

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Men's Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 5

Read Acts 9: 20 – 11: 57

Questions:

Q1: The theme of fear is throughout the texts for this week. What are the different meanings of fear in these texts? Of what are people fearful?

Fear of Saul:

Believers

Jews

Fear of God

Cornelius

Fear of other's discipleship

Q2: What is the meaning of Peter's vision? How does it relate to the visit by Cornelius? What does it foretell?

Q3: What is Peter's role in these texts? What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Q4: Bonus question: The number three is used several times in these texts. [Cornelius has a vision at three in the afternoon; Cornelius sent three men to Joppa for Peter; Peter heard the voice in his vision three times] What is their use and what is the significance of this number in each case?

Insights:

I1: Willie James Jennings, theologian, in the book, *Acts, in the Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible* series, writes regarding Peter's vision he had (Acts 10:10 – "He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance."), p. 105:

"Now God comes. Peter will be the site of the in-breaking. God's timing is purposeful, like a musician with perfect rhythm and pitch, whose entrance defines the song. The old order approaches on foot, and the new order drops from the sky. God comes to Peter inside of Israel's first and deepest gesture – in the moment of prayer. God comes to Peter inside the creature's deepest truth – in the moment of his hunger. Prayer and hunger, hunger and prayer – these will be the pillars on which God will build the future of the creature. These are the pillars on which God will constitute the new order. Hunger and prayer go together, completing each other in God...God wills the creature to pray, and god wills the creature to hunger."

I2: William H. Willimon, in the *Interpretation Series* book, *Acts*, p. 100, writes regarding baptism and inclusion of the Gentiles as the people of God:

"Gentiles like Cornelius are included, not as those who are basically nice people after all but as those who, like Israel, are able to repent (11:18). Repentance, contrary to popular misconception, is not a heroic first step I make toward Christ nor is it a felling-sorry-for my sins. It is the divine gift of being able to be turned toward truth. Turning toward the truth about myself and my situation is quite beyond my

power to accomplish. Like Cornelius, I cannot repent – turn around – on my own. So God does it for me. In Christ, God has turned toward us and “granted,” given, us repentance... Repentance is an act of God’s grace. Everyone, says Peter (10:43), Jew or Gentile, virtuous pagans like Cornelius or zealous persecutors like Saul, may now turn, return, to God.”

I3: Joseph S. Harvard, in *Feasting on the Word*, reflecting on Peter’s testimony, (p. 452, C2):

“Would the Gentiles have a place? That was the question hanging in the balance along with the integrity and expansion of the early church. Fortunately, God had a witness. Peter was the pivotal figure, the rock, whose confession changed the dynamics of Jesus’ relationship with his followers and opened the door to discipleship. Remember the promise that the risen Lord made to his disciples, that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit? The fulfillment of this promise is nowhere more evident than in the boldness of Peter’s testimony in Jerusalem. God empowered Peter, an ordinary fisherman, to play a significant role in the mission of the church.”

Links to further study:

L1: Review the Bible Project video about Acts. Start at minute 7:12.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGbNw855ksw>

L2: Peter's Vision, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54209> [retrieved March 1, 2018].

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