

**THE VISION SUMMIT –
STAGE 5. REACHING BASE CAMP**

Acts 10:9-23

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(with material from Will Cotton, used by permission)

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PREFACE

Today marks the fifth week of the six week Vision Summit Series. We are using the story of Moses, when he stopped to climb Mount Nebo while leading the people of God on the journey to the Promised Land, as a background for the series. We are also using modern mountain climbing as a metaphor for the mission of the church. This Vision Summit series is an opportunity to find encouragement in our life together, see where God is leading us, and consider how we can pass the torch of faith to the next generation.

SCRIPTURE

The next day as Cornelius’s messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, ¹⁰and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. ¹²In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. ¹³Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.” ¹⁴“No, Lord,” Peter declared. “I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean.”

¹⁵But the voice spoke again: “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.” ¹⁶The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven. ¹⁷Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon’s house. Standing outside the gate, ¹⁸they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there. ¹⁹Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three men have come looking for you. ²⁰Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don’t worry, for I have sent them.”

²¹So Peter went down and said, “I’m the man you are looking for. Why have you come?” ²²They said, “We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message.” ²³So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa (Acts 10:9-23 NLT).

INTRODUCTION

Mountain climbing is carried out in stages. The first stage is the choosing of the peak. We need to know where we are going. The second stage involves surveying the mountain. We need to know the challenges we face. The third stage is preparing for the climb. We need to know what are the resources and capabilities that are needed. The fourth stage is staging the climb. We need to know how to measure our progress.

The fifth stage is reaching base camp. What is base camp? American mountaineer Matthew Du Puy explains it this way:

Basically, on any big expedition, you drive as far as the road takes you, then you walk until you need a rope. . . Base camp is where that rope starts.

It is a camp set up in relative safety at the bottom of the mountain. It stores supplies and gear. It is the last stop before you begin the climb in earnest.

Base camp is about motivation. The climber realizes that up to this point it has been fairly easy. But that is about to change. The climber wants to know, “How important is this to me? What am I willing to do to get to the summit?”

Many churches today reach “base camp” but then decide to go no further. They like the safety and security of base camp and wish to stay there. Consequently the spiritual expedition, we call the mission of the church, comes to a grinding halt.

But even if we think the expedition is important, many times we are afraid to venture forward. We are afraid to take risks. So where is our motivation?

1. NEW DIRECTION

The story of Cornelius is a major turning point in the life of the early church and in the life of Peter. Peter is motivated to go in a new and risky direction. But in order to understand the story we need to realize that the biggest barrier in the first century was between Jews and Gentiles. The earliest disciples saw themselves as part of a movement within Judaism. They believed that the message of Jesus Christ was not meant for outsiders.

What we see in Acts 10 is God radically re-directing the mission of the church to include the very people Peter thought were supposed to be excluded. Will Cotton describes it this way:

God was blessing [Peter’s] work, even doing miracles through him right outside the [temple] (Acts 3). Then, in Acts 10, God rocked his world. The scene is comical. Peter is on the roof praying and he gets really hungry.

While he is waiting for lunch, he has a vision about food, a sheet with all kinds of animals on it. He must have thought, “I’ve either had too much sun up here or I was hungrier than I thought.” Then he heard a voice say, “Get up, Peter! Kill and eat.” He looked closer at the animals and saw they were animals no Jew would kill and eat, but rather the food staples of the Gentiles. Peter gives what he thinks is the right response, a refusal to eat the nonkosher food. How shocked he was to hear the Lord’s next words, [“Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”]

Peter was content to be at base camp, surrounded by the relative safety of familiar traditions. But God intervened to direct him outward to people outside his comfort zone. The message and ministry of Christ was meant for all people. This is the clear interpretation of the vision.

Peter is not the only one having visions. Cornelius, a god-fearing man and Roman centurion (in other words, not Jewish), has a vision that leads him to Peter. One of the features of the book of Acts is that God works both sides of the missionary venture, the side of the witness and the side of the one receiving the message of the witness. It is important for us to realize that we are not so much people who make things happen, as we are people who become part of a work in progress, a work already begun by God. That fact alone should free us to make genuine witness of our faith without feeling that we have to force it or get certain results.

Even though we enter a work in progress, it does not mean that we have no initiative or that what we say and do is risk free. It would have been much easier for Cornelius to go to Peter’s house. As a centurion, he was free to go wherever and to whomever he pleased. But God clearly placed the risk with Peter. Peter needed to go to Cornelius.

The two generations before our present one were actually fairly unusual in American and church history. Some refer to it as the “whosoever will, may come” era. Churches opened their doors and encouraged people to stay with their friendly styles, excellent music, youth programs, and great preaching. But clearly, entry into the church was at the initiative of the visitor. Most evangelism programs consisted of visitation to people who had already attended worship. For the most part, that era has now ended, and risk has returned to the church. We need to take the initiative and go outside our walls to a needy and hurting world. The local church, in which the Holy Spirit is present, can no longer be content to compete for the smaller and smaller group of people who come to us. The initiative and the risk are ours.

But here is a key part of this story. When Peter gets to Gentile Cornelius’s house, the food will definitely not be kosher! Peter could have insisted prior to his visit that only kosher

food be served. After all, the people he meets are supposed to become like him, not vice versa. Not that Peter necessarily thought that. But church people often talk like that. “We don’t have to change to draw people here. They need to change and become like us.” And so we become a PLU church – “People Like Us.”

But Peter’s experience and Cornelius’ subsequent conversion to Christ teach us that this is neither a helpful strategy nor is it faithful to God’s intent. We need to make adjustments in how we go about our mission in order to meet people as they are and give them the good news of Jesus Christ. It would be easier to remain at base camp – easier, but it also wins fewer people for the kingdom of God. God has a purpose for us. What are we willing to do to fulfill that purpose?

2. MOTIVATION

This speaks to motivation, doesn’t it? Motivation can sometimes be hard to come by.

A guy walks into a library and asks, “Do you have motivational books here?” The librarian replies, “Yes. They’re down on the 17th row, upper shelves.” The man then says, “Do you have any books closer?”

Why should we leave base camp? Why should we go forward? Why should we make the effort to advance the cause of Christ?

Now there are many benefits for doing so and we could spend the rest of the day just talking about these and only scratch the surface. There are benefits we receive here and now and there are benefits we will receive in the life to come. But even if there were no benefits, we would still have a powerful reason for trying to fulfill God’s purpose for our church. This reason can be expressed in two words – the cross. Because of the cross, Jesus gave his life completely for us and he expects our lives in return.

"He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again"(2 Cor 5:15 NIV).

And elsewhere we read:

“You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God...”(1 Cor 6:19,20 NLT).

It cost Jesus to die for you and it’s going to cost you to live for him. But he deserves it. We would not have a blessed and glorious destiny if it weren’t for the cross.

Because of the cross of Christ I can know that my life matters. I was redeemed at great

cost. I may struggle with sin in this life but I know that in Jesus I am forgiven. The struggle will continue throughout this life, but the final outcome is assured. Christ is victorious over sin and death!

You are precious to God, worth far more than any earthly treasure. By faith in Jesus you are made new and discover your true and lasting significance. You have been given something far greater than any earthly blessing: the delight of friendship with God, the privilege of service, and the joy of life everlasting.

The only response to this that makes sense is a response of gratitude. How do we show our gratitude? By faithfully carrying out God's purpose for us and our congregation. And to do that we need to answer some tough questions: What are we willing to try? What are we willing to change? What are we willing to do to be faithful to God's call upon us?

CONCLUSION

Thom Rainer, author of *Scrappy Church*, says that scrappy churches:

. . .are not blind to the difficulties around them and in their congregations, [and] they remain certain God is still working in their churches. "We are at this address right now for a reason," one pastor told us. "We are not here by accident. We are determined to make a difference in our community. We are moving forward."

So does the church have challenges as they seek to move forward? The pastor responded with a loud laugh. "Of course we do. We have many of the same issues in our turnaround as we had in our decline. We still struggle for resources. We still have change-resistant members. We still have a lot of critics."

He paused for a moment and reflected, "But, you know, many of us in the church have chosen to focus on what God wants us to do. We have to be obedient to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. We can't spend our time focusing on the critics and the naysayers. We have to focus on God's plan for us."¹

God has a plan for our church. And he promises to be with us as we work the plan. That is why we can say with confidence, God is not done with us yet!

¹ Thom Rainer, *Scrappy Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 24.