



THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

What You See Is What You Are

SERMON BY REV. SU KIM ■ AUGUST 22, 2021

Introduction

What you see is what you are. Imagine you are on a road trip. You have been on the road for hours and you need a break. What catches your eye? An outlet mall or shopping center? Starbucks or another coffee shop? An outdoor park or rest area? McDonald's, a Cracker Barrel, another fast-food chain? Whenever my family is on a road trip, they know that when I see a sign with the letters "BBQ," we are going to make a stop. Because I love BBQ, I can see those signs a mile away! *What you see is what you are.* . . .and my love of BBQ impacts the interpretation of what I see. When some people see smoke, they think "fire"; when I see smoke, I think "Yum!"

How does being a Christian influence what we see? If, as we learned last week, we follow a different Master, how does it impact what we see? Acts 10 is the text we will be reading this week and next, and it is one of the longest narratives in the Book of Acts. It provides a powerful message for us. Luke used 1,150 words in the original language for this story. By comparison, Acts 9 with the healing of Aeneas who had been paralyzed for eight years had only 62 words. The story of raising Tabitha from the dead had 161 words. These were major miracles, but they are given relatively little attention. There is a lot of repetition in Acts 10 as well, so this was an important story for the early church, and as a biblically-centered church, it is an important story for us today. Let's turn now to Acts 10.

The Word of God says this:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ²a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:1-8

Who do we see in this text? We see Cornelius, who as a centurion would have commanded approximately 100 men, but as a centurion of the Italian Cohort may have commanded up to 1,000 men. He is a man with status and rank in the important city of Caesarea. The city was built in honor of Caesar and was a magnificent seaport and provincial capital. Cornelius is a powerful man in a powerful city. The text says that he is devout, fears God, gives generously, and prays continually. Cornelius is a good man, and as a man of continual prayer, he prays at the hour of prayer which was about 3 PM. As he prays, he has a vision. The angel of God tells Cornelius to search for Peter, and Cornelius immediately responds by ordering two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa, a city 30 miles south of Caesarea.

The story continues...

⁹The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet

descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹²In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Acts 10:9-16

Who do we see in this text? We see Peter, who is staying in the house of a tanner named Simon, just as the angel had told Cornelius. Like Cornelius, Peter is praying. And Peter is hungry. Like Cornelius, Peter sees a vision as he is praying, and a voice tells Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

What you see is what you are.

Because Peter is a devout Jew, what he sees on the heavenly sheet before him is a mix of clean and unclean animals. At this time, the early Christians were still operating under the Jewish principle of defilement by association. Leviticus 11 taught about clean and unclean animals, and because clean animals were mingled with unclean animals, Peter considered all the animals on the sheet to be unclean.

Our current COVID situation sheds some light on what it might have been like in biblical times. I remember early on when there was little information about COVID, I wiped down boxes delivered from Amazon, door handles, and everything else out of fear that I could get sick by association ... defilement by association. That was the principle by which Peter, as a Jew, was living.

Our God is Sovereign, meaning He has Divine control over everything that happens. He sovereignly guided redemptive history. He gave ancient Israel dietary laws to reflect that Israel was chosen and set apart. They were to be different from the surrounding nations because their God was different; even what they ate was different. They were to be holy, just as the Lord their God was holy. But these were to be temporary differences, temporary until the time when

everyone, Jew and Gentile, could have a relationship with God and receive forgiveness of their sins on the same basis: faith in Jesus Christ. As the Sovereign God who guided redemptive history, He redefined the dietary boundary after the completed, perfect work of Jesus Christ. God declared that all the animals were clean and that Peter must not see an animal made by God as common or unclean. Peter could truly kill and eat the food provided. This applies to us today as well.

¹⁷Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." ²¹And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²²And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." ²³So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

Acts 10:17-23

God showed Peter the same vision three times, but Peter was still confused about what the vision meant until the men arrived at the door! Note that this story is not about what Peter or Cornelius did, but about God at work. God directs and confirms this expansion of the gospel! God is Sovereign. God is in control. He was in control then; He is in control now. Peter did not invite the men to be his guests or agree to go with them because he thought it was a good idea; he did it because God was directing him. In Acts 11 we learn that six men went with Peter, so ten men traveled 30 miles north of Joppa to Caesarea.

²⁴And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

Acts 10:24-29

Cornelius was waiting! He invited relatives and close friends to hear what the Lord had to say! When Cornelius, who was seeking God and had a vision, sees Peter, he sees a man of honor or perhaps a deity. Powerful Cornelius bows at the feet of a fisherman from Galilee. This is our Lord's upside down Kingdom where the first are last, and the last are first; where those who exalt themselves are humbled, and those who humble themselves are exalted; where one day, every one will bow at the feet of a carpenter from Nazareth!

Peter walked in to see a great many people gathered! He had been confused about his vision of the clean and unclean animals, but he now applied that vision to human beings. This is no small thing. **What you see is what you are.** Peter as a Jew should have seen the room as full of Gentiles with whom he should not be associating. But God had begun to change him. Peter, as a Jew, should have seen Gentiles as common or unclean; but Peter, as a forgiven follower of Christ, did not see anyone whom God had made clean as common or unclean.

³⁰And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³²Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind

enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Acts 10:30-33

This is the third time the story has been retold. Four days have passed and Cornelius, his family, and the others he invited are all gathered and ready to hear what Peter will say. How will the listeners respond? How will other Christians respond? We will look at that next week.

Conclusion

What you see is what you are. Peter was affected by what he saw. He was trained from birth to distinguish between clean and unclean. This rule not only applied to food, but to people as well. In today’s story, God begins to change Peter, and reveals to him that what God has made clean, he should not call unclean—because of Jesus Christ.

The promise that Gentiles would share in God’s blessings goes back to Genesis 12 when God called Abram. That thread runs through the Old Testament, and throughout the Gospels we see that Jesus lived it out. He crossed gender, racial, socioeconomic, and ceremonial boundaries with His agape love. In the book of Acts, we see it fulfilled as the Gospel of Jesus Christ ripples out: from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria. Now it begins to go out to the ends of the earth: the Samaritans, an Ethiopian, even to a persecutor of the church, Saul. They are all welcomed into God’s household by grace through faith. If we are following the Master, we must see people differently.

What you see is what you are.

While this text covers a lot, I offer three applications. First, recognize how God sees you. If you are in Christ, He sees you with the righteousness of Christ. He sees you as a beloved daughter or son. He does not see you as the world sees you. If you are in Christ, God has made you clean, and no one can call you unclean.

When I was in elementary school, my mom worked at a local Korean grocery store. I was visiting one day, and the owner asked if I would like to help label the products with prices. This was before the wide

use of barcodes on items, so every item in the store was hand-labeled with a bright orange sticker with the price on it. The owner gave me a box of items, told me the price, and I set the dials on the price stamp appropriately and went to town. I was having fun working through the many boxes. Halfway through one box, the owner shouted for me to stop! The items were supposed to be priced at \$39.99; I was labeling them as \$3.99. I was mislabeling the products and she was upset because she knew their true value.

God knows **your** true value. Only your Creator gets to tell you how valuable you are. Only your Maker gets to tell you your worth. No one else gets to label you. He does not see you as the world sees you. When the world saw a childless wanderer, God saw Abram as a father to multitudes, through whom the entire world would be blessed. When his father Jesse along with his brothers saw a little shepherd boy, God saw David as a king. When everyone saw Simon as a reed tossed about, our Lord saw Peter, the rock.

Second, recognize how you see others. Every human being is made in the image of God and therefore has intrinsic value. Every human being has redemptive potential. In God's Kingdom, His people cannot and should not categorize others according to their background. Right now, people are throwing labels—very strong, and often hurtful labels—all over. One thing I do not like about the Internet age is that people are willing to say things they would never say to someone's face. As disciples of Christ, we must see others as Christ sees them. As followers of Christ, we must not follow our culture; we must follow our Lord.

Perhaps this week, you can label someone with their true value. Take a second and ask the Holy Spirit to whom you should reach out. Who needs to know their true value? Then tell them how much they are worth to you, tell them how much they are worth to God.

Finally, recognize how you see God. Do you see God as Sovereign? Our choices have consequences; even choices made this week will have ramifications for the world. We cannot see the future, but God

can. He is in control. Many of us today may feel that the wheels are falling off in our nation and even our world. Our God was Sovereign when He guided Cornelius and Peter; our God is Sovereign now as He guides His sons and daughters. Do not tell your God how big your problems are, but tell your problems how big your God is! Turn your eyes to Him. Be still, and know that He is God! (Psalm 46:10) And as you gaze upon Him, "... the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace" (from *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* by Helen H. Lemmel).

What you see is what you are. ■

