

Peter could learn a lesson and so that the Gospel could be advanced. And God continues to do these things today.

Unlike my phone, God is orchestrating for you today to discover more about him in your life. Even if today you would say you are still at the searching stage of this faith thing, God is orchestrating encounters for you into this week. All I would ask of us is be ready to see what God is going to do this week. The only reason you will miss them, is if you don't look out for them. The key to Peter's transformation was that even though he was coming close to the city, he took time out of the plan to stop and pray. Prayer sounds a very fancy intellectual word. But think of it today as a conversation with God. And so each morning this week as you start the day, I'd ask you to consider speaking to God with these words. "Lord, as I look into this day, give me encounters that help me understand your will for my life. May I remain open to see these, and may my heart be open to change. Amen"

You know these devices are cleverer than I ever really imagined. Now I realise the next story might freak a lot of you out, but for about the past year I have often wondered what's going on with these devices behind the scenes. For example, these new phones seem to be always listening for instructions. I can ask my phone right now with the phrase "Hey Google" any question at all and it will answer it for me so here goes. Hey google. How long would it take me to drive from here to cork? You see what I mean. So in order to answer that question, my phone is always listening. But then on top of it, my phone is tracking me. It knows where I am in order to determine then how long it's going to take me to get from here to Cork. Is that not really scary. But it gets scarier. Have any of you been talking about things at home and then wondered why when you go on to your phone, or social media or something, it brings up adverts relating to the very thing you were talking about earlier on that day? Spooky or what. I truly believe these things are listening and working away in the background.

Now you might wonder what's that got to do with this morning's reading. Well I hope this morning that we all come to realise just how much God is working around us all the time, placing us and others in situations so that his name may be known. He is longing for us to know his love, his interest and his delight in who we

are. And I believe he places people in our path in order that his will for our lives is fulfilled.

As today marks the return to our gatherings in our church buildings, I thought it was appropriate to step back into our teaching series that we had begun last September on the book of Acts. Today we are jumping into how God is working behind the scenes to prepare Peter for the next stage of his plans.

The book of Acts is an incredible picture of the work of the Holy Spirit firing up the church for its mission. But there are a number of social barriers that need to be broken down in order for the Gospel to reawaken a community. In chapter 8 we have seen the Gospel break into Samaria. We then see it breaking into Ethiopia through the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. We then see the incredible transformation taking place in Saul in chapter 9. And now we see the Gospel breaking into Roman influence, the government, through the life of Cornelius. And Cornelius is being challenged to meet a man he has never met before Simon Peter. As I said earlier, God is working away in order that his will is fulfilled.

You see the amazing thing about where we enter this story is how it begins. Verse 9 'About noon the following day as they were on their journey and

obeys. And for some of us, especially those today who are full of questions whether around faith, whether about your own troubles and worries that you are facing, God knows that like Peter you are confused, but again like he did with Peter walking out onto the water, he needs you and I to trust and obey.

If it had been me in the shoes of Peter, I'd have went down to the door, said a few polite hellos, and then arranged to meet the 3 men (gentiles but also romans by the way) later in the day for the roadtrip, maybe somewhere less public. But Peter doesn't. He practices hospitality and invites them in and gives them a room for the night. Now you've got to understand; this was a no-no, according to Jewish custom - you simply would not allow Gentiles to come in and eat and sleep in your home. But this shows the work of the Holy Spirit on Peter's life and it shows how far he had come – he literally violated tradition, because for him, there was no other option but to obey what God had just told him to do. He wouldn't consider any other way.

So here's the point folks. You can come away from today and think about the journey of faith, the sanctification that is taking place in Peter's life – he has come a long way. But that's not the point today. The point is that God Himself is orchestrating all these people to come together for a specific reason so that

3 days I didn't take a bucket, but I did carry a cup with my 3 things in it that went with me absolutely everywhere to remind me. And it worked, for a while.

But the point is that God wants to start a work in each of us. He wants us to know it's not just for our good, but it's for his perfect will. It's to carry those buckets of our own each and every day to help us examine those areas that are a work in progress. God has not finished with us. It may seem stupid to us to carry a bucket round for 3 days but if it means that God teaches us to listen and to be ready for change then go and get a bucket after this service.

Our reading in verse 17 says that after Peter had seen the vision, he was deeply perplexed. It was so foreign to him, but God was doing something new in him. But in order then to cement this further, God brings things together, and he brings them together very quickly. Peter is still puzzled, but God has been doing a work in the background, and before Peter has much time to think, three guys are standing at the gate. God gives him a real example on which to exercise his theology, but he's not giving him time to sit and ponder the options.

The text demonstrates that Peter has learnt very quickly. He's questioned God three times, but now he

approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray'.

It's like a scene in a film, where we've had one scene, and it now cuts to a completely different thing unrelated. If you have a bible and you like to mark things in it, then why not underline those words "as they were on their journey, Peter went up on the roof to pray". You see Peter had no idea what was going on. He was going about his normal routine.

While one group of people are obeying God and moving to hear God speak through a vision, God is already beginning, without Peter having any awareness of what is happening, to have him put immediately into action what his will is for gentiles. Is that not remarkable? Remember, God is at work all around us, even when we don't realise it. Three men are already on their way to Peter and he knows nothing about it. But you see, Peter had already come a long way in his faith journey, but God still had more that he needed to do in him.

Today, have a quick think about how long you have been following and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. For me it's 41 years now. Does that mean I've got the ticket and there's nothing more to do? No, not at all. Yes I am saved, but I am no more saved than any one

else. We are all growing to become more like Jesus. I am a work in progress. That's what we call sanctification. So be encouraged today that we are all working this through, but as we will see, God was saying to Peter, "You've got to recognise there are still things that need to change in your life". The issue for Peter, and I suppose for all of us is this, do we recognise what those things are, and then are we willing and open enough to allow God to do a transforming work in us? I hope you are.

For Peter, it was some of the ritual practices of the Jewish faith. It was a big deal, and therefore God had to teach him a new thing. Allowing practices that were not of the Jewish tradition, one of those being around eating animals that in Leviticus were considered unclean to God, was going to be a hard nut to crack for Peter. Peter was, I suppose like many of us, stubborn.

Look at his response. It was kind of, "No, no, no. All of my life, this is the way I've done it. Any other way would be going against my faith." Three different times he has to hear this Word.

And some of us, maybe we're a little stubborn, and God has to repeat these lessons over and over. Don't worry there are many examples in scripture where God seems to repeat himself until his people get the

message. But we have to be aware that when our preferences cross paths with God's plan, we must submit to His will. We can't avoid it because I believe God will keep putting things in our path to make us think.

Yes, sometimes the path ahead will seem so foreign, but God calls us to obey because his will for us is far greater than our questions. I'll tell you a story to prove this. In our house group this year we did a mini series called Everybody Always by Bob Goff. Now Bob is one of those guys who has a personality that would make even the grumpiest of people smile. The study was all about how to love people around us in our everyday lives. And one of the things he prompted all of us to do was to think of 3 things that are characteristics we don't like about ourselves that we carry around and drain us from having more positive relationships with people. He used the analogy of a bucket that people carry around that weighs us down in life. So Bob then asked us to consider three things to replace that with that would be more fulfilling, that would give us more sense of peace about us and would be a real encouragement to others. But to help remind us of those things, he asked us to carry our buckets around with us wherever we were, and I mean a literal bucket – whether out shopping, in work, wherever. How mad was I to take a bucket everywhere I went. For the next