

A Reluctant Peter and A Ready audience

Acts 10:24-33

Sunday morning, May 30, 2010.

I. An apprehensive Peter.

A. It was not a reluctance or apprehensiveness to do the will of God.

Nor was Peter tentative about his understanding as to what the vision meant.

Several things made the meaning of the vision clear:

1. The testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding the three men at the gate seeking Peter. Acts 10:19,20.
2. The tangible presence of the three men at the gate enquiring about Peter.
3. The timing of Peter's severe hunger, the vision, and the arrival of the three men.
4. The fact that the Lord had spoken three times the same message. Only once before the Lord had spoken three times the same message to Peter. That was when Peter was restored to fellowship following his denial of the Lord on the night of His arrest. Peter felt the weight and importance of this moment.

B. It is precisely the feeling of the weightiness of the moment that causes Peter to be tentative; apprehensive, and contemplative.

1. Peter senses the importance of this moment in redemptive history. He knows, he is standing on the continental divide of redemptive history. Prior to this moment all the little contributories and mighty rivers of God's redemptive activity emptied out in the ocean of Judaism. Salvation was of the Jews, and God had put His Name in earthly Jerusalem; more precisely, in the temple of that city.

From here on out all that would change. All the little contributories and the mighty currents of God's saving work would now flow in a whole new direction, and empty out in the ocean of New Jerusalem; Jerusalem Above, and The Israel of God; the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is not tied to any nation or ethnicity, but is universal in scope. "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

With that development the very heart of Judaism consisting in its city, temple, priesthood, sacrifices, Mosaic statutes and traditions, would perish. This came about in the judgment of AD 68-70.

2. Apprehending something of the importance of this moment in redemptive history, Peter can not rush. He is deliberate; contemplative and apprehensive as he moves forward.
 1. Peter could have immediately gone with his visitors back to Caesarea. It was early in the afternoon when his visitors arrived, and it was a 12 hour walk to Caesarea. They could have walked 4 hours that day and arrived in Caesarea on the third day after Cornelius had his angelic visitation. Peter does not do this. He lodges his three visitors instead for the remainder of that day and the night.
 2. Peter does something else that we should not miss. He goes to the church in Joppa; at least to the leadership, and he must have discussed with them something of the importance of this moment. Peter does not want to go alone to Caesarea with these three men. He wants witnesses. Acts 10:23.

He brings not just a few; he brings six witnesses Acts 11:12. And they were all Jews Acts 10:45. (Double the 2 or 3 witnesses Mosaic law required.)

3. Peter must have known that crossing the Continental Divide of redemptive history would not go by without contention on the part of the Jewish constituents of the Church; just as we see happening in Acts 11:2,3. He wants the facts of whatever is going to happen at Cornelius' house to be well established, for no doubt is to remain that the covenant community of God has now crossed the continental divide of redemptive history, and has once for all lost its Jewish character.

Application:

Have you come to grips with the implications of this moment in redemptive history? Have you crossed the Continental Divide? Today we have Christians who seem to be drifting to the other side of this divide again. There are those who circumcise their boys on the 8th day; they will mark the occasion with a party; some will even have a rabbi do the honors. Some burn candles on a Jewish menorah at the time of Hanukah. There are those who follow OT dietary laws, and those who celebrate Passover according to Jewish custom, and those who will have a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah for their children. Though it be fully granted that we have liberty to do so, we should note that we are no better for doing so, or worse for not doing so. We also should examine our hearts as to why we would want to return to the spirituality and piety of God's covenant people on the far side of the Continental Divide. Are we looking for something by way of spirituality or piety that God has not provided for us on this side of the Continental Divide? Something we think we are missing out on? Is part of our identity on the far side of the divide, or are we complete in Christ? Do we take our identity from Christ alone, or do we take it from Moses also on this side of the divide? Col 2:6-23.

II. A ready audience.

- A. Peter was not the only one making due preparations for his encounter with Cornelius. Cornelius also senses something of the importance of this encounter. He has four days to reflect on what might be coming, and he believes it will be important enough to gather all his friends and relatives together.
- B. Upon their encounter, Cornelius falls at Peter's feet and worships him. A posture and practice Jews reserved for superiors, but Greeks and Romans reserved it for Deity only. Cornelius read too much into his angelic visitation, and Peter quickly corrects him. Not all of God's servants in history have been as quick with this as Peter was.
- C. Next Cornelius fills Peter in as to how he came to call on him all the way in Joppa, and he concludes his remarks by stating two truths:
 1. We are all present before God. (Not before Peter.) Cornelius and company expected to hear from God, and they gathered before Him. How do you come to church?
 2. We're all present to hear (and to do, by implication) all things commanded you by God. What readiness; what expectation; what preparation of heart we have here! God does not fail to meet with, and to speak to hearts like that, and He still does not fail to do so today. Pray for heart preparation like that!