

Prejudice Withholding Blessing

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[0 : 00] Let's begin our worship by singing to God's praise in Psalm 65, and that's on page 82 of the Sing Psalm books. Psalm 65 on page 82.

And we're going to sing from the beginning of the psalm. In Zion praise awaits you, Lord. To you our vows will pay. To you all people will come near. You hear us when we pray.

When we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay, you pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away. We're going to sing to the end of verse 5. Psalm 65 from the beginning of the psalm.

In Zion praise awaits you, Lord. To you our vows will pay. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Oh Oh Oh

[2 : 33] Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh Let's join together in prayer. Let's pray together.

Our Father in Heaven as we come before you this morning or this afternoon we're asking that you would help us to bow down in your presence and realization that we're seeking to enter into the presence of the living and the true God.

The God who created everything that we see around us and the God who has given life to everything that has life. You are the God who sustains our lives and to in you that we all live, move, and have out being. Because you are the universal Father of every creature under the sun.

Every creature that has breath you have given them breath. But we seek to approach you not just as our creator. We seek to approach you as the one who has adopted us into your family. The one who has deemed to enter into a special relationship with a people that you chose for yourself from before the foundations of the world.

And having chosen them in the fullness of time, you called them. And having called them, you justified them. And you will go on to glorify them. So we give thanks O Lord that we can come as a result of the work that Jesus did on our behalf in order to reconcile us to yourself.

[4 : 45] Because we acknowledge in your presence that we are sinners who sinned against you. And that by sinning against you that we had forfeited the right to life.

And the right to receive anything that gives us any pleasure and joy in this life. But we know, Lord, because we've experienced, regardless of who we are, that your mercies are new unto us every morning.

That you bestow your blessings upon us each day that we live in this world. The temporal blessings that we so often take for granted.

not realising that we had forfeited the right to any of them. We had forfeited the right to find shelter, to find clothing, to find food, and to find drink.

And we know that that will be denied to those who will go on to experience what sin decels, which is eternal death. Lord, we give you thanks that we're still on mercy's ground and that there's still the opportunity afforded to us to call upon yourself whilst you may be found.

[5 : 58] And to call upon you whilst you are near. Lord, we ask that if there are any who have not yet come to a saving relationship with yourself in this congregation, that you would impress upon them the urgency of doing so whilst they're still in the day of salvation.

Because this is the time that you've given to us to make our calling and our election sure. And we're asking, O Lord, that you would be pleased to bless the word that we will hear today being proclaimed.

That you, O Lord, would be pleased to help us to understand it and to apply it to ourselves and to our own particular circumstances.

That you would help us to understand, O Lord, that you're the sovereign God who rules over all things. That you're the God who has ordered our providence and that you're the God who has commanded the gospel to go forth.

And that you're the God who commands that men everywhere are to repent. So help us, O Lord, that we would not take lightly the hearing of your word because it's what's able to make us wise unto your salvation.

[7 : 18] Give us ears to hear your voice speaking through it. And give us eyes to behold you in our midst. Give us receptive hearts, O Lord, that would be willing in a day of your power to be changed so that we might be conformed to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And we know that he's praying on our behalf to these ends that we might be sanctified by the truth. And your word is truth. And we pray that we would be fashioned in accordance with that truth and that that truth would be our sure guide to lead us and direct us in the way that we conduct ourselves and live our lives.

So we pray that you would bless all who have gathered to worship you this day. We pray not just for ourselves gathered in the building here.

We pray for the community. We pray for the housebound who would like to be with us but who are unable to do so. We pray for the careless and indifferent.

And we're asking because we know that you're not confined to buildings made with hands that you would go forth to reach them at the point of their need.

[8 : 35] Some of them may be aware of their need and they may be petitioning you to give them grace. Others may not have the sense to call upon you. And we're asking that on their behalf you would hear our prayers.

That you would be pleased to quicken them and to alert them to their danger and that you would draw them to yourself. Lord, we commit them to your care and we come before you to give thanks for the ordering that you have for this congregation and situating a minister over them.

We give you thanks, O Lord, that you have led us to that point that a choice was made and we believe because it was prayerfully made that it's your choice for them.

And we pray that you would be with them as a congregation as they now prepared for an induction. We ask that all things would be done decently and in order and that you would help them in the preparations in the days that lie ahead for that purpose.

We pray for Donald himself who has accepted the call. We pray that you would be with them and prepare them to minister to your folk here in Tolstah.

[9 : 53] We ask, Lord, that you would give them from on high food that will edify your people and build them up in their most holy faith and that you would be pleased to use them to reach those who are yet lost and that they may be drawn into your kingdom translated from the kingdom of darkness into the glorious kingdom of light.

We ask that you would be with us now as we seek to wait upon you, that you would lead us and go before us in our worship, having mercy upon us for our sins and shortcomings.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to further sing to God's praise. This time we're going to sing in Psalm 33.

And that's on page 245. In the blue books, page 245 from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 33.

And we're going to sing from verse 8. Let earth and all that live therein with reverence fear the Lord. Let all the world's inhabitants thread him with one accord.

[11 : 07] For he did speak the word and done it was without delay. Established it firmly stood whatever he did say. We're going to sing to the end of verse 12.

Psalm 33 from verse 8. Let earth and all that live therein with reverence fear the Lord. Let earth and all that live therein with reverence fear the Lord.

Let all the world's inhabitants thread him with one accord.

For he did speak the word and done it was without delay. He established it firmly stood whatever he did say.

God hath the council bring to naught which he then folk do take.

[12 : 36] And what he did not which he then folk do take. And what the people do devise from none effect and make.

hope that the council of the Lord doth stand forever sure.

and of his heart the purposes from age to age endure.

that nation blessed is whose God Jehovah is and those.

a blessed people a blessed people a whom for his heritage Jesus just before the children go to the Sunday school do you mind sitting in the front?

[14 : 21] You can carry on down to the front pew. I just want to say a few words with you before you go. I should have done it after the prayer but it just slipped my mind.

Now I'm sure you're all eagerly awaiting Christmas are you? You are. Why are you waiting for Christmas? Go ahead and answer.

Maybe I should come down there. Just to be a wee bit closer to you. Why are you waiting for Christmas?

Spending time with the family. Spending time with the family. That's the only thing in that way. Anything else? What other things do you expect from Christmas?

To decorate the tree. Decorate trees. Any words? Yes. Jesus' birthday. Jesus' birthday. That's the best answer. I thought you were all going to say that we would be following to this new Christmas.

[15 : 26] That's what I'm going to be following to. But, you said, we have to remember Jesus' birthday. Okay. Now, the first people that were to announce that Jesus was going to be born was the shepherds.

And you might think that was a very strange choice that God made when He chose the shepherds to be the very first people to announce the birth of Jesus.

Now, the reason that I'm saying that it was strange is because shepherds weren't really liked by the people of Jesus' day.

Because they were slave people. They spent all of their time out in fields with their sheep. They even slept with their sheep. And that's why we were slave.

And they went very well and prayed. And if anything went missing, people usually blamed the shepherds. Because some of them were slaves.

[16 : 33] And they didn't have a very good name. And they were uneducated people. Not like you and I who are able to go to school or to Sunday school to learn.

These poor shepherds didn't have anyone to teach them. And you might wonder why on earth would God choose the shepherds? Well, I think God chose the shepherds.

To show not just His love for the shepherds. I believe He chose them to show the love for us.

Because sometimes we might think those things unimportant. And who's going to listen to us anyway? We're just children. Or we're just people.

You aren't all that important. And you might not be that well educated. You might not all be better. And that doesn't mean to say that God doesn't trust.

[17 : 37] Because He does. And God chose the shepherds to recognize that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Now imagine the crowds that are in Bethlehem. The reason that He was born in a stable was because the place was crammed packed with people. They couldn't find a home in Bethlehem.

And of all the people that were crammed packed with Bethlehem. None of them realized that the Savior of the world was born in a stable, right in the heavens.

But the shepherds knew that. Now on Christmas day there would be movements of people celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Enjoying the party, the food, the presents, the decorations, meeting with family and all the rest of it. And many of them won't realize the significance of Christmas.

[18 : 41] And as you said, the important thing is that Jesus was born in this world in the universe. Let's just pray.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus, we come before you to ask that you would help us with all the things that are associated with Christmas.

That you would help us not forget your real reason for Christmas. That it was because you were born into this world to save us from the destruction of our sins.

So help us that we would commit our sins to you. Just as the shepherds when they realized the one that was born in Bethlehem came to see this marvelous thing that was done.

And we ask that you would help all of us to be overhauled at the marble that Jesus Christ was born into this world to save us. We might not be all that important.

[19 : 47] And people might not consider us to be very important. But in your eyes we fall very important. From the least of us to the greatest.

You are God of grace and of worship. And we ask that you would help us to receive the grace in Jesus' name. Amen. We are going to read God's word from the book of Acts chapter 10.

The book of Acts chapter 10.

At Saint Syria there was a man named Cornelius. A centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort. A devout man who feared God with all his household gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God.

About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and said to him, Cornelius. And he stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord?

[21 : 08] And he said to him, Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.

He is lodging one Simon at Tanner whose house is by the sea. 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.

And having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. The next day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

And he became hungry and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

[22 : 18] And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has made clean do not call common. This happened three times and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean. Behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was lodging there.

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation.

For I have sent them. And Peter went down to the men and said, I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and a God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you, to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them. And some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea.

[23 : 39] Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

But Peter lifted him up saying, Stand up, I too am a man. And as he talked with them, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.

But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I went, so when I was sent for, I came without objection.

I asked then why you sent for me. And Cornelius said, Four days ago about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour. And behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your arms have been remembered before God.

Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon at Tanner by the sea. So I went, so I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come.

[24 : 56] Now, therefore, we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality.

But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is the Lord of all.

You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him on the third day and caused him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

[26 : 10] And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judged of the living and the dead. To be the judge of the living and the dead, rather.

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. And while Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his own word.

[27 : 17] We're now going to sing in Psalm 15 on page number 16. Psalm 15 on page 16. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face.

Whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from his heart sincerely truth express. And so on. We're going to sing the whole of the Psalm.

Psalm 15. Psalm 15. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place. Page 16. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place.

And who upon your holy hill may live before your face.

Whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness.

[28 : 44] And who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

He casts no slur on anyone, nor does his neighbour wrong.

He has no spite within his heart, or standing on his hand.

He honors those who fear the Lord. The worthless he'll despise.

He keeps the oath which he has sworn, however high the prize.

[29 : 52] He lends his money at no charge. No bribe can he endure.

Those who behave in life like this will always stand secure.

He's a good one. We can turn back to Acts chapter 10. And I want to take some thoughts from the whole of the chapter.

The chapter is entirely occupied with one subject, and that's the conversion of Cornelius and his household. And it describes for us the providential means by which Cornelius and his household on the one hand, and Peter as the chosen instrument on the other hand, were prepared by God to receive this blessing.

And this consisted of two visions. One to Cornelius answering him that God had purposed to show mercy towards him, and directed him to send for Peter.

- [31 : 12] And the other vision was given to Peter himself, informing him that the old partition between Jew and Gentiles was now broken down, and directed him to go to Cornelius.
- Now, in obedience to both visions, the result was that the gospel was preached, and souls were saved.
- The first thing we want to consider is Cornelius himself and his vision. Now, notice that the angel who appeared to Cornelius was not God's appointed agent for the conversion of Cornelius.
- He was simply commissioned as a messenger to convey to Cornelius the command that he was to send to Jobba for Peter.
- And it was Peter who came to preach the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, not the angel.
- [32 : 27] And it was through the preaching of the word, which is God's appointed means for saving sinners, that Cornelius and his household were saved.
- They were born again of the Holy Spirit. Now, anyone who has an encounter with an angel should not depend on that encounter for his salvation.
- Because I believe that it's quite possible for people to have spiritual encounters with the spiritual world and to leave them untouched.
- And might not bring them to the place that they will receive salvation for their souls. Notice from the text that it was through the preaching of the gospel that Cornelius and his household were saved, not by the angel.
- And we are privileged to hear that same gospel being preached to us in where we live and where we were born and brought up.
- [33 : 38] That's a far greater blessing to us than to have an encounter with any angel that God may send to anyone. Because that's the means that God has appointed to save sinners.
- And that's what we all need. Now, notice that it was in Cornelius' search for the truth, his faithful application of the knowledge which he had already received, that God was pleased to bless him.
- We read in the scripture that he who is faithful in that which is least will be entrusted with that which is much. Now, Cornelius demonstrates his faithfulness by acting immediately in obedience to the instructions that he had received.
- He didn't delay. He acted on what he heard and received from the angel. And the angel didn't in any way try to convert him because he hadn't been commissioned for that.
- But angels aren't commissioned to preach the gospel. Men are commissioned to preach the gospel. Men are God's chosen vessels to reach those who are lost.
- [35 : 02] And he uses those from within his own church for that mission. Now, the angel's mission was to instruct Cornelius to send for Peter.
- And he told Cornelius where Peter was to be found and what was to be done. Now, as soon as the angel left, he acted, as I said, immediately upon these instructions.
- And that's what's true of somebody who is earnestly seeking after God. He will act upon what he hears.
- He will act upon what the Lord conveys to him, regardless of how that message may be conveyed. And he will act upon it because he is desiring to be saved.
- And this is what Cornelius was desiring. He was desiring to have a relationship with God. He had used and made use of all that the Jews had imparted to him up until that particular time.

[36 : 13] We read that he was a God-fearing man. That is, a man who respects God. A person who respects everything that there is to do with God, who himself might not be saved.

But who believes that God is able to save and has respect for God's people and everything to do with God's cause. And there are many God-fearing people in our own island who have not yet come to salvation.

But if they're genuinely God-fearing people, they will seek to act on everything that they believe they ought to do in order to be saved.

Now, we see that Cornelius did that. He acted up until that point on everything that he heard. And now that he's had this revelation from the angel, he further acts on that.

And he gives obedience to it and sends messengers which he knew he could depend on to go and fetch Peter for them.

[37 : 31] He told, we read in verse 7, that the angel who spoke to him had departed, that he called two of his servants a devout soldier from among those who attended him.

And having related everything to them, that he sent them to Joppa. Now, a diligent seeker doesn't abandon common sense.

He takes every precaution to make sure everything is done to the best of his ability. So that's the type of man that Cornelius was.

And this is the vision that was given to him. Now we move on to Peter and his vision. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up onto the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Peter had a vision in Joppa. Now, Joppa was about 30 miles from Caesarea.

[38 : 43] So it was a long day's journey for these three messengers that Cornelius had sent. Now, we notice that Peter's vision came as he prayed.

His vision came at 12 noon. That's the third hour in the way that the Jews referred to the time. And we learned that Cornelius' vision had come at the ninth hour the previous day.

Now, we read that Peter had gone up onto the rooftop to pray. And the houses had flat roofs. And very often there would be steps going up the side of the house for people to access the roof.

And there would be a wall or a railing around the roof to prevent people from falling off. That was a commandment that was given to them.

And we read of in the book of Deuteronomy. And it was a place that many people used to pray to God. It was a place that they would be in private with God, just as we might enter into the closet.

[40 : 01] Now, the Jews had fixed times of prayer. And they very often prayed three times a day.

And 12 noon was a favoured time for many Jews to pray to God. Just as Christians today have appointed times that they go aside to pray to God.

Usually in the morning and in the evening and possibly sometime in the afternoon. It's not really that important what time we fix for prayer.

As long as we set time aside to pray to God. Now, fixed times of prayer, like everything else to do with God, is a danger for us to become a formality.

And I have no doubt that many of you, if not all of you, will have had family worship or worship this morning.

[41 : 08] But the question that we ought always to ask ourselves, are we doing this just out of formality? Is this just become a habit for us?

Or are we sincerely desiring to meet with God every time that we endeavour to approach Him through prayer? Because if not, it's of no value to us.

God has promised to hear and answer the prayers of His people. We ought to enter into our devotions with the determination that we can meet with God.

And that God can hear and answer our prayers. Now, it was in the act of praying to God that this vision was given to Peter.

And very often, that's how God speaks to His people. It's in their acts of devotion.

[42 : 15] Even in your attendance here this morning, you may very well hear an answer from God speaking to you as a result of the prayers that you've offered up.

I don't know what you've prayed for. But if God is speaking to you through this service, then it's because God has heard that prayer.

And He's now revealing Himself to you. Maybe not so spectacularly as He did for Cornelius and for Peter in a vision.

But nevertheless, God can speak. And God speaks in a still, small voice. In other words, very often, unless we've blotted out all the other voices that are demanding our attention, we will fail to hear Him.

Just as you may fail to hear Him speaking to you here this morning, if you've entertained yourself in your mind with planning what you're going to do for the rest of the week, or wondering if you put the dinner on before you left the house, or whatever thoughts might come through your mind as you sit in your pew.

[43 : 34] We know that Satan will not leave any of us at rest when we're seeking to worship God, that he will flood our minds with other things to distract us and to take our minds away from what we have sought to enter into.

And seeking to meet with God, he will try to prevent us from hearing God speak, because he will clutter our minds with all the other voices that demand our attention.

That's why we ought to prepare ourselves for coming to our acts of devotion. In former times, the Lord's people spent as much time preparing themselves as they actually did in prayer, making sure that their minds were focused and concentrated when they did enter into their prayer.

Now, Peter went up and we're told that it was 12 noon and that he went up there whilst the rest were preparing a meal for him. So he was hungry. Now, a person who is hungry is far more ready to hear God's voice than a person who's full.

Because the mind is more alert when we're hungry. And that's why we've been exhorted in Scripture to fast and to pray. The two things go together.

[45 : 08] It's to focus our minds, to make sure that nothing else will interrupt us, but that we will have our minds focused on God and the act that we're engaging in.

Now, we're told that whilst he was up on the rooftop praying, that he entered into a trance and that the trance revealed to him various foods.

He saw the heavens opened, we're told, and something like a great sheep descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

And in it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

Well, if we want to see the heavens opened, we must first of all use the key that opens the heavens.

[46 : 13] And the key that opens the heavens is prayer. And we ought not to neglect that means of grace. Now, Peter was given this vision.

And that vision would have corresponded to his physical need at that time. He was hungry. The reason that he had gone up there was to give the people that were preparing a meal for him time to do so.

So he was hungry as he entered into prayer. And the vision corresponds with his physical condition. He sees all kinds of animals laid out before him and given the invitation to rise, to kill and to eat.

Now, Peter, being a devout Jew, recognised that it wasn't lawful for him to eat unclean animals.

Yet, this sheet contained clean and unclean animals. And Peter's response enables us to understand that Peter understood that it wasn't lawful for him to eat and to kill all of these animals.

[47 : 33] Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. It would have been a shock to Peter's conscience to realise that he was being commanded to eat something that was unclean.

And his impulsive reaction is true to his character because we read that that's the kind of person that Peter was. We read, for example, when the Lord told them that he was going up to Jerusalem and that he must suffer many things and be put to death, that Peter impulsively goes against what the Lord has revealed to him and said to him, No, Lord, that can't be.

If that's the case, don't go up to Jerusalem. You see, Peter wasn't listening. He was impulsive in his actions. The same when the Lord was washing the disciples' feet.

When he came to Peter, Lord, you're not going to wash my feet. He wasn't willing to wait and to see what the Lord was doing and what the Lord was saying to him. Because that's the kind of character Peter was.

And we see here that he is refusing to accept that the vision that has been given to him was from the Lord, even though he addresses him as Lord.

[49 : 10] By no means Lord. He's willing to go against what the Lord has revealed to him. Because he is impulsive.

And he's not willing to wait to hear what God has in store for him. The same was true on these other occasions.

He wasn't willing to wait to see the outcome of the Lord's suffering and his death. Because he ought to have realized the Lord knows this is going to happen because he's just told us it's going to happen.

He knew it was the Lord speaking to him. In the same way, when his feet were being washed, he wasn't willing to wait to see what the spiritual significance of that was going to be.

He was going to try and prevent the Lord from washing his feet until the Lord told him, if I don't do this for you, Peter, you will have nothing to do with me. We have to wait on the Lord to see what the Lord is speaking to us.

[50 : 19] Even although it might be contrary to what we want him to say. Because that's how it was for Peter. And I believe that that's how it will be for many people.

But on all of these occasions, we see the condescension of God's divine love and the sufficiency of his grace.

It shows us that even the best of men can be so attached to external ceremonies that when we hear the voice of the Lord, we're not willing to listen because we are so fixed in our own ways.

We have already determined what we're going to do and our minds are shut to hearing what the Lord has to say to us. And many fall into that trap.

The revelation Peter received in this vision was not primarily to teach him the abrogation of the Levitical laws of purification.

[51 : 37] Its immediate purpose was to remove any scruples that Peter may have in his mind which might prevent him from going to a Gentile to proclaim the gospel to him.

Notice the words that we have in verse 20 when the Lord speaks to Peter, rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation for I have sent them.

Now that would have been hard for Peter to believe that the Lord would send Gentiles to him so that he might go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Because he was so fixed in his own mind and his Jewishness that God would have nothing to do with the Gentiles. Because that's how the Jews treated the Gentiles.

They treated them no better than dogs. They wouldn't even speak to them. They looked down their nose at them. Now the natural man might argue and say it wasn't the Lord who sent these men, it was Cornelius.

[53 : 02] But the spiritual man recognizes that God is in sovereign control over all things. It was the Lord who sent these men.

And the Lord made that clear to Peter. Now to the natural man you might say well it was Cornelius who gave them the command to go.

Yes, but who was sovereignly holy and in control of all of these circumstances? It was the Lord and the spiritual man recognizes that.

He recognizes God's sovereignty. And we notice throughout the whole of this narrative how all these events seem to be dovetailing into each other.

All things are working together for the good of Cornelius' household. from his vision of the angel and his message to Peter who was also prepared by a vision that was given to him on the following day which was breaking down all the scruples that he might have and sending to a Jew.

[54 : 22] And all the scruples that Peter might have am I going to go to a Gentile? The messengers being sent after Cornelius' vision arrive just at exactly the right time after Peter has received his vision.

Everything is just happening at the right time. it's not coincidence. There are no such things as coincidences in God's plan for things.

It's God's ruling over all things and bringing all things together in order that he might send his blessing.

So we see that all the circumstances are dovetailing into each other in order to bring about the result that God has determined.

And that is that Cornelius and his household his friends and his neighbours may be blessed. Now Peter has just been given two divine revelations one by a vision and another by the Holy Spirit speaking to him.

[55 : 46] Yet he acknowledges his own ignorance. In verse 21 we read that he says when he went down I am the one that you are looking for.

what is the reason for your coming? So he himself still doesn't know the reason. The man that God was going to use as the means of bringing this blessing to Cornelius' household after having received a vision and after having discerned that the Holy Spirit spoke to him he still doesn't know what God has in store.

And that's very often the case for God's people. Even although we might be led in certain directions and even although the word of God might speak to us we might still not be aware of what God has in store for us.

And the person who realises and recognises that God is speaking will readily acknowledge his own ignorance as to what God has in store.

Yet we believe that this is the way God has led us. And it's only as time goes by as Jesus said to his disciples hereafter you will know.

[57 : 16] and it's only as we submit ourselves to his direction and leading that he will reveal himself to us further and show us that it was for our good that he led us down the particular path that he's led us down so that he might bestow his blessing upon us.

Peter asks the three messengers what's the reason for your coming? He's realising I don't know although I've had this vision and although I've been told by the Holy Spirit to go with these men I still don't know why.

And they answer what they've been told. They speak in verse 22 Cornelius a centurion an upright and a God fearing man who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation was directed by the Holy Angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

And it was only when he met with these men that he may then have realised well the only thing that God could be sending me to these people is so that I might preach the gospel because Peter had been commissioned to preach the gospel.

And not knowing what Peter was going to say Peter would have understood the only thing if this is from God that I have to say is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[59 : 08] They were going to give ear to that gospel and on hearing that gospel they were going to be saved. Peter knew what he had been called to do and he was going to give obedience to what the Lord revealed to him in the vision that he was given that he was to go to the Gentiles those who had previously been considered unclean to the Jew he was to go to them because that was the significance of the vision of the unclean animals.

His primary calling was to go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ Christ. And before we close I want us to notice the words that we have in verse 23 he invited them in to be his guests.

Hospitality to strangers was practiced and commended in both the Old and the New Testament. and we learn from this part of the narrative that barriers have been broken down before the blessing flows.

The removal of the barriers that we set up the prejudices that we entertain concerning others needs to be broken down so that God's blessing might flow.

Peter might not have entertained these people prior to the vision that he had been given because there was a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles.

[61 : 11] But Peter was willing in obedience to what was revealed to him to break down these barriers and the same could be said of Cornelius.

Were there any Romans that were to stoop down to the Jews and acknowledge that they had something that they desired?

No. Because the Romans were too proud to acknowledge that the Jews could be of any benefit to them. and that they might have something that they didn't have themselves.

Yet Cornelius was willing to break down the prejudices that most other Romans had. Just as Peter was willing to break down the prejudices that he had concerning Gentiles.

And it was only after it was demonstrated by his hospitality to these Gentiles and his willingness to give obedience to what was revealed to him that the blessing flowed.

[62 : 22] And I believe that we are responsible for preventing many of the blessings that God could bestow upon us as a result of our own prejudices.

because I believe that God has not changed and I believe that God is as able today to bless us with the greatest blessings that he has ever bestowed upon this earth.

That he's able to do that for us today just as surely as he was able to do it in former generations. And if you go back and think about what you've heard of times of revival, you'll see that prejudices were broken down, people came together, because they recognized that it's in unity that God commands his blessing.

As the psalmist tells us, where brethren dwell in unity, God will command the blessing, the life that shall never end.

And surely that's what all of God's people ought to desire, that we would receive that life for ourselves and that we would desire it for our fellow human beings, regardless of who they are.

[63 : 50] Because as Jesus tells us, we're not just to love one another, we're to love our enemies, those who may be opposed to us, we're to pray for them, and we're to desire their spiritual and eternal good.

Well, may God grant that he will help us to learn some of the lessons that are brought before us in this chapter, that we would apply it to ourselves, and that we would endeavour to give obedience to the Lord, and that we would submit to the leading and the teaching that he gives us, so that we might experience God's blessing, and not be guilty of being responsible from holding them back from ourselves and from others.

Amen. Our Father in Heaven, we come before you to acknowledge that there are many things within us that have set us in our own ways, but your word reveals to us that your ways are far higher than our ways, and although we cannot fully understand at times the way that you lead us, we believe that if we're being led by the Holy Spirit, that he is leading us into the paths of righteousness, the paths in which you can bless your people, and that's what we desire for the congregation here, in the days that lie ahead of them as they prepare to receive the man that you've called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, that they would receive him without prejudice, and that they would open their minds to accept accepting that he's your chosen vessel to bring your blessing to them as a congregation, and we ask that you would abundantly bless them, that they themselves would be blessed in their person, and that you would hear their prayers on behalf of their families and friends, so that they would see a spiritual revival in the community.

Lord, that's the desire that we have for all of our communities, and we ask that you would break down all the barriers that prevent your blessing from flowing.

Hear us and answer us, and forgive us for our many sins, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing in Psalm number 85, on page 340.

[66 : 52] And we're going to sing from verse 6, We're going to sing to the end of verse 9, three stanzas, that in thee may thy people joy, will thou not us revive.

But in thee may thy people joy, will thou know us revive.

Show us thy mercy or to us to thy salvation give.

I hear what thought the Lord will speak to his spoken speak peace, peace, and to his sins, but let them not return to foolishness.

With them that fear him surely near his salvation.

[68 : 48] The glory in our land may have habitation.

salvation. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.