

05.10.17

**Is The Venue by Which The Disciples of Christ Are Guided
and United
Acts Chapter 10**

We are going to be looking at the end of the Book of Acts Chapter Nine starting with Verse Thirty-two as I believe that Chapter Nine Verse Thirty-two corresponds and flows into Chapter Ten. This will be a very busy night because we are going to go from Chapter Nine Verse Thirty-two to Chapter Ten Verse Forty-eight.

We will go with Peter as he takes us to different spots. To put it another way, God takes Peter through different spots and moves him in ways that are miraculous. What we have been seeing is God raising up His church. He has been establishing the foundation of the way He will work through His church. Tonight, we will look at how God will use the church as the venue by which the disciples are guided and united.

The word disciple in the Book of Acts is the name for Christians until we go to Antioch. In 11:26, it says the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch; and we are not at Antioch yet. We are still perceiving the disciples as the believers, or more specifically, learners of Christ. As we watch the church grow, we discover that it is getting its meat and its bones. It is becoming alive. It was breathed on in Acts Chapter Two by the Spirit of God; and it became a living, breathing organism. As we follow its formation, we are watching it mature. It is being established. The Book of Acts is really fluid in that regard. You cannot draw an analogy from the beginning of Acts Chapter 2 and say, “Well, that is the way the church should be.” You have to follow it all the way through and say, “Okay, when you come to the end, that is the way the church should be.” By the time you come to the end of the Book of Acts, Paul has gone into “all the world”; and he is under house arrest in Rome. We have gone from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the earth. In the process, we will see the church

spread. It is the church once again that is the venue for all these things; and God has established the church. One of the things that Christ declared to Peter is,

(Matthew 16:18) “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

We know that this is Christ's church. We know that He is the One who is the head of the body. We also know as we study and comprehend this chapter that the church is under persecution. I really believe that we are in a time when everybody wants to rationalize that they do not belong to any single group of believers. They say, “Well, the church is universal.” We know that everybody who is a believer is part of the body of Christ; however, the church is never seen as universal in the Scriptures. Probably that idea came from Catholicism because “catholic” means universal. The idea probably came from that. But the fact of the matter is that every church that you see in Scripture is a local body. It is the local body with which God begins

to work, and this is why it is so important that everyone belongs to a local body and that everyone functions within the realm of that body. Let me give you an example. In chapter 1 of Acts, 120 people are meeting in the upper room. They become the body in Jerusalem. It is this group that begins to proclaim the great works of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 1:15) “At this time, Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred twenty persons was there together)...”

(Acts 2:1) “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.”

We are not talking about a universal church here. We are talking about one place. They are all together in one place. God begins to do great things as they begin to proclaim the works of God in this one place. I know people often feel limited. They feel as if they should belong to a thousand different Christian organizations at the same time. If they give a little bit to every one of

them, then they think that they are doing great work. God says, “No. You need to be faithful where you are.” It would be no different from a father of a household saying, “If I could just give every kid in all the world a penny, then I could be a father to each one.” I would say, “You are a father to nobody. You have helped no one.” God gives you a child, and he gives you a family. This is the arrogance of our day. People try to spread themselves out so thin that nothing of value is produced. But my point tonight is, once again, that the church is the venue through which the disciples of Christ are guided and united. We are going to see this. If you want to be guided and you want God to unite you, you need to understand that the church is the venue by which that is accomplished. You can work in other venues, but you are not really going to be guided by the Spirit of God because God has ordained that the church be the venue which produces His guidance. Look at how the church began to grow. I think often that the thought is, “Well, I must go out there and lasso people in. That is how they come to the Lord.” I am all for it if you

are really good at lassoing. That would be wonderful. The Gospel is being preached, I will rejoice in that.

But what is interesting is how Acts illustrates evangelism. Let me give you a couple of examples. If you go to Acts chapter 5, what you will see is that the church takes a very strong stand and elevates the Holy Spirit and truth. To put it another way, there is veracity and genuineness and sincerity because of the Spirit of God. He expects us to be real, to be genuine. When the church is serious about its purpose, which is to share the Gospel, God begins to add to the number. If you look with me in Acts chapter 5, it is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They both dropped dead because they lied. If you and I were talking about evangelism, we would not figure out why, after this happened, the church grew. “Well, I have a good way to evangelize. Have two people die.” That would not be our idea, would it? But if you look in the passage, it continues: (Acts 5:10) “And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found

her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.”

Acts 5:11) “And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard these things.”

(Acts 5:12) “At the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all in one accord in Solomon’s portico.

(Acts 5:13) “But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.”

(Acts 5:14) “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.”

You would not think that this would be the case, but this is the result when people are serious and genuine. Here again, what Scripture will emphasize is that the body of Christ must be real. If they are genuinely following Christ, God will take care of them and bring in those who are His, those who are real, those who are genuine.

As you look in Chapter 6, there is concern for the widows, the Hellenistic Jewish women, who were being neglected. Because there is genuine concern, the church takes on the responsibility as its own. The apostles chose 7 men, deacons, to minister to the widows.

(Acts 6:6) “And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.”

(Acts 6:7) “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

Now why do you think a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith? Well, I can tell you. The priests were concerned about the care of the widows, and they saw the integrity. Those priests who were concerned about the integrity of the ministry saw the integrity of the church taking care of its own. That is what drew them in. Do don't you think it is interesting? It was not the disciples talking with them or knocking on doors; it was that the

church was functioning the way that it should. The word gets around. These are two examples of how the Book of Acts pinpoints reasons for their growth. This ties in with Jesus' words to His disciples in the Gospel of John,

(John 13:34) “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

(John 13:35) “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

What a strange way to evangelize, I know. But the functioning of the church, if it functions rightly, is a powerful force which begins to speak to the community. If you are really in love with your church, you begin sharing it with people. They begin wondering, “Well, what is going on there?” They become curious. You might have a conversation with someone about having a difficult time; and you might say, “Well, in our church, this is the way we do it.” They respond, “I would like to see that.” It draws those who are searching for what is true. This is one of

the points that we are going to see as we come to Chapter 9 verse 32 as Peter begins to travel to different places. We are going to see the guidance that takes place because of his concern for the church. However, before we look at Chapter 9, I want you to look in Chapter 8 to remind you that Saul had been persecuting the church. Remember? After Stephen was stoned and died,

(Acts 8:1) “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.”

For whatever reason, the apostles for a while stayed in Jerusalem. But the Scriptures relate that others, including Philip, leave and begin to preach the Gospel from Azotus all the way up to Caesarea as we see in Acts 8:40. That is a pretty good distance. He is probably going about fifty to sixty miles up and down the coast. Philip is ministering which is what God had called him to do. As we pick up in

Acts Chapter 9:32, it seems as if Peter is concerned for those who have been scattered. This is natural. He is an apostle. He is one of the founding fathers of the establishment of the church. He is concerned because the church had been broken up. What is happening to these pockets of disciples? What is happening to them? And, we have often read that wonderful book written by James. From reading the Book of Acts, we see that James becomes the pastor of the church of Jerusalem. He writes a letter, which we call the Book of James. It starts off:

(James 1:1) “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”

The twelve tribes are the Jewish believers from the Jerusalem church who have been dispersed. Peter seems to be concerned for them. It is the concern that God has given him for the church. This is what I am trying to explain. It is the concern for the church that will open up venues of ministry for you. People say, “Well, I am going

to have my own little ministry and do this one thing aside from the church.” That is not the way ministry works. God has ordained the church to be the venue for directing and for uniting the body. In 9:32, we begin with Peter.

(Acts 9:32) “Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.”

These are believers who were scattered abroad. At this point, all of the believers are Jews. The city is probably pronounced Lydda, but it looks like Lydda. It is near Joppa in Judea. Joppa is probably pronounced Yapa. The believers are all part of the twelve tribes. They are living in Judea which is in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. By the time you get up to Lydda, you have gone through Ephraim. But you are still in Jewish territory. I guess that is my point. Peter is going to Lydda which is probably 20 miles from Jerusalem. That is what you are looking at as he travels to see where they are. He knows that there are saints who live in Lydda. His desire is to strengthen the

saints. It is no different than Paul's desire when he goes through Lystra and Iconium in Acts 22. He spent time strengthening the saints. What is happening to the church? A concern for the church opens up Peter's desire to travel, and Paul followed the exploits of Peter. Peter really is not missionary-oriented. Ultimately, there is a debate mentioned in Galatians Chapter Two. Peter wanted to go back to a kind of Judaism. How is it then that Peter finds himself on a missionary journey? Eventually we will follow Paul on his missionary journeys. But Peter will not continue to go on. So what is it that is moving Peter? The bottom line is his concern for the church. If you want to be used by God, your concern for the church will begin to ignite and open up doors of ministry. Therefore, he goes down to the saints who lived at Lydda. He is heading north, but the reason it says "goes down" is because everything from Jerusalem is "down". Jerusalem is seen as "up there".

(Acts 9:33) “There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed.”

What I want you to take note of is the wording that will be used throughout Peter's journey. For instance, in verse 33, the phrase “there he found”. It appears as though he unexpectedly came upon somebody. If you look in verse 37, there is the phrase “and it happened at that time”. Right? You see that? All the way into Chapter Ten, you are going to see this kind of phrasing. I guess that what I am trying to convey is that Scripture is not telling us that Peter is a victim of happenstance. What it is saying is that God is moving him. God is moving him, and it comes about that He places him in front of specific people for a specific reason. Now let me just say this. Peter has no idea what is about to happen to him. He has no idea why he is going other than that he is going to encourage the saints. However, God is going to lead him to Caesarea to begin to minister for the first time to Gentiles. Peter will be the first to do that, even though Paul will state in the Book of

Galatians 2:7 that Peter's ministry is to the Jews while his is to the Gentiles. Peter is the first one who goes to the Gentiles and declares that they are part of the body of Christ. God will orchestrate this in such a way that Peter will be forced into it, but it is all part of the journey. You see the hand of God in the journey. As we walk with Peter on his journey, watch how he is moved. This is key because it illustrates how we are moved, how the Lord directs us. He finds a certain man named Aeneas, and the text says that he has been bedridden for eight years. God has been planning up to this point. The numbers are very significant. Eight is the number for resurrection. It points to that. What we will see is the perfect timing of God. What we have is Peter's concern for the household of God. If you go to Matthew 8:14, Jesus and the disciples go into Peter's house. Jesus heals his mother-in-law. Peter has a concern for his own house. The same is true for Christ as He begins to minister. In Matthew 10:6, He tells the disciples, "I want you to go out, but I want you to go only to the house of Israel. Only go to our house. Do not

go outside the house of Israel.” In Matthew 15:24, He says that He has only come to the house of Israel. The fundamental principle is that you have to be faithful where you are in your house. We can take it all the way to becoming an overseer. First Timothy Chapter Three lists the requirements for being an overseer of the church. What is one of the first? You have to manage your own house well. That is a requisite. In every case, there is faithfulness to your own house. That is why the church is so important. The church must be established in your own house. Scripture says, for instance, in Hebrews 13 to obey your leaders. Hebrews will also say, “Do not forsake your own assembly. Why does it say that? Because you have responsibilities in your house, and God wants you to intertwine and become a part of that body to where that body is dependent on you. Imagine if everybody said, “Well, I am a part of the household of God, but they went elsewhere in the world.” “Well, I wonder if Joe will ever show up and help us move the chairs. It has been a couple of years since I have seen him here.” The point is that God

has ordained you to be a part of a church body. You read in Ephesians Chapter Five: "Husbands, love your wives." It does not say love everyone else's wife. "Wives, be submissive to your own husband." No one else's. It is a foundational principle that you will see repeated over and over and over again. In Galatians 6:10 it says, "I want you to be gracious to everybody, but especially to the household of God." Do you hear that? Especially to your house. I know we have probably used this phrase from time to time, but "charity begins at home." If you have not been faithful with what you have been given where you are, then how is it? Are we going to give you another ministry? It will be through the venue of Paul ministering in the church at Antioch even though he had been on the road to Damascus. He had seen Christ Himself. Christ had called him out. It will not be until he is in Antioch and he is serving in the church at Antioch that the church sends him out. It will be because he is ministering within the church.

Peter then finds a certain man. Verse 32 says Peter came to the saints, which tells us that this man was a saint. He is a believer. This is not mission work yet. The mission work will come from this, but it begins with the ministering to this man who has a need, and Peter seems to be concerned for him.

(Acts 9:34) “Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.’ Immediately he got up.”

(Acts 9:35) “And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon, saw him and turned to the Lord.”

Sharon is more in the area of the fields. What the word is talking about is probably the whole field of Sharon which is between Lydda and Joppa. In that area between those two places everybody started talking. Something happened in the body. We do not have a church yet in this area, but we have a body of believers who have been scattered from the church in Jerusalem. They are together, and something has happened. Something miraculous

happened. The word gets out. God has done something great within the body.

(Acts 9:35) “And all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.”

God is now beginning to move and to bring people to Himself.

(Acts 9:36) “Now in Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.”

She is one of those who had been scattered. Tabitha, when translated, means gazelle which seems to convey that she was not only attractive, but she had a great zeal to get things done. Within the passage, this woman was “abounding with deeds...” Abounding is an interesting word for a gazelle. Right? Was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. She was serving among other believers, and she was abounding in her service. She was the one who was probably doing

more work than fifty other people. She was abounding. The last person that you would want to see die is Tabitha. “God, do not let her die.” It is as if God turns and says, “She is going to have to die so that you will begin to rally and get Peter to come here.” Peter is not necessarily thinking about this trip. He is not focused on traveling to Joppa. He is just checking on the saints.

(Acts 9:37) “And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.”

There is that phrase again, “it just happened”. And it happened “at that time.” At what time? The time that Peter just happened to be sashaying over to Lydda. Peter finds a guy; this guy is healed and word just starts going all over the place. It somehow reaches Joppa. Right? It just so happened. This is a perfect time for Tabitha to die. God says, “Let's take her out.” It is not a mistake. Look at the passage again. “At that time, she fell sick and died. The passage does not go into much detail. It only says she was

not feeling well, and then she is dead. It is quite sudden. They washed her body and laid it in the upper room. Lydda just happens to be near Joppa, right? It just happens.

(Acts 9:38) “Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, ‘Do not delay in coming to us.’”

Do not delay. Come to us at once.

(Acts 9:39) “So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.”

Peter arrives, and the women started displaying everything she did for them. “Look what she did for me. You have to do something, Peter. You have to do something”. God had stirred in their hearts a love for this woman that will begin to unite the church there. Caring for other believers is what begins to unite the church.

Right? Peter arose, goes there, and sees all those who were weeping and showing all the tunics and the garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. Dorcas would be another translation of her name.

(Acts 9:40) “But Peter then sent them all out, knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”

Obviously, they were blubbering too much so that he could not really concentrate. He sends them out. Then he knelt down and prayed.

(Acts 9:41) “And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.”

You can just imagine what a day of rejoicing this was, right?

(Acts 9:42) “It became known over all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.”

(Acts 9:43) “And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.”

Strangely enough, his name is also Simon. Now here he is in this place, and he finds himself looking out at the Mediterranean. He finds himself at the exact same spot where Jonah had been. Jonah went to Joppa.

(Jonah 1:3) “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

If you are a Jew and you want to take a ship, you do not go necessarily to Caesarea; that is a Roman military town. You will go to Joppa; you will take a boat there. You will go to the Mediterranean and sail into the wild blue yonder, however far it takes you. We know why he went there. He was actually supposed to go the other way. Syria is back the other way. He is supposed to go to Nineveh. Jonah decides, “I am not going to Nineveh. I do not like those

people. I am not going to preach to them. I am going to Joppa to get a boat to sail in the opposite direction.” Why was he dodging? Well, he hated the foreigners. He did not want the Gentiles who had been a curse to him to surrender to God. He was resisting. Might Peter have an inkling of resisting to share the Gospel with the Gentiles? We will see that he does. In fact, one of the first things he will say when he sees Cornelius, who is a Gentile, is, “It is not legal for me to talk to you. Jews are not supposed to talk to you. That is illegal.” That is one of the first things he will say to him. We understand that Peter is going to be resistant to this. But what is God going to do? God is going to set him up at the very same place where Jonah had been. Peter knows the story of Jonah, and he is going to be looking out over the water while God brings him his sign. God is going to say to him, “You need to go to the Gentiles,” and Peter will respond, “I do not do unholy stuff.” God is going to show him over and over and over again. What do you think he is thinking while he is looking over that water? It is almost like God is saying, “You want

to go the fish route because we can go the fish route.” We know what God is doing. Not only has He given him the visual, He is giving him the smells. There is nothing that smells worse than a tanner’s shop because of all those dead animals. So I would guess it would smell something like a fish’s insides. That probably would have smelled like this tanner shop because many of the dead animals ate a lot of fish. Peter is smelling these nasty odors. God asks, “You sure?” Peter answers, “Not sure yet.” You see him working with it. As you go into Chapter Ten,

(Acts 10:1) “Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,”

The point of the matter is that God is moving Peter to Caesarea. That is where he is heading. He does not know that, but he stops off at Joppa. Had he not stopped off at Lydda, he would not have gone on to Joppa. But it is what happens before cell phones when you simply call and say, “We need you to come up here to Caesarea.” Something

had to happen in Lydda, and then he is told, “Well, people in Joppa need you, too.” We now start into Chapter Ten. There happens to be a certain man from Italy who just happens to be stationed in Joppa. It is like somebody moving to Mayport. He just happens to be stationed at Caesarea for this time. The passage tells us that he is from the Italian group; cohort would be another way of putting it. The text tells us why God is pulling Peter that way because, as he is described, he is a devout man. He is one who fears God.

(Acts 10:2) “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.”

With all his household. Do you see that? This man gave alms to Jewish people because they are the ones who worship the one true God. He is drawn to that. He has been faithful to that; and God sees his heart. God is going to get to him. It is sort of like John 10:16 says, “If you are a true seeker, I will find you. I have other sheep. I am going

to find you. All you have to do is be true.” God begins to work. Wouldn’t you know,

(Acts 10:3) “About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’”

If you go back to

(Acts 3:1) “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.”

What is the ninth hour? It is the hour of prayer. That is what it says. It is the hour of prayer. What do you think Cornelius is doing? It is the ninth hour. He is praying because he has taken on this faith as his own. As he is praying, God begins to talk to him, which is a good example of how God begins to lead us. Why should I even bother praying? “I don’t know; but I think God talks to you when you pray. He begins to move in your heart.” As he is praying, an angel of God comes.

(Acts 10:4) “And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.’”

This is just like Daniel when he started praying. Cornelius prayed and humbled himself before God; He is obviously a very humble person. The angel then says,

(Acts 10:5) “Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;”

God has a guy down there in Joppa. He is sitting in this tanner's house, and his name is Simon, but he is also called Peter. God distinguishes which Simon so that Cornelius' men know which one to ask for. You see how specific God is in giving directions? He begins to tell him, “You need to send your guys because I am going to do a work here. He is going to tell you the truth.” It is interesting that He reminds us that Jonah was here, too.

(Acts 10:6) “He is staying with a tanner named Simon who is in a house by the sea.”

(Acts 10:7) “When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned the two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,”

(Acts 10:8) “and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.”

(Acts 10:9) “On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.”

Look at the timing. They are approaching the city so they are not quite there yet. They are coming down as they head towards this area. It is about a 35-mile trek. As they approach the city, Peter goes up onto the house top about the sixth hour. Basically, the Jews pray three times a day. I do not know whether they got that from Daniel or somewhere else. But they pray three times a day. One of those times is the sixth hour.

(Acts 10:10) “But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;”

His stomach starts growling. Okay, I do not know if it growled, but it says he became hungry and that he is desiring to eat. It is as though God has him primed. He is smelling all the foul odors from the tannery which must be nauseating. He knows that he is surrounded by unkosher stuff. I do not even know how you can be hungry at a tanner’s store, but apparently he is.

(Acts 10:11) “and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,”

The four corners of the sheet in the vision makes reference to Revelation 7:1 where the angels go to the four corners of the earth.

(Acts 10:12) “and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.”

God lowers down this sheet in the vision and asks, “How about trying some spinach and broccoli?” Or maybe you like these vegetables. It would have been sushi for me as I do not like that. But Peter objects. “I am not supposed to eat any of that stuff. I am a Jew.” What God says is, “You are going to people that you perceive as unholy. I am just getting you ready for that.”

(Acts 10:14) “But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’”

(Acts 10:15) “Again, a voice came to him a second time. ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’”

(Acts 10:16) “This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.”

(Acts 10:17) “Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house, appeared at the gate;”

Here he is. The vision is clear, but Peter still wrestles with it. I think a lot of times one of the reasons why we wrestle with whatever God is telling us to do is not because God is unclear. It is because we do not want to do it. It is as though God says, "I want you to go here." You stall by saying, "Let's talk this over. Do you mean right here or over there?" God says, "Here." We go, "Are you sure you do not mean over there?" You start arguing with God a little. This is very interesting to me. The men who had been sent by Cornelius asked for directions to Simon's house. Men do not ask for directions. This is an anomaly in and of itself. But the point of the matter is that Scripture is telling us that they have been held back until Peter is ready. You know? For whatever reason, they are confused. Scripture records that fact. Scripture could have just said that they arrived. But it wants you to know that they take the time to ask directions. God is holding them back until Peter is ready. When they arrive at the gate,

(Acts 10:18) “and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.”

They make the differentiation on whom they wanted.

(Acts 10:19) “While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you.’”

(Acts 10:20) “But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.”

This is what I have been talking to you about. It is the perfect timing of God which orchestrates all these things. Who would have thought that it would all begin by simply a desire to serve the body? See, God begins to orchestrate everything. Sometimes people wonder, “Well, how will I know when God is leading?” You cannot miss it. If your heart is right and you are zealous for serving the body, God will open one door, the next door, the next door. I think it is one of the things that you have had to contend with. Sometimes the doors open so closely one after the other that you say, “How can it be so fast? How can it be

so many one right after the other?” Certainly, God knows our hearts and can open those doors. I think one of the great concerns is that often people try to make the doors open. They try to kick them open. I have often said, “Look, just love God, love His people, start ministering where you are. It will happen.” We see that in this case with Peter. God says to Peter, “I have already told you. If I pronounce them clean, they are clean. I sent them Myself.”

(Acts 10:21) “Peter went down to the men and said, ‘Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason you have come?’”

(Acts 10:23) “They said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.’”

Here again, this is the kind of venue that the Lord had prepared.

(Acts 10:25) “On the following day, he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.”

(Acts 10:27) “As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.”

The Scripture says many people. “I have a few close friends and relatives.” You walk into a room with hundreds of people, and you go, “How many relatives do you have?” “Well, most of them are close friends.” The fact of the matter is that this is a man who had a desire and was reaching out.”

(Acts 10:28) “And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet, God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.’”

(Acts 10:29) “That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.’”

(Acts 10:30) “Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house in the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments.’”

This thing is not an accident. Everything is timed perfectly.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1) “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—”

Then it goes on and says, “But who can know?” God says, “You can know. If you will attach yourself to the body of Christ, I will let you know when it is time. I will let you know when to go. I will let you know what to do. I will let you know how to serve.”

(Acts 10:31) “and he said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.’”

“This is what the angel of the Lord said to me. So I sent for you, and here you are.” I love the way Peter words his answer.

(Acts 10:34) “Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,’”

The body is now being united.

(Acts 10:35) “but in every nation, the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

(Acts 10:36) “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—”

Then he begins to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth and preach the message to them.

(Acts 10:40) “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,”

(Acts 10:41) “not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.”

(Acts 10:42) “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead,”

(Acts 10:43) “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

(Acts 10:44) “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.”

This is an interesting text. The reason I say this is: if you follow through in the Book of Acts, you are going to see the Holy Spirit falling on only these people this way. In fact, it is going to be very difficult for you to have a formula if you do not understand what the text is saying. For instance, if you look in Acts Chapter Two, Peter finishes his message to an audience of all Jews. They then ask, “What must we do to be saved?” He says, “Repent and be baptized in the name.” Right? They have to repent and be baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Why is

that true there, but here all they do is to hear the message before the Holy Spirit falls on them? I am going to tell you why. The first group is only Jews. Jews follow the law. It is through the law that they must come to Christ. John the Baptist was the final law giver in the sense of the prophets of the Old Testament. What did he say? “Repent and be baptized. Repent and be baptized.” The baptism of John is the initial part of their coming to Christ. They have to come in obedience because the Jews had gone away from the law of God. They have to submit themselves under the law of God and say, “We will submit ourselves under the washing of God and believe that He will wash us.” Then the Spirit of God says, “Okay. Now I will abide in you.” In Chapter Ten, we come to Gentiles. The Gentiles will come by simply hearing the word of God. How do we know that this is now fundamental? We know according to

(Ephesians 1:13) “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also

believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Do you see baptism in there? Now they are going to be baptized, but Scripture wants you to know that it is not the baptism that is necessary for you to believe as a Gentile because you are not coming through the sense of obedience to the law as the Jews are. What is interesting is there was another time when you saw the sign of tongues in Acts Chapter Two. In this text in Acts Chapter Ten now with the Gentiles, you will see the sign of the tongues. Next, go to Acts 19:6 where you have the disciples of John the Baptist.

(Acts 19:6) “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.”

This is the last time you will see the sign of tongues. Remember, the sign of tongues is God declaring that He is going to all the nations. They each spoke in all the languages of the known world. It is a sign of God going to

all the nations. Why is this sign in every one of these groups? For the Jews, it is to let them know that God is going to all the nations. For the Gentiles, it is to let them know that He is going to all of their nations. For John the Baptist's disciples, it is so that they may see that it is not by their list of rules or by the repentance of John; but rather it is by the power that comes by submitting to the baptism of Christ. In each case, there is the sign of tongues. Also, in each of these cases Peter was present. If you back up, in Samaria, Peter had to come personally and lay his hands on them in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Remember? Peter had to lay his hands on the Samaritans, and then they received the Holy Spirit. Why is that true? It was because the Samaritans said, "We worship on this mountain. We have our own authority. It is not you guys in Jerusalem." Jesus says, "Well, it really is on their authority because I gave it to them." He is establishing the authority of the apostles. The only way that the Samaritans will understand is if the apostles are there to lay on their hands before the Samaritans can

receive the Holy Spirit. At this juncture, however, you will not see Peter doing that. What God does at this point is give Peter the power through the word of God. You see God working in different people groups differently because of what they understand and how they perceive. In every case, it is the same Gospel; and it is the same truth. Different people are receiving ministry according to where they are in their beliefs. It is like when Paul goes to Ephesus, and everybody falls under his shadow. People are falling in his shadow, grabbing his handkerchief, and being healed. He has all this power because it is a very mystic place. They begin to burn all their books about their witchcraft. He goes into Corinth, and he is so poor that he has to make tents. There he does absolutely no miracles. He says, "You know the reason I am here in weakness? It is because you guys are so rich that you think money is the answer. God made me poor so that the only thing you would accept from me is poverty; and you would understand that through my poverty, I had nothing to give you. The power is in the Gospel. In every case, God

is speaking to each group of people in a unique way, but it is the same message, and it is the same power. In talking with Cornelius, he ends this way:

(Acts 10:44) “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.”

(Acts 10:45) “All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.”

(Acts 10:46) “For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,”

(Acts 10:47) “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?””

(Acts 10:48) “And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.”

It is a great passage. How wonderful it is that Peter obeyed God in moving all the way up to Caesarea. God took him there simply because he was obedient in where he went and ministered where he was lead.

Prayer

Father, we thank You for the opportunities that You give us. Thank You for the doors that You open. Thank You for ordaining the body of Christ that you might give us direction and that everything happens in Your perfect timing. Help us to be faithful where we are with what we have. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.