict Scripture, yet here it appears in this story that the Holy Spirit may have contradicted Scripture, why is that? Again, these are questions we will explore next week as we continue looking at Acts chapter 10.

Let me end with this:

Jesus promised Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven and Peter is now on his way to Caesarea, those keys jingling in his pocket. Matthew 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." We will see next week that Peter will pull out those keys and use the keys he was given to open the door of heaven to the gentiles.