

## Whew! Glad We Made It!

Acts 10:19, 20 NIV

*“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, these men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”*

I was recently listening to NPR (National Public Radio) and heard an interview with a Nigerian novelist who had come to the U. S. to attend college. Growing up in Nigeria, she was not used to being identified by the color of her skin. As a black African in America, she was suddenly confronted with what it meant to be a person of color in the United States. Race as an idea became something that she had to navigate and learn.

The learning process took some time and was episodic. She recalled, for example, an undergraduate class in which the subject of watermelon came up. A student had said something about watermelon to an African-American classmate, who was offended by the comment. She remembered sitting there thinking, ‘But what’s so bad about watermelons? Because I quite like watermelons.’ She felt that her African-American classmate was annoyed with her because she didn’t share her anger – but she didn’t have the context to understand why. The history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was not taught to students in Nigeria. So she had yet to learn fully about the history of slavery and its continuing reverberations in the U.S.

“Race is such a strange construct,” she said, “because you have to *learn* what it means to be black in America. So you have to *learn* that watermelon is supposed to be offensive.” (taken from an interview with NPR *Fresh Air*’s Terry Gross).

Aren’t we all “foreigners” in a very real sense? We need to remind ourselves that Christians are aliens here since we are citizens, not of this world, but of a world not yet visible to us. Despite the many nations and territories of this world, there are only two kinds of people – those who have received God’s grace through Christ and those who still need to. God wants us to see every person from every nation as someone He loves. That makes our response clear. We are to view every person as someone who needs to hear God’s word personally. Cultural and racial barriers may seem daunting, but the love of God is stronger. Jesus commissioned his apostles to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jews and Gentiles in the Roman world looked at each other with much suspension. Gentiles found Jewish beliefs and customs to be confusing and narrow minded, while Jews thought of Gentiles as pagan and immoral.

Cornelius was a Gentle centurion. He is described in scripture as being ‘devout and God-fearing’ which suggests that he lived in a way that was consistent with the Law of Moses, even though he was not initially a full convert. Then Cornelius experiences a vision from the Lord. An angel tells him that his sincere acts and prayers are not ignored in heaven. But even with all of Cornelius’ devotion, he still needs the salvation that only Christ can bring. He’s instructed to send for Peter in Joppa.

In the meantime, Peter falls into a trance. He sees heaven open up and ‘something like a large sheet being let down’ with all kinds of four footed animals, reptiles and birds in it that the Jews



consider unclean. Peter then hears a voice that tells him “Get up, Peter, Kill and eat”. Peter is horrified at the thought of making himself unclean before the Lord. The voice speaks to him a second and third time, with God admonishing him that he is to call nothing unclean that God has made clean. God’s statement relates to food, but also applied directly to Peter’s views about Gentiles. Peter later, in the home of Cornelius, said that he learned from a vision that he should not avoid contact with Gentiles because God does not show favoritism.

Peter’s trip to see Cornelius was not without controversy. Peter was called to answer to the charge of entering into the house of a Gentile. “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:2, 3).

For too long believers have permitted the “Gentiles” of modern culture to remain those who are untouched with the gospel. Peter’s vision tells us that God disapproves when we pick and choose those members of our society whom we think deserve the kingdom of God. All races and ethnic groups should hear the gospel and feel God’s love through us. Remember, we’re Gentiles too, but I’m glad we made it into the family of God by the mercy and grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why is prejudice so prevalent? What are some forms of prejudice that we need to be aware of?
2. Even today there is a tendency to hold to legalistic righteousness. Why is there often a preference to hold to legalistic requirements instead of the freedom found in Christ?
3. As God called on Peter to lay aside his prejudices and biases, He calls upon all of us to do so as well. In what ways might God be calling on you to overcome your prejudices and biases?

**Reflections:**

Peter and Cornelius were neither insane nor “hearing voices.” God sent a messenger to each of them so both sight and sound could confirm the message. Each of them saw, heard, and responded positively. We may never get a message in the same way, but God still speaks to us through His Holy Word, the Bible. When we open its pages and read, our response should be as positive and immediate as theirs.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, you are a God of love and mercy. Help us to reach those of every nation who need your saving grace. Encourage us to be ready for them with the gospel of Christ. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

What God wants me to do:

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Special insights I have learned:

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