



# 18 | ACTS 9:32-10:16

## MIRACLES, MEALS, & MERCY FOR GENTILES

*When God is working, God will use you to bring people to Christ, even if they have little in common with you.*

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### Call to Worship

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. <sup>3</sup> Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together! —Psalm 34:1-3

### Songs

*All Creatures of Our God and King*

*Holy, Holy, Holy*

*Man of Sorrows*

*Christ My Hope in Life and Death*

### Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called “Life on Life Discipleship.” Our title this morning is: “Miracles, Meals, & Mercy for Gentiles”.

I don't know about you, but I deeply desire to see God working in our lives personally, and in our congregation. I believe he is at work. We are studying in the book of Acts about life-on-life discipleship, and one thing that is apparent is that if you are growing as a disciple,

you are going to see God working, expanding the boundaries of his kingdom. We see the second Gentile convert. The first one was the Ethiopian eunuch. So the first New Testament Gentile convert was from Africa. The second one is a Roman named Cornelius.

Are you seeing God move in your life? What is holding you back? It might be culture. People say, “Well, if the music was better at church, I’d really follow Jesus. I’d really serve him. I’d really reach souls.” Or perhaps it’s, “If my marriage was better, I’d see God move.” Or it could be, “I’m so sick and suffering, and if I wasn’t suffering so much, I’d see God move.” Can I say the obvious? The only thing holding you back from God moving in your life is you. It’s not your circumstances or your culture or your church or your marriage or your singleness. It’s your unbelief.

So many of us are living in our caskets of fear and frustration. Yes, anger and anxiety tempt us and haunt us throughout each day, but what do you do? We try to change our circumstances. That’s the most useless thing we can do. God is more interested in changing your heart than changing your circumstances. Indeed, when we suffer, we tend to be humbled and more willing to draw near to God. So who here will get out of the casket this morning? Who will live in the power of the resurrection and insist that if God works anywhere, he works here and now in your life, in your church? Who will call on God for that?

That was the attitude of the apostles and disciples in Acts 9 and 10. God was on the move, and they had been used to seeing God work. Isn’t that amazing to get to that point. No longer are we in unbelief, but we are just expecting God to work every time we get together for prayer, for the Word, for singing, for fellowship. God is on the move. If you believe that say, “Amen!”

Key Thought: When God is working, God will use you to bring people to Christ, even if they have little in common with you.

In Acts 10, we are going to learn that when God is working, we see three things: miracles, meals, and man’s conversion. People will start coming to Christ, and it’s not merely because of your friendship with them, or that you work together, or your charm. But God is calling them, and he will use you to transform their heart from a heart of fear to a heart of faith.

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## 1. THE MIRACLES (9:32-43)

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Here we see two miracles by Peter, and it is remarkable. One is a dramatic healing. The other is a glorious resurrection. Peter is carrying on the ministry of Jesus.

God can do anything. We often don’t believe God can do anything. But he can. Often God, when he is getting ready to do something impactful through a saint, he will stretch their faith with an impossible situation. Do you need a faith-stretching miracle? We see two in the last part of chapter 9.

### A HEALING

First, we learn of a man who was bedridden for eight years, and Peter heals him. It’s an impossible situation, but Peter does not flinch. You can see he’s done this before. Remember Acts 3 when Peter and John healed the lame man, and he began leaping around, and Peter’s message about the Christ who heals led to a revival? He’s seen many miracles done by his Lord Jesus Christ, as well as each of the apostles. He just commands this paralyzed man to walk.

## *The Person Healed*

**Acts 9:32-33** | Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. <sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.

Eight years is a long time to be sick in bed, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and no end in sight. The doctors had long since given up the case of Aeneas as hopeless. There was not only the pain and suffering, the sense of uselessness, of being a constant burden to others; there was the nagging and unanswerable question, Why me?<sup>1</sup> If we will turn to God, he will either heal us or show us the purpose for our suffering as we trust in him.

## *The Power of the Healing*

Peter had the gift of healing, one of the authenticating gifts of the early church. He instantly healed this man in the name of Jesus. Though we don't necessarily have apostolic gifts, this physical healing is not the greatest kind of healing. Salvation is the greatest healing. All those who are divinely healed will face a just God on judgement day. We need to have something more than physical healing. We need to experience the power of the resurrection. We need the healing of our sins being forgiven, our minds being renewed, and our hearts being cleansed of idols and filled with love and worship for Jesus.

## *The Purpose of the Healing*

**Acts 9:35** | And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Long story short, the man is completely healed, and when the town people see him, they glorify God. Luke said the people of the region turned to the Lord as a result of Aeneas's healing. One recalls how the news of Jesus' miracles also spread to the surrounding neighborhood and attracted crowds to him. As we have seen before, the miracles in Acts are signs of the power of Jesus and often serve as the initial basis that leads to ultimate commitment. They are never, however, a substitute for faith.<sup>2</sup> Conversions of Jews are taking place all over the region because of this.

As much as this did for the inhabitants of Lydda, this is really about Peter's faith being built up and stretched.

## **A RESURRECTION**

If healing wasn't enough, Peter goes to another place, not far away to Joppa, and he finds a girl named Tabitha (her Aramaic name), also known as Dorcas (her Greek name). She became ill and died, and Peter raises her from the dead.

**Acts 9:36-43** | Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed

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<sup>1</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 9:33.

<sup>2</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 246.

her, they laid her in an upper room. <sup>38</sup>Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." <sup>39</sup>So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup>But Peter put them all outside, and 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. <sup>41</sup>And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. <sup>42</sup>And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup>And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

What do we say to this? God is a miracle working God. This is a miracle so similar to the raising of Jairus' daughter, Talitha (Mk 5:21-43). You get the idea. These are the acts of Jesus through the apostles.

Though we are not apostles, you must know that God is working through you in a similar way. Jesus is going to expand his kingdom, not just through the pastors and teachers and preachers, but through you. Do you get that? Take hold of that. If you are not evangelizing people, you are stuck in your growth. You are Jesus with skin on.

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## 2. THE MEAL (10:1-16)

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Now we see the reason for these miracles for Peter. God is about to turn Peter's world upside down. Peter has never seen a Gentile come to faith outside of Jerusalem. You see there is a ritual for Gentile converts, and what is about to happen is going to stretch Peter's faith beyond the borders of Israel. God is about to save a Roman centurion named Cornelius.

### THE MEAL WAS ABOUT A NEW PEOPLE

Here we have a divine appointment for a Gentile named Cornelius. He lived in Caesarea which was the capital of the Roman occupation of Israel. It was a military town. It's right on the coast, thirty-one miles north of Joppa. It's important to know that the Jews hated Caesarea. They called it the daughter of Edom, a place of ungodliness. It was a symbolic name for Rome.

#### *Cornelius is a Leader*

Cornelius is a captain of the occupying Roman army. As a centurion, he would have commanded about a hundred Roman soldiers posted in Caesarea, and he would have been paid as much as five times more than an ordinary soldier. So he's a wealthy and influential man. Jews, however, surely resented him.<sup>3</sup>

**Acts 10:1** | At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort.

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<sup>3</sup> Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, 164.

A normal Roman cohort, consisting of 600 men, was the tenth part of a legion. Each company of 100 men was commanded by a centurion, a tough-minded, iron-disciplined, well-trained, brave-hearted man. The Italian cohort would have been a cohort levied in Italy.<sup>4</sup>

### *Cornelius is a Lover of God*

**Acts 10:2** | A devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

Luke doesn't want us to miss Cornelius's religious devotion (10:2). The man "feared God." He is a Gentile openly seeking after God. He's not "all in", but he is a seeker. The term "God fearer" was applied to Gentiles who adhered to Judaism's faith in one God as they obeyed the Ten Commandments.<sup>5</sup> Many of them attended the synagogue and were instructed in the Scriptures and even observed the Sabbath and, to some extent, the Jewish dietary laws. They drew the line, however, at becoming full proselytes by circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice.

The Holy Spirit underlines three things about this very fine person, Cornelius. He mentions *his faith*. He was "a devout man, and one that feared God." Cornelius lived up to the light that he had. He mentions his *family*. He feared God with all in his household. He knew the Lord. This man had thick skin as a Roman soldier, but he had a big heart for God and for his family. Then we learn about his *fervor* for the Lord. He was generous with his giving to the poor, and he had a fellowship with God, praying continually.

### *Cornelius is a Learner*

More than anything, Cornelius is a learner. That's what "disciple" means. He goes to synagogue. But he's not circumcised or baptized, so he can't offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. Yet it seems he's born again. God sends an angel to let him know that his prayers are answered. That's amazing! But he's not yet received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 10:3-8** | About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." <sup>4</sup>And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup>And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup>He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." <sup>7</sup>When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, <sup>8</sup>and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius was a seasoned, rugged Roman soldier, but the appearance of the angel brought him great terror. When God interacts with us, we are often surprised. But the angel tells him that his prayers are answered. I don't know the content of his prayers, but as a God-fearer, he wasn't circumcised, and he wouldn't have been welcomed by the Jews. He must have been lonely. But he's following the one true God.

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<sup>4</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 10:1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *Let's Study Acts*, 124.

Peter is sent to tell him the gospel more clearly, specifically that Jesus died for his sins, that the Messiah has come. So now, without true fellowship for his whole life, Cornelius is now sent the Apostle Peter of all people! He was to call on the great Apostle and invite him to his own house. To be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, we must be learners. A disciple means “learner”. That means we are tender to God, and we are going to be taught and equipped by those all around us.

When we celebrate the Lord’s supper, it reflects God’s heart. All the prejudice and pride in the corrupt hearts of men is cleansed by the blood of Christ. We come together as one loaf, participating with Christ. We are his body. All the walls of our pride and sin between all the ethnicities of the earth are torn down by the atonement of Christ. He brings us into one body, and he calls all people everywhere to repent and take part in his kingdom where we are all part of God’s forever family. You are my family in you belong to Jesus.

### THE MEAL WAS ABOUT A NEW PURPOSE

Peter falls into a trance, where he is awake, but he’s seeing a vision. He is shown a strange meal in this vision. God says to him: Rise and eat some unclean food, Peter. “No” says Peter, “Never! I’m a faithful Jew, and I’ve never eaten anything unclean.” Isn’t it funny that he’s getting a revelation from God, but he thinks he knows better? Let’s read about this vision.

**Acts 10:9-16** | The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour [12 noon] to pray. <sup>10</sup>And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup>and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. <sup>12</sup>In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup>And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”

Here was this blanket of birds and animals. He had been hungry, but he’s not hungry anymore. This sheet has also been translated “sail” which would also be an appropriate symbol for the Gospel on the move.

Above him the sun shone down and over yonder he could see the Great Sea (so much bigger than his little Sea of Galilee), its horizons stretching farther and farther away to the west and to the Gentile nations of the mighty Roman world. Down below could be heard the sounds of the tanner and his men busy at their dubious trade. And up from the kitchen wafted the provocative smell of food sizzling in the pan.<sup>6</sup> Peter saw so many different animals in the vision: clean and unclean.

The point of the meal (and actually the point of the entire Old Testament sacrificial system of clean and unclean animals) was that though we are to be separate from the world because of a life of holiness, the church is to be made up of every tribe, language, ethnicity, and nation. When it comes to people, what makes us unclean is our sin. We are born sinners. But God is willing to make all people clean in Christ. In other words, it’s not about race, it’s about grace.

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<sup>6</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 10:17a.

## THE MEAL WAS ABOUT A NEW PERSPECTIVE

**Acts 10:13-14** | And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”

Peter was shocked by what God had asked. Never before had he eaten anything that was unclean. Never before had he reached out to a Gentile to give him the gospel. This is for the Jews. Peter was being asked by the Lord to “kill and eat.” This wasn’t about food but about people. He needed to go and meet Cornelius and give him the gospel.

Instead, Peter started arguing with the Lord’s messenger. “Never! By no means!” You will remember that Peter has a habit of standing against the Lord’s plans. Once when the Lord told Peter and the disciples that he was going to die at Jerusalem, Peter rebuked him.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” —*Matthew 16:21-23*

Jesus gave Peter a nickname for the way he was acting. Do you see what it was? He called Peter “Satan”. Sometimes God’s people do Satan’s work better than the evil one himself. We don’t mean to. We mean well. Peter meant well. But he got his eyes on “the things of man” and not on the “things of God”. And this is how it goes for us as Christians. The moment we start thinking about the kingdom of self, we start doing Satan’s work.

### *Making People Clean*

Now after Peter’s arguing, the Lord gave a new perspective to Peter. He says, don’t call unclean, what God makes clean. God can make people clean.

**Acts 10:15** | And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

Jesus was calling Peter through this angel to reach the Gentiles. Jews hated Gentiles, and the feelings were mutual. The ancient world was filled with race riots, racial slaughters, and long-standing bitterness. But God always loved the Gentiles. He had commanded Israel to reach them (Isa 2:2-5; 26:5-8; 56:3-8; 60:3-5). Instead, they either joined into their pagan worship of false gods, or they isolated themselves from them altogether, like the Pharisees. The Jews looked at the Gentiles, because of their pagan worship and customs, as “unclean” and common.

God’s heart for the nations is seen in Jesus’ marching orders before he ascends to heaven. He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” The word “nations” happens also to be the Greek word for “Gentile”, *ethnos*, which correlates to the Hebrew word, *goyim* (Mt 28:19; cf Acts 1:8; 11:18). A “Jew” was anyone who belonged to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a “Gentile” was everyone else. A typically used in the New Testament, “Gentile” simply means “non-Jewish”. God makes people whether Jew or Gentile, religious or non-religious, clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.

### *Making Peter Understand*

Was Peter getting it? Maybe not at first. There is an indication that he needed more convincing. Notice the vision was seen by Peter three times.

**Acts 10:16** | This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Why three times? It could have been God's way of telling Peter, "Hey, It's really me. Remember when you denied me three times and three times you said you loved me? Well, here's another three times. It really is me, so take this seriously!" Still on the roof, trying to understand the vision and what the voice of God told him, three Gentiles arrived at the house where Peter was staying to invite him to meet a Gentile that God wants to save.

What about you? God wants you to get out of your comfort zone and be willing to reach people that are not like you. Peter was uncomfortable with non-Jewish culture. He wasn't like Paul who was immersed in the Greek culture all around him. Peter was offended by Gentile culture. But God was calling him to wake up to the world that was dying and going to hell. They need a preacher to tell them about Jesus. The same is true for you and I. We are Jesus with skin on. We are called to reach the unclean and the untouchables. We are called to reach those who it might be uncomfortable to reach.

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## 3. GOD'S MERCY

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Do you see God's mercy of this vision? Whether a person was raised religious or atheist, we all need Christ. There is hope for all of us. We all need a Savior.

Our world today is in shambles because of racial divisions in our culture, but our world is not much different than how the world has always been. The talking heads and sociologists today are telling us there is no remedy for racial divisions in our society. And to a point, in ourselves, they are right. The best the world can offer is a new kind of segregation. It truly is shocking to me how people today want to move backwards to allow for even greater divisions and animosity.

Jesus is the only one who has the solution for racial division in any culture and in any time period. The only answer to racism is "gracism". We have to realize that there are sinful tendencies in every culture. We need to repent of what is sinful in our culture and celebrate everything else. We are all different. Praise God! How boring would life be if we were all the same!

So let me make the point: the solution to racism is see our great and merciful God exalted over every tribe, tongue, people and nation. We have to be humble enough to say to those who are different than us: welcome. We have to be humble enough to confess the sins of our culture and our family. Our fathers and mothers have not done everything right. There are sins that are passed down from generation to generation, and we need to put aside the sins of past generations and say: no more! And then we need to adopt what I like to call the "Jesus culture" of loving one another, celebrating the diversity and ingenuity of God in the Body. Isn't God amazing?

I was thinking even on a sociological level, God has a way of communicating to us. I heard about a couple of different ethnicities who had a set of twins; one girl was white and the other was black. I love that! That's God. There are really not different races. There is the

human race. The Bible says we are all of “one blood.” We are all brothers and sisters, and we need to treat each other with love, respect, kindness, and compassion. God “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26, KJV). We are all “one blood”! That means if I need blood, and you are my bloodtype, I need your blood no matter what kind of superficial differences there might be in your looks than mine. We are all different. Even in my own family, there was a running joke between my older brothers about my twin sister and I being adopted. You see my four brothers were all dark and hairy. My father had jet black hair and my mom’s hair and skin were darker. And here were these twin babies, and we were “towheads” with platinum blonde hair, and paily white skin. Of course, we weren’t adopted. We were just different. And like symphony with different instruments or a body with different parts, our differences should be celebrated. That was something that Peter was just being introduced to, and it offended him at first. But as a Christian, we had all better get used to it, because God wants his heaven full. He wants you to go outside of your comfort zone, and reach those different from. You.

### *Conclusion*

Let me encourage you this morning if you are uncomfortable with reaching out to those who are different than you. Jesus touched the untouchables. He hugged the lepers. Peter was uncomfortable as well. But it was the Holy Spirit who showed him the love of God for all people (10:28).

Here’s where I think we are as a congregation. I believe we are like a fully fuel and sophisticated rocket ship. We have all the power and fuel of sound doctrine and the joy of the Holy Spirit, but I think we’ve got to get off the launching pad. I believe we are like Peter, content with doing healings and resurrections (both amazing things), but we need to get out of the borders of our comfort zone and go to the Corneliuses of this world. God wants to pour out his mercy and reach so many people that are so different than you, so don’t get in his way. He’s going to use you. Yes you! Christians (and that means you) are the only representatives of Christ on the earth. We need to reach out. So I want to close with a prayer challenge. And be careful what you ask for because God answers prayer. Will you pray for that person or those persons in your life that you are not reaching out to, but you know you should? Pray that God by his Holy Spirit will show you how dear they are to him, even if you are uncomfortable. If you pray that prayer, God will answer it. Amen!