

# **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 11 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 9 B & 10**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Lord Jesus Christ had given Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Before His ascension, He commanded Peter three times to feed “My sheep”. Peter officially opened the Christian gospel to the Gentiles. When the Samaritans were converted, Peter together with John went to Samaria to confirm that salvation in Christ Jesus was extended to them just as it was given to the Jews.

Here, we see Peter travelling to the neighbouring regions visiting “the saints” (9:32). These trips by Peter were evangelistic and pastoral. Two miraculous incidents done by Peter were recorded in Acts.

The next significant ministry of Peter was the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion who lived in Caesarea. Peter was sent by God to bring the gospel of salvation to him, a Gentile. In accordance with their religious tradition, the Jews would not associate themselves with any Gentile. In this episode, God showed Peter that it was wrong to discriminate against the Gentiles. Therefore, the important lesson of Peter’s visit to Cornelius is that God is no respecter of persons and that the gospel of salvation is extended to everyone everywhere.

Chapter 9:32-43 falls naturally into two parts: 1) Peter healed Aeneas,

the paralytic (9:32-35); and 2) Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (9:36-43). Chapter 10 describes in detail the conversion of Cornelius, his family and his friends. It can be divided into the following sections: 1) Cornelius was instructed by God to seek Peter (10:1-8); 2) Peter saw a vision from Heaven (10:9-18); 3) Peter visited Cornelius (10:19-33); 4) Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to Cornelius, his family and friends (10:34-43); and 5) Peter witnessed the conversion of Cornelius, his family and friends (10:44-48).

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **Peter Healed Aeneas**

Peter was busy preaching the gospel of salvation. He travelled to the neighbouring regions and visited “the saints” in Lydda.<sup>1</sup> The record in Acts of Peter visiting “the saints” indicated that Peter, apart from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, was also engaged in pastoral work. Naturally, his visits to the churches involved teaching, encouraging, correcting and counselling believers and leaders. The term “the saints” literally means “the holy ones”. The term is used to refer to a group of believers rather than to an individual. It is not used to describe the saintly character of Christians but rather to refer to them as a group of believers belonging to God.

In Lydda, there was a paralytic named Aeneas. He had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed” (9:34). Immediately he arose. Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Lydda was a small town in the tribe of Ephraim. It is mentioned only here in Acts. It was about 20 kilometres east of Joppa on the road from the sea-port to Jerusalem.

made it very clear that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who healed him. He did not make any claim to having the power to heal and he did not rob God of His glory. When the people of Lydda and Sharon saw the miracle, they turned to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Peter Raised Dorcas From the Dead**

Now in Joppa, there was a woman, whose name was Tabitha (Aramaic) alias Dorcas (Greek) who fell sick and died. She was a good and generous Christian. She helped the poor and needy and did works of mercy. Her fellow believers did not bury her immediately as was the custom. Instead, they sent for Peter who was in Lydda. They must have heard that Peter had healed Aeneas. Peter responded straightaway and came to Joppa.

On arrival at Dorcas' home, Peter saw that a group of widows was crying. They displayed the clothes which Dorcas had made when she was with them. They appreciated and recognised her good works, and mourned for her. Peter sent all of them out of the room. He "knelt down and prayed" and then turning to the lifeless body of Dorcas, said: "Tabitha, arise" (9:40). Immediately, Dorcas opened her eyes and sat up. Peter then lifted her up, called for "the saints" and widows and presented her alive! The news of this stupendous miracle spread throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once again, Peter made it clear that it was not his power that raised Dorcas from the dead. He "knelt and prayed" to God, and this indicated that the glory belonged to God alone. He followed the same procedure as the Lord Jesus when He raised Jairus' daughter. The Lord Jesus sent all the mourners out of the room, except

Peter, James and John, and then called her to rise (Luke 8:54).

### **Cornelius Called for Peter**

In Caesarea, there lived a Roman military centurion by the name of Cornelius.<sup>2</sup> Under the Roman army, a centurion was a commander of a unit of a hundred soldiers. Cornelius was "a devout man and one that feared God" (10:2). This implied that Cornelius worshipped Yahweh in the Jewish ways and observed the Jewish hours of prayer. As a God-fearer, he embraced the faith of the Jews except for the rite of circumcision. He also instructed his family in the religion of the Jews. He did charitable deeds by giving alms to the people. We can safely say that he was loved by the people especially the Jews who lived in the sea-port of Caesarea.

In the ninth hour of prayer, Cornelius saw a vision. An angel of God appeared to him. The angel allayed Cornelius' initial fear, and told him that "thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God" (10:4), that is, God was pleased with his prayers and charitable deeds. The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to look for Peter who was staying with a tanner. The apostle Peter would tell him what he ought to do. After the angel had departed, Cornelius obediently sent three men, one of whom was a soldier, to Joppa.

### **Peter Saw A Vision from Heaven**

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<sup>2</sup> CAESAREA was about 70 miles from Jerusalem. It owed its magnificence to Herod the Great, who built a great city on the site of an obscure village, and constructed a vast artificial harbour "at all times free from the waves of the sea". When Judaea became a Roman province, Caesarea became the Roman capital, the residence of the governors or procurators, of Pontius Pilate, Felix and Festus, and the headquarters of the Roman troops. It was the great Gentile city of Palestine.

Cornelius' servants and the soldier were nearing Joppa. At about the same time Peter, who lived with Simon a tanner, went up to the roof top of the house to pray at the sixth hour. It was the morning hour of prayer. Peter was hungry and while they were preparing his food, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and a great sheet of cloth knitted at the four corners coming down to him from heaven. This great sheet had all kinds of four-footed animals and creeping creatures and fowls on it. A voice spoke to him: "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (10:13). But Peter said: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." Peter refused to eat in keeping with the Mosaic dietary laws, which were given by God (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). But the voice spoke to him again: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (10:15). This was repeated three times before the great sheet was lifted up back to heaven.

Peter was perplexed. He could not understand the vision. While he was still thinking about its meaning, Cornelius' messengers arrived at the house. They stood at the gate and asked for Peter (10:18). This indicates that they were sensitive enough not to offend the Jews by entering into the house.

### **Peter Visited Cornelius**

The Holy Spirit instructed Peter to go with the three men. He was told that God had sent them (10:19-20). The Holy Spirit knew that Peter needed assurance because he did not want to be seen associating with Gentiles and Romans. Peter came down from the roof top and identified himself to the three men. The three men introduced their master as a centurion; a God-fearing man, who was loved by the Jews. They explained that Cornelius was

instructed by an angel to ask Peter to his house and to hear what he had to say. Peter called them into the house. They stayed overnight in Joppa before leaving for Caesarea the following day. Caesarea was about 50 km from Joppa.

Peter and Cornelius' men arrived in Caesarea the day after. Cornelius was anxiously waiting for them. He had invited his family and close friends to his house. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius greeted him by falling down in a worshipping posture. Peter instantly took him up and said: "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (10:26). At this point, let us examine Peter's demeanour. First, he stayed in the house of a tanner. The occupation of a tanner was considered the lowest and meanest by the Jews. The physical contact and handling of dead animals would render the tanner ceremonially unclean. Also, the household would have to put up with the foul smell. Secondly, Peter received Cornelius' men and had fellowship with them. His fellow Jews would frown upon his association with Gentiles. Thirdly, Peter went into the house of a Gentile. When Cornelius fell down at his feet, Peter lifted him up and treated him as his equal. All these showed that Peter had changed and was indeed fit for the Master's use.

Peter went into Cornelius' house and saw a large gathering of people. He told them that it was not lawful for a Jew to keep company with a Gentile. However, he humbly confessed that God had shown him that he should not call any man common or unclean (10:28). The Holy Spirit must have enlightened him regarding the vision of the great sheet with all kinds of animals on it. God, who had instituted the dietary laws for the Jews, had the power and right to repeal those very same laws in order

to fulfil His plan and purpose. Peter assured his audience that he did not argue with Cornelius' messengers but came as soon as he could. Peter then asked them why they had sent for him (10:29).

Cornelius explained that he was fasting and praying at the ninth hour when he saw a man standing before him in "bright clothing" (10:30). The man told him that God had heard his prayers and remembered his good works (this means that his good works were acceptable and pleasing in God's sight). The man then instructed him to send for Peter who, when he arrived, would speak to him, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (10:33).

### **Peter's Sermon**

On that note, Peter began his sermon. His opening statement declared the eternal truth that God is no respecter of persons. But every nation and every person who fears God and who works righteously are acceptable to Him. Peter expressed that he had learned that physical association with Gentiles would not defile a Jew. God was treating Cornelius the same way as He had treated the Jews. God had broken the partition between the Jews and Gentiles.

Peter reaffirmed that the Word of God was first sent to the Jews. It was undeniable that the Jews were chosen for a special role: "preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all)". Peter's use of the phrase "Lord of all" is appropriate since Cornelius and all those present were Gentiles - God is the God of all of them, both Jews and Gentiles.

Next, Peter focussed on the life and work of Jesus. Jesus came after John, the baptiser, who prepared the

way for His coming. God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and with power. Jesus went about doing good and delivered many who were oppressed by the devil. Peter shared that he and the others were witnesses of all the things, which he had just told them. Peter testified that the Jews were the ones who slew and hanged Jesus on a tree. But God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. Jesus then appeared publicly to some of His disciples. Peter and his companions were witnesses for they had eaten and drunk with Him after His resurrection. Jesus had commanded them to preach the gospel to the people and to testify that Jesus was ordained by God to be the Judge of all, both the living and the dead. This truth was also attested by the prophets who had come before Him that "whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (10:43).

### **Peter Witnessed the Conversion of Cornelius**

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. Peter's Jewish companions were astonished that the Holy Spirit was also given to the Gentiles. They saw that all who heard the word spoke in tongues and praised God. Peter then called for all those who had received the Holy Spirit to be baptised. Cornelius, his family and close friends were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cornelius then urged Peter to stay in his house for a few days.

Once again, Peter, who was given "the keys of the kingdom", officially inaugurated the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. The previous occasion involved the conversion of the Samaritans. This was in fulfilment of the commission given by the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples to preach the gospel and make disciples of all

the nations, and to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). In both instances, Peter the apostle was there.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

Peter's healing of Aeneas and Dorcas was a demonstration of supernatural power. That power, as indicated by Peter, was from the Lord Jesus Christ. But the deeper lesson is not concerning the physical healing because these healings would be temporary and of value only to life on this earth. The true lesson is that the Lord Jesus Christ has the power to heal spiritually. He has the power and authority to forgive sins, and all those who believe in Him will be spiritually healed and will possess eternal life.

"God accepts those who do good works of kindness and mercy. God is pleased with these people and their good works. God is interested in the good works even of people who are not yet saved. This is testified in the case of Dorcas who was a believer, and in the case of Cornelius who had not yet become a believer. But good works of kindness and mercy cannot be used in exchange for the remission of sins and the gift of eternal life. Cornelius knew this truth; that was why he did not tell Peter that he did not need to believe in Christ because of the good works which he had done." Do you agree with this comment?

When Christians do works of kindness and mercy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Some will have the joy of knowing that they have pleased the Lord; of experiencing eternal praise, honour and glory; and of receiving their reward from the Lord Himself.

The reverse is also true. Some will grieve that they have not pleased the Lord; that they have done nothing with their lives and that they have no reward. However, their salvation is intact because it is a gift from God. If we are saved, we should be producing good works. Indeed, the result of salvation is doing good works (Titus 2:13-14): "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*"

The prohibition of eating certain animals and food (both of which were applicable to the Jews) was for several reasons. First, the Jews were God's chosen people. They had to be separated from the other nations and they enjoyed a special relationship with God, and had to carry out a special role with regards to the other nations. One of the ways in which God required them to be "separated" was in their lifestyle, which includes their diet. After the redemptive work of Christ through His death and resurrection, God repealed these dietary laws and taught the Jews that there should not be any ethnic discrimination and prejudice between peoples. The moral and spiritual laws are not abrogated, only the dietary laws. Since God made the dietary laws for Israel, He had the authority to repeal them

"Peter was a true Jew; however, he learned fast when God showed him graphically that there should be no discrimination against anyone." Do you agree with this comment?

### **DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

#### **Daily Readings**

**Monday:** Acts 9:32-43; James 5:14-15; Hebrews 12:12-13.

**Tuesday:** Acts 10:1-8; Romans 8:28-30.

**Wednesday:** Acts 10:9-18; Mark 7:18-23.

**Thursday:** Acts 10:19-33; James 4:6.

**Friday:** Acts 10:34-48; Romans 2:6-11.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Whose faith was it that healed Dorcas? Was it Dorcas' or Peter's?

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2. Cornelius' prayers were heard by God before he believed in Jesus Christ. Does this mean that non-Christian's prayers will also be heard by God?

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3. What practical action did Cornelius and Peter take after their vision from God? How does God reveal His will to us today?

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4. How do you understand Acts 10:35? Does it mean that those who fear God and do good works can earn their salvation?

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5. What was the meaning of the vision that Peter received from God? Was the vision given to teach Peter that he can now eat all kinds of food or to go and eat with Gentiles?

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6. Why did God repeal the dietary laws? What is the application for the Christian today when he studies the dietary laws?

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