

# “GET UP, PETER. KILL AND EAT.”

Acts 10:1-48

Key Verse 13

**“Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’”**

Jesus has great vision for his church, saying, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8).”** Last week we saw how the first part was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the apostles were baptized by the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ vision extends beyond our individual lives and generations to the ends of the earth. In Acts 10 Peter preaches the gospel to the Gentiles. Central to this story is a vision of a sheet full of animals, all different kinds. This is Jesus’ vision for all the people of the world. He wants Peter to know and share his vision.

But Jesus’ vision isn’t easy for Peter due to his deeply rooted prejudice against Gentiles. Through this encounter with Cornelius, Jesus helps Peter, and through Peter the entire church, to learn God’s mind and heart. For 2,000 years, Jesus has been fulfilling his vision. Do we see Jesus’ vision? Is there prejudice in our own heart, preventing us from obeying Jesus: **“Get up, kill and eat”**? Let’s take this opportunity to study how Jesus helped Peter, so we too may learn the heart of God and participate in his plan this Fall semester. We’ll look at this story in three parts.

## **Part 1: The visions given to Cornelius and Peter (1-23a).**

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus’ disciples were his witnesses in all Judea. Samaritans believed the gospel, shared with them by Philip (8:4-13), and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Peter and John (8:14-17). The gospel went to all of Judea and Samaria (1:8; 8:25). The Holy Spirit began to reach out to the ends of the earth. Philip evangelized an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-38) and then traveled to Caesarea (8:40), where he stayed and built a family, including 4 unmarried, prophetic daughters (21:8). Jesus appeared to Saul, his chief enemy, on the road to Damascus, and chose him to be his instrument to the Gentiles and their kings (9:15). All the pieces were in place; but how to get his apostles and his church involved? With their primary enemy Saul

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now a disciple, the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened (9:31). Peter traveled to Lydda and healed paralyzed Aeneas (9:32-35), and raised the disciple Tabitha from the dead at Joppa, where he remained (9:36-43). The stage was set for Jesus' plan to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, if only Peter's heart could broaden.

God began at Caesarea. The city had been rebuilt by Herod in honor of Caesar Augustus, and was a lavish port city, hosting major sports competitions. It was the seat of Roman power in the area. God chose a Roman centurion, Cornelius, to work with. As a centurion in the elite Italian Regiment, he had power, wealth, and influence. He was a man of authority, tasked to keep his 100 men in line, while being the front line of interaction with the occupied people. But he is not what we expect. Verse 2 reads, **“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”** Even the Jews, who despised Gentiles, respected this man (22). He was the spiritual leader for his home, and even some of his soldiers became devout, likely through his influence (7). In short, he was a man who feared God and did what was right. He was a man seeking God, sincerely, humbly and earnestly. I really like Cornelius. Sounds like a great neighbor, or classmate, or fellow worker. But his seeking and devout life could not save him from the power of sin. He needed to hear the gospel of Jesus and be saved. But how, unless someone shared it with him? None of the apostles even knew about him, but God did. God saw his life of prayer and giving, and God remembered him. God had a plan. He sent an angel to Cornelius, telling him to send for Simon Peter. Cornelius did not despise or dismiss the angel. His seeking heart made him very humble and open to God. Although Simon Peter was just an ex-fisherman living in a tanner's house, Cornelius was ready to listen. He called his servants and a soldier, told them everything, and sent them 30 miles down the coast to Joppa where Peter was staying.

At noon the next day, while Cornelius' men were approaching Joppa, Peter was on the roof praying. God intervened. Look at verses 10-13. **“He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’”** The large sheet was covered with

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all kinds of animals, clean and unclean. Since Peter was hungry, some looked delicious, like turkey sandwich, or beef rib tips and taco meat. But some of the others would make him unclean just by touching them, let alone killing them or eating them. Jesus had already declared all foods clean (Mk 7:19), since what goes into a person doesn't make them unclean, but rather what comes out of a person defiles them (Mk 7:15). Jesus thus nullified the Levitical dietary laws. It was time to fire up the BBQ. God's vision for world salvation is dramatically revealed in this command: **“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”**

But Peter wasn't ready. Verse 14 reads, **“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’** To Peter, keeping his identity as one of God's holy people depended on maintaining a strict line between clean and unclean. Leviticus 11:44-45 read, **“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”** Since the Holy Spirit came upon him, his desire to be holy only increased. There was no way he could obey Jesus' clear direction: **“Get up, kill and eat.”** The site of the bugs and reptiles and birds squirming around on the sheet was making him sick. Those were the things that Gentiles eat. Could you imagine Peter in China, where you can eat spiders, bats, and roaches on a stick? The Jews despised Gentiles who ate such things, and considered them all unclean. Peter had to unlearn some old habits and traditions of the Jews, but he was too weak to do so.

Jesus knew Peter's habit to rashly oppose Jesus when he doesn't understand. So Jesus helps him. Look at verses 15-16. **“The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”** This was his point, repeated three times, in order that even stubborn Peter would get it. Jesus wasn't saying, “It's ok to be impure and unclean. Go ahead and live with no standards at all.” Rather, his point is: **“Do not call anything impure that God has made or is making clean.”** Peter needed to broaden his heart to see the greater implications of the gospel beyond his own cultural understanding. His narrow Jewish heart needed to be expanded. God sent Jesus to make clean and pure that which was defiled. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10), not to condemn the unclean.

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We tend to see the prejudice in others easily, but think we ourselves are free from all prejudice. Surely Peter thought so. But through this vision God was exposing Peter's prejudice. Like Peter, we are prone to read the Bible through the lens of our prejudices, pointing out who is “clean” or “unclean,” rather than understanding God's heart for the world. He is working in us to root out our prejudices and allow us to reach across cultural and personal barriers with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is part of our sanctification.

Peter didn't understand. But he took the vision seriously, wondering about the meaning and thinking about it. The Holy Spirit helped Peter to invite the Gentile men sent by Cornelius into the house as guests, and the next day travel with them. Often we are like Peter, concerned about what is right in front of us, like eating. But God is working in and among us. He wants us to accept his vision of the sheet, and his passionate command: **“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”**

### **Part 2: Peter and Cornelius discover what God is doing (24-35).**

The next day Peter arrived in Caesarea. In the first part the Holy Spirit was leading every step, through their prayer, through visions and through clear instruction. Now it was the time for these men to respond to what they had learned, and to go one step further: to work together. Cornelius had a humble attitude. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. **“Stand up,”** he said. **“I am only a man myself.”** God had not told them what he was doing in detail, but left them to figure it out. They were able to do so because they both had a humble and obedient attitude toward God and toward one another. In order to see what God was doing, they had to share their stories with each other. Each of us has a story. To work together with one another for God's plan we need to learn humble listening. No one person has the full vision of God; we need to learn from each other, and work together. I've learned that through our UIC leadership team, and from working with Pastor Ron and Dr. Mark Yang and other staff. Through sharing our stories together, our lives, we overcome individualistic wish-dreams and find out what God is doing in our midst.

Peter went first, going inside to the large gathering. Verses 28-29 reads, **“He said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit**

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**a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”** Peter was honest with them; standing in the room with them was way outside his comfort zone. He never would have come, but he learned something through the vision of the sheet. God showed him that he should not call anyone impure or unclean. This is a message for us in our polarized world today, where many think their task is defining and calling out who is impure or unclean. As a result, doors for the gospel are increasingly being closed in our schools, colleges and universities, and Jesus’ name is not taken seriously. It was painful to step out of his comfort zone, but he did so without any objection. Peter didn’t know why he was there. So he asked why they sent for him. Recently a seasoned missionary and accomplished disciple-maker came to Chicago. His prayer topic is to see what God was doing, and find how God wants him to participate. We are learning from each other, and he is already being used by God preciously. We are thankful to have him.

Now it was Cornelius’ turn to share his story. He shared about the angel’s visit and the directions he gave. Verse 33 reads, **“So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”** Cornelius didn’t know what Peter would say. But he had a great learning mind. He had eager expectations through his vision. The three days his servants were gone he prepared a conference program, held registration, and filled his house with friends and relatives, to hear Peter’s message. They were thirsty for the message of God.

In what must have been a huge “A ha!” moment, Peter finally figured out what he was doing there. Verses 34-35 read, **“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.’”** Listening to Cornelius’ testimony taught Peter something. He learned that God loves and accepts not only Jews, but people of every nation. Those who fear God and do what is right are not limited to circumcised people. Peter realized: God wants me to preach the gospel even to these Gentiles! He learned the heart and mind of God in a way he never would have known, except through this encounter.

Many of us have experienced this. I know that over the past 17 years of teaching

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the Bible and shepherding others I have learned so much about God that I would never have learned otherwise. My heart begins to change, to beat like his, to feel like his. Through becoming a husband, I learned the sacrificial love of God. Studying Hosea last year, I understood his agony. I became a parent, and I'm struggling to raise 4 sons as godly men, I understand God's identity as Father in a way I didn't know before. Yes, to grow in this way requires us to challenge and step out of our comfort zone. But this is what it means to know God's vision for world salvation; to obey his passionate command: **“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”**

## **Part 3: Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius (36-48).**

Peter's gospel messages in Acts are all similar, establishing common ground, going into detail about Jesus' death and resurrection, and then making application to the audience. This is the best part of the passage, because it is all about Jesus.

**First, the gospel of peace through Jesus (36-38).** Verse 36 reads, **“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”** The Gentiles of Caesarea knew about the ministry of Jesus, likely considering him a rebel. But Peter called this the good news of peace. Peter changed. Back in chapter 1, he had asked Jesus, **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel (1:6)?”** It meant, “Aren't you going to get rid of the Romans? They are so bad!” But now he realized that in Jesus true peace between Jew and Gentile is possible because Jesus is Lord of all.

How is Jesus Lord of all, and how does his coming bring peace? Verse 38 reads, **“...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”** This life and ministry that Jesus began has been carried on down through the generations of his disciples. We are in a world that desperately needs Jesus' peace, who makes the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside the law with its commands and regulations and creating in himself one new humanity out of the two (Eph 2:14-15). Where can peace be found between Ukrainians and Russians? What about Israelis and Palestinians? Or in Ferguson,

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MO between the police and the black community? Between conservatives and progressives? Between husband and wife, or parents and children... This is impossible, because of the power of the devil. Jews and Gentiles could never be at peace. But at the cross of Jesus there is peace. Jesus has defeated the devil, and heals all who are under his power. In Jesus, therefore, is peace.

**Second, the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, testified to by witnesses (39-41).** There were things about Jesus that could only be shared by eyewitnesses, namely, the apostles. Verses 39-41 reads, **“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”** As we remember his grace through the gospel accounts, in the testimony of others, and in our own lives, we say, “Jesus is beautiful.” Sinful men killed him by hanging him on a cross. He died as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29b). But God raised him from the dead. This gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the good news of salvation. There is no greater story in the world than the story of Jesus. We need not be ashamed of this story; it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro 1:16).

**Third, Jesus' coming as Judge, and forgiveness of sins by faith (42-48).** Verse 42 reads, **“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”** Our life and death in this world is not everything. One day we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2Co 5:10). As Lord of all, Jesus alone is worthy to judge human beings. Knowing this, we live in hope of his coming, obeying his commands and seeking to please him. His coming is not dreadful, however, to those who live by faith. Verse 43 reads, **“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”** Cornelius and Peter were very different people humanly. But fundamentally they are the same: sinners who need to be forgiven. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name. So as we live by faith in Jesus, we don’t need to fear his coming, but rather look forward to it, and speed its coming through preaching to the people about him.

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What was the response to Peter's message? The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message, and they began to speak in tongues and praise God. The circumcised believers were astonished, since these were Gentiles. Peter said in verse 47, **“Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”** The unity of the church and centrality of the gospel are very important to God, as shown through how much work he went through to get to this establish it. This united church has a clear purpose: to fulfill God's vision.

Our world is like a giant sheet spread out, and all the people are like the animals on it. Let's try something. Everyone stand up, and close your eyes. Let's think about the vision of the large sheet, covered in animals. They represent the people of the world. Some of these are cute and likeable, and we have no problem reaching out to them. Others not so much.

We all have prejudices, opinions, self-righteous standards that prevent us from accepting people whom God loves and wants to save. He is working in us to root out that which we are blind to. He calls us to **“Get up, kill and eat.”** Peter was in Joppa when he saw this vision. In Matthew 16 Jesus calls Peter: Simon, son of Jonah. Peter's dad was named after the prophet Jonah whom God commanded to give the message to the wicked people of Nineveh. But Jonah instead fled to Joppa, and took a ship to Tarshish, to escape God's command. We can all be a little bit like Jonah. But let's decide this Fall semester to be like Peter, not like Jonah. Let's hear God's command: **“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”** Yes, it will require us to step out of our comfort zone. It will require us to humbly pray and listen to the Holy Spirit, to one another, and to the people we minister to. But it is the privilege to work together for God's world salvation plan. It is the way to learn God's heart and to be inspired by his plan. We can't do it sitting at the computer or watching Youtube. Jesus said, **“Get up, kill and eat.”** Let's get up, and go find the Cornelius God has prepared for us.