

WEEKLY REFLECTION

In Isaiah 55:8-9, the prophet records God's declaration that His thoughts and ways are nothing like ours. They are far beyond anything we could imagine! Acts 10 shows us an example of this as God orchestrates an encounter between Cornelius the centurion and the apostle Peter.

Prior to this incident, the Holy Spirit has yet to fall on Gentile believers. Although Cornelius is a devout and God-fearing man, he and his household have yet to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Imagine his surprise when the Spirit falls on him and all those gathered with him as Peter shares with them the gospel! (v.44) They begin to speak in tongues and extol God, and they are baptized in the name of Christ. (v.47-48) What Moses dreamt of and hoped for a few thousand years ago has now become a reality: that the Spirit of the Lord would fall on the people, and they would receive it. (Num. 11:29)

Nobody saw this coming, least of all Peter! In fact, Peter receives a strange vision as he is praying, before he receives the summons from Cornelius. In it, God commands him to eat of animals, reptiles, and birds that the Law had deemed unclean and forbidden. (Acts 10:11-15) Perplexed and confused, Peter has no idea what is in store as he responds to Cornelius' request to meet him in Caesarea, but he comes to recognize his internal prejudice and bias towards the Gentile believers. (v.34) His understanding that God shows no partiality and favoritism is what launches him into a mini-sermon, and his sharing of the gospel acts as the catalyst for this outpouring of the Spirit. (v.44)

Peter still struggles with the same sin and bias fourteen years later (Gal. 2:11-14), and we continue to see how he is a work in progress. He isn't perfect, and neither are we. But he and Cornelius show us how God sees and hears, and how His heart is always for those who seek Him. (v.35)

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Have you ever spent time with people you normally wouldn't be with, or be at a place you normally wouldn't visit? What happened? Why were you there? Are there any takeaways from that encounter that made you see things differently?

QUESTION TWO:

In addition to the Ten Commandments, there were many more laws that the Israelites received. The food laws found in Leviticus 11 are an example, and they were meant to keep the Israelites as a people set apart for God.

Jesus' arrival means that these laws no longer apply to us as they are fulfilled in Him. (Matt. 5:17-20) However, as Christians, we may find ourselves subscribing to some man-made rules and regulations that prevent us from reaching out to people who are different from us. What are some examples that come to mind, and why do we abide by them? Can we discern which ones are God-given, and which ones are due to personal bias, or passed down by culture and tradition?

QUESTION THREE:

Ephesians 2:14-18 tells us how Jesus destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles with His sacrifice upon the cross. Are there any racial, cultural, or social barriers that are stopping you from sharing the gospel? How does God's love render them void? What are some actionable steps you can take to step out in both courage and humility?