

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 13)

The book of Acts isn't just about "superstar preachers" – in fact, it's largely about "ordinary" Christians who witness about Jesus Christ everywhere they go! Out of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6, we read about the impact of Steven in Acts 7 and of Philip in Acts 8.

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

BEGIN WHERE THEY ARE – AND PREACH JESUS! That's all Philip did, that's all the church in Acts did, and that's all you need to do!

In Acts 9, we read about the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who later becomes widely known as Paul the Apostle. But Paul wouldn't have experienced salvation if it hadn't been for Ananias, and wouldn't have been accepted by the New Testament church if it hadn't been for Barnabas. Never underestimate the impact of one "obscure" saint of God!

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Paul essentially becomes the "main character" for the remainder of the book of Acts. But first, we revisit the ongoing ministry of Peter for a brief moment. Although he is not as "prominent" as Paul, please notice that it is Peter's ministry that is associated with all of the major "transitions" in Acts (using the "keys" to reach Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, Gentiles in Acts 10).

Acts 9:32-35 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

The Apostle Peter had been engaged in an itinerant ministry that took him to Lydda, a largely Gentile city about 25 miles from Jerusalem. The area had been evangelized by disciples who had been scattered by persecution, and Peter now joined them (Acts 8:25 – "in many villages"). No doubt Philip the evangelist had also ministered throughout the area (Acts 8:40 – "in all the cities"). And God worked with them!

Acts 9:36-43 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Joppa (modern Jaffa) was located on seacoast, ten miles beyond Lydda. It was from here that the Prophet Jonah embarked when he tried to flee from God (Jonah 1:1-3). **Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles, but Peter in Joppa received his call to go to the Gentiles!** Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the "wind of the Spirit" that caused the Gentiles to rejoice. What a contrast!

Peter was in Joppa on Divine assignment for several reasons. When Dorcas died, the believers in the city sent for him immediately. There is no record that any of the Apostles had raised the dead up to this point, but they had faith in the words of Jesus to His disciples:

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

It was always God's will to have the Gentiles in His church, but the Jewish believers who were already saved didn't have the right mindset! Perhaps they were so busy trying to keep the church "clean" that they didn't think to reach out to those who were different. But God didn't mind "messing up" their comfortable church to see souls saved!

Proverbs 14:4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

It is ten years after the Day of Pentecost, and they are just beginning to move out of their comfort zone to the Samaritans. And if it hadn't been for direct Divine intervention, it probably would have taken another ten years to even think about reaching out to the pagan Gentiles!

Genesis 22:18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Isaiah 49:6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Isaiah 60:1-3 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Malachi 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

HOW IN THE WORLD DID THE CHURCH MISS THESE PROMISES?

Acts 10:1-2 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

But in the meantime, CORNELIUS WAS PRAYING ...

While Jesus was speaking forth the promise of the Holy Ghost ...
While the disciples were watching the Lord ascend up into Heaven ...
While the eleven were choosing Matthias to take the place of Judas ...
While the believers were waiting together in the Upper Room ...
While the Holy Ghost was falling and they were speaking with tongues ...
While Peter was preaching his sermon on the Day of Pentecost ...
While 3000 were added to the church and baptized in Jesus' name ...
While the lame man was leaping and dancing his way into the Temple ...
While Peter and John were standing their ground before the council ...
While Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Ghost ...
While the Apostles were being persecuted, arrested, jailed and beaten ...
While the place where the church had gathered for prayer was shaken ...
While seven deacons were appointed and began to serve the church ...
While Stephen was preaching his sermon and being stoned for it ...
While Simon the Sorcerer was trying to purchase the power of God ...
While Philip the Evangelist was baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch ...
While Saul was being apprehended by Jesus on the Damascus road ...
While Peter was praying and Dorcas was being raised from the dead ...

... CORNELIUS WAS PRAYING!

Acts 10:3-8 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, an angel appeared to the preacher and sent him to the inquirer. In the case of Cornelius, the angel appears to the inquirer, and tells him to send for the preacher. In both cases, the work of the angel was merely to bring the two men together, face-to-face ... because an angel can't preach the gospel, only human beings can!

1 Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

CORNELIUS IS VERY RELIGIOUS, BUT HE ISN'T SAVED YET! He is "ready" to be saved, but needs a preacher to tell him what to do. That's why God is working on both ends of the situation to bring them together!

Acts 10:9-18 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

God's timing is always PERFECT – the 3 men from Caesarea arrived at the door just as Peter was pondering the meaning of the vision!

It's not enough just for God to prepare SINNERS ... if the PREACHERS aren't prepared for what God wants to do we will miss the opportunity!
AND WE ARE ALL "PREACHERS" OF THE GOSPEL!

2 Corinthians 3:2-6 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

So why did the angel instruct Cornelius to send for Peter, who was thirty miles away in Joppa, when Philip the Evangelist was already right there in Caesarea? Because it was Peter, not Philip, who had been given the KEYS to the Kingdom! It was necessary for every people group specified in Acts 1:8 to be brought into the Kingdom in exactly the same way!

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Acts 10:19-24 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Acts 10:20 ... "doubting nothing" = "making no distinctions"

Acts 10:25-33 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Acts 10:29 ... "without gainsaying" = "without any questioning"

Acts 10:34-43 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Acts 10:43 ... Peter is making his way through the gospel like he did in Acts 2, preaching how Jesus DIED so that his hearers will REPENT ... then he just begins to preach BAPTISM ("through his name" ... "remission of sins") when the Holy Ghost interrupts the sermon!

(This event is our PRECEDENT for believers receiving the Holy Ghost before they are baptized – but they still MUST be baptized!)

AND GOD IS NO REPECTER OF PERSONS TODAY!

Acts 10:44-48 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

There is no such thing in your Bible as a Christian who was not baptized in Jesus' name or a Christian who didn't receive the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues! It is the universal pattern in Acts ...

- When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).
- Simon the Sorcerer observed "evidence" when the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-20).
- Paul had this experience (Acts 9:17-18), for he spoke with tongues more than anyone in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 14:18).
- Believers who had only experienced John's baptism were re-baptized and spoke with tongues (Acts 19:1-6).
- Cornelius' household, who were gentiles, spoke with other tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-48). **There wouldn't be ANY Gentile Christians today if it hadn't been for speaking in tongues – that's the only reason the Jews let us in the church!**

Even though these believers have REPENTED and received the HOLY GHOST, Peter immediately returns to the fact that they need to be BAPTIZED in order to receive "remission of sins" ... "through his name." Why? Because these three steps are the KEYS that he used on the Day of Pentecost to unlock salvation for the Jews. BAPTISM is not an option ... "he COMMANDED them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

Acts 2:38-39 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Under the anointing, Peter preached something on the Day of Pentecost that he didn't even believe (not even ten years later)! But NOW he believes it, because he knows that "God is no respecter of persons."