

THE BIG IDEA: The key to being seen differently is seeing differently.

The Take-Off

This morning we’re going to be jumping back into our journey through the history of the first church, so go ahead and open your Bibles to Acts 10

Now, just to get us thinking about what we’ll be reading, let me ask you to think about key moments in your life Already you’re wondering what a key moment looks like, so let me try and give you a good working definition of a key moment: Key moments open doors to something new.

Having a child is a key moment because it opens the door to a new period in your life

Marriage, death, love, loss - these are all key moments

Today we’re going to bite off a 2 chapter chunk in the book of Acts that will describe a key moment in the early stages of the first church, and hopefully this will be a key moment that springboards our church further down the road to seeing the love and mercy of Jesus radically transform the culture of this county.

Because it’s such a big portion of scripture, we’ll need to navigate it carefully to make sure we all know what’s going on before we make some conclusions about what it means for us today.

1. The dreams

Without trying to be too simplistic, the storyline of Acts 10 and 11 goes like this: Jews love God. God loves Jews. God loves Gentiles. Jews don’t love Gentiles.

Of course, this was a problem because Jesus had clearly sent the disciples to the world because the gospel wasn’t meant to be for some, but for all.

So what we’re about to read is the way God handled that problem and ensured that the love he has for everyone actually got to everyone.

This is a key moment and it’s going to unlock a new door for the early church.

Let’s break the chapter 10 into 4 sections:

Cornelius has a dream, Peter has a dream, Peter’s dream comes true, Cornelius’ dream comes true

Cornelius has a dream:

- Cornelius was a Gentile, which for our purposes places him “outside the circle”
- He was praying at 3 in the afternoon because he was devout and searching (v. 3)
- God gave very clear directions (v. 5)
- Cornelius sends 3 men to Joppa (about 30 miles south) to find Peter (vv. 7-8)

Peter has a dream:

- Praying was a normal part of Peter’s routine, probably 2-3 times a day
- He went up on the flat roof for privacy (v. 9)
- He’s starting to pray about the same time 3 Gentiles are coming into the city
- While he’s praying and waiting for lunch, he has a vision
- God lets down a sheet with all kinds of animals in it and tells Peter to kill and eat (v. 13)
- We can tell from Peter’s response in v. 14 that this is a mixed bag of clean and unclean animals (see Leviticus 11 for specifics)
- But the point wasn’t about unclean food as much as unclean people that God was getting ready to send Peter to
- Perhaps he saw things like these unclean things [PICS OF BUGS]

Peter’s dream comes true:

- men arrive from Cornelius (v. 17)
- God explains that this is the point of the vision (v. 20)

Cornelius’ dream comes true:

- Peter arrives (v. 24)
- Peter preaches Jesus (vv. 34-43)
- All who heard it were baptized in the Holy Spirit and water (vv. 44-48)

2. The drama

Acts 11 is when we read the reaction of the early church to what we just read in Acts 10

It’s also where we’ll see how close the early church came to stopping what became an incredible move of God

Sadly, as soon as the “clean” Christians in Jerusalem heard about the “unclean” Gentiles receiving the gospel, they criticized Peter as soon as he returned. (Acts 11:2)

Peter explained to them exactly what had happened: the dreams, the men, the response to the gospel by Cornelius and his household, the baptisms

3. The decision

After Peter had explained it all, verse 18 shows the decision that the early church made

Basically, God is sending the gospel to “unclean” Gentiles, too

Remember the Big Idea? **The key to being seen differently is seeing differently.**

Here, the church is choosing to see differently.

Gentiles are no longer unclean, but people loved by God and wanted by God.

4. The difference

So what difference did it all make in the early church?

According to Acts 11:19 - not much for some because they kept telling only the Jews about Jesus

But for some, it changed everything

Verse 20 says some began to tell the good news to Greeks and tons of people came to be followers of Jesus

It resulted in quite a revival, so much so that reinforcements were brought in to help, and Barnabas and Saul stayed in Antioch for a year preaching and teaching

But the biggest difference it made was in how the “unclean” saw the church...

In Acts 11:26, we find that it was in Antioch that they were first called “Christians”

“Christian” means “Christlike” and what we need to takeaway this morning is that nothing that has happened to this point in Acts - Pentecost, the healings, the miracles, the preaching - has resulted in others saying that the church looked like Jesus.

What caused it? Taking the good news to people who were seen as “outsiders”

They were first called Christlike in the unholy city of Antioch by the unholy people who lived there

The Landing

Here are some takeaways for us from this key moment in the early church:

It is God’s nature to accept. It is our nature to object.

- Don’t be surprised when the people God sends you to cause the people in the church to object

- Don’t get defensive or offended. Do what Peter did and explain how God is moving.

It is God’s nature to include. It is our nature to exclude.

- It’s easy to read verse like John 13:35 and 1 John 4:20 and get caught up in loving ourselves (which is a worthy goal)

- But Luke 6:32-36 takes this to another level and warns us not to exclude even our enemies

If we want to world to see the church differently, then we’ve got to see them differently, too. It starts with us.

- The church has an image problem in America today and we’re the ones who can change that

- Story from “Out of the Saltshaker and into the World” by Rebecca Pippert

- You know that visitor saw that church differently after that, and it all started with an old usher seeing that visitor differently first.

That’s because **the key to being seen differently is seeing differently.**