

A Successful Launch
Acts 10:1-29, 44-45
August 12, 2018

If you are OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER the Apollo space launches, they were indeed a SIGHT TO BEHOLD - They were GIANT ROCKETS sitting MAJESTICALLY on a LAUNCH PAD - There was the COUNTDOWN - usually starting COUNTING OUT LOUD starting at about 15 seconds - Every American would watch on their 15 inch BLACK & WHITE TV - Joining the COUNTDOWN OUT LOUD in their living room!

When you got to about 3 seconds, the ENGINES WOULD FIRE - the flames would EXPLODE from the pad and the ROCKET WOULD BEGIN TO SHAKE as the POWERFUL THRUST began to PUSH IT UPWARD.

It was a SIGHT TO BEHOLD - and if you were fortunate enough to SEE ONE IN PERSON, you could feel the POWERFUL RUMBLE OF THE SHOCKWAVES FROM MILES AWAY!

On July 16, 1969, three astronauts, lead by Commander Neal Armstrong, climbed into Apollo 11 for Mankind's first TRIP TO LAND & WALK ON THE MOON - Here is a short clip of the LIFT-OFF of Apollo 11 - It will give you a feel for the EXPERIENCE I HAD as a 10-year-old kid watching HISTORY BE MADE.

SHOW CLIP

In contrast to the DRAMATIC NATURE of a launch, there is the QUIET, SEEMINGLY PEACEFUL return to earth of the CAPSULE - Though just as EXCITING IN ITS OWN WAY, the soft parachute landing in the PACIFIC OCEAN seems tame next to the POWER OF THE LAUNCH!

Beginning a JOURNEY is always MORE DRAMATIC than coming home - At the beginning of ANY NEW EXPERIENCE IN LIFE, there is EXCITEMENT & ANTICIPATION - for no one knows for sure what the EXPERIENCE WILL BRING - We have OUR PLANS & HOPES - but rarely does anything go EXACTLY ACCORDING to our plan!

Sometimes things GO BETTER than we anticipate - Sometimes things GO TERRIBLY WRONG - Some trips are met with UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES - Some are met with UNEXPECTED THRILLS! - Most trips I have been on in life have a WONDERFUL MIXTURE of both - Challenges & Thrills!

The same is true for OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS - They are also full of SURPRISES - When we launch out and try NEW THINGS, we NEVER KNOW when God will show up and DO UNEXPECTED THINGS in our lives!

This was the case with the Apostle Peter when he took a short trip to COASTAL CITY of Joppa - He thought he was going to a little SEA-SIDE R & R - but what he got was the LAUNCH OF A JOURNEY that would change HIS LIFE - and ultimately CHANGE THE WORLD.

God ROCKETED PETER on the RIDE OF HIS LIFE - and it all started in a most UNEXPECTED WAY - It all started when Peter laid down to take a NAP as he WAITED FOR LUNCH - Let's read OUR STORY from Acts 10 this morning - we will begin in Verse 1.

Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God."

Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. "He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do." And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. "Arise, therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day, Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

"Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

In verses 30-43, Peter RECOUNTS HIS VISION and then PREACHES the Gospel to those gathered - That is when something MIRACULOUS HAPPENS - We read in verse 44 . . .

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

For Peter it was JUST ANOTHER DAY - Joppa is a BEAUTIFUL CITY by the Mediterranean Sea - He thought he was there for a SHORT VACATION - some time ALONE WITH GOD - but God had other plans.

Isn't that the way GOD OFTEN WORKS - When we LEAST EXPECT IT, God turns the ordinary into the extra-ordinary - He turns OUR NORMAL into something SUPER-NATURAL - God shows up when I HAD OTHER PLANS!

Peter takes a moment to REST & PRAY, and God SPARKS A VISION - Peter was awaiting his COSHER LUNCH - but God serves up a SOUTHERN BBQ instead - All of this in order to TEACH PETER that God was about TO DO A NEW THING!

In the vision, he sees a PICNIC BLANKET filled with some UNCLEAN FOODS - and the blanket is BEING LOWERED before him - He is instructed to KILL & EAT - But like ANY GOOD JEWISH BOY, Peter refuses - Even though God COMMANDS HIM to do so, he RESPONDS, **"Not so, Lord!"**

Peter is BEING LAUNCHED on a journey he WAS NOT PREPARED FOR - But there ARE LESSONS HE MUST LEARN if he is going to CONTINUE GROWING as a believer - And they ARE ESSENTIAL if he is going to be a LEADER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Peter is going to have to LET GO OF SOME OBSOLETE, DEEP-ROOTED BELIEFS - And for ALL OF US, this is not an EASY THING TO DO!

God is CLOSING ONE CHAPTER on how He is interacting with man - and He is about to open a WHOLE NEW ONE - God is moving from LAW TO GRACE - from Moses to Jesus - from the LAW that bought DEATH to the Spirit who GIVES LIFE - the question for Peter is, **“Are you ready to grow?”**

The LAUNCHPAD OF ANY JOURNEY has its DANGERS & CHALLENGES - Over the past 75 years, many rockets have CRASHED & BURNED BEFORE they left the launchpad - Things went WRONG - Plans & Procedures were FLAWED - and the launch ended IN DISASTER!

HERE IS ONE SUCH OF FAILED LAUNCH - **(SHOW CLIP #2 - NO SOUND)**

Peter's launch could have ENDED IN DISASTER as well - Trust me, there were plenty of things that COULD HAVE GONE WRONG - But thankfully Peter's OPEN HEART & STRONG FAITH allowed for a SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH and an INCREDIBLE JOURNEY!

This morning with the rest of our time, I want us to examine **3 Keys to a Successful Launch** that we learn from PETER'S EXPERIENCE here on the shores of the Mediterranean - 3 Keys that will help you when God challenges you to TRY SOMETHING NEW & UNCHARTED!

Some here today are **SUNDAY ONLY** church-goers - Your experience with Church begins and ends BEFORE LUNCH on Sunday mornings - Today, I believe God is challenging you TO LAUNCH OUT on something new! - It is TIME TO GROW!

We have talked about several NEW OPPORTUNITIES that are coming THIS FALL - Is there one you know you need to ATTEND IF YOU ARE GOING TO GROW as a Christian? - You will only go SO FAR ON SUNDAY mornings - **To MATURE further, you have to GO FURTHER!**

Let's look at what Peter did WHEN CHALLENGED with something new - Let's see just what he did to INSURE SUCCESS on his new journey with Jesus.

Peter's first key to a SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH was found in verse 15, **"What God has cleansed you must not call common"** - Here is the first key - **You must be willing to go outside your comfort zone if you are going to go further in your walk with God!**

Peter had never eaten UNCLEAN FOOD in his life - His diet had been STRICTLY ACCORDING to the Law of Moses - but now God is CHANGING THE RULES - All of a sudden, God wants to take Peter on A HIGHER PATH - One that will require him to SEE LIFE & HOLINESS DIFFERENTLY!

The Law had SERVED A PURPOSE - but now God was moving to a MORE POWERFUL & PERSONAL way of dealing with mankind - The approach of Grace would take us all to a MORE SPIRITUAL RATHER THAN PHYSICAL way of relating to God and to EACH OTHER!

To this point in Peter's life, his relationship with GOD & PEOPLE had been viewed through this NARROW LENSE of Jewish legalism - And this had served an IMPORTANT PURPOSE - It had separated the people of God from the SURROUNDING PAGAN NATIONS - it had helped them AVOID SINFUL PITFALLS OF IDOLATRY that the other nations had embraced.

But now, God was DOING A NEW THING - His GRACE HAD APPEARED in His Son Jesus - Now being separate from the world would be DEFINED BY OUR LOVE & ACCEPTANCE of all people IN JESUS' NAME.

The grace of God was BREAKING DOWN WALLS & BARRIERS - **it was bringing all people to the LEVEL GROUND at the foot of the Cross!**

Men like PETER & PAUL WOULD LEAD THE WAY down this new path God was paving - But first Peter had to OVERCOME HIS NARROW THINKING - And His INGRAINED PREJUDICE - and be willing to love the very people he had ONCE DESPISED & AVOIDED!

Stop for a moment and think of a GROUP OF PEOPLE you grew up AVOIDING - All of us had some group we STAYED AWAY FROM because of FEAR OR BIGOTRY.

Maybe you SEPARATED FROM them because of THEIR ECONOMIC STATUS was way ABOVE OR BELOW yours - or maybe because their SKIN COLOR was different from yours - or maybe it was because they had a POLITICAL STANCE you were opposed to.

Maybe they came from a DIFFERENT PART OF THE COUNTRY or the WORLD - or they just DRESSED DIFFERENTLY from you - or they liked MUSIC THAT YOU DON'T understand - **You avoid them because they are different.**

What if God suddenly told you that IF YOU WERE GOING TO GROW FURTHER in your walk with Him, you were going to have to have to STOP AVOIDING THEM - And even more, you were to have DINNER & FELLOWSHIP with them - If you were going to really LOVE JESUS, you were also going to have to LOVE THEM - and ACCEPT THEM - and BEFRIEND THEM!

Would you be willing to GO OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE and allow God to CHANGE YOUR THINKING? - Would you be willing to FOLLOW OBEDIENTLY while God challenged everything you always were ONCE CERTAIN OF?

In essence, this is exactly what God is TELLING PETER HE MUST DO - Look at what Peter says to Cornelius in verse 28, **"But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean".**

The very act of WALKING INTO CORNELIUS' HOUSE was Peter saying "Goodbye" to a LIFETIME OF PREJUDICE & MISUNDERSTANDING - Could it be TRUE FOR YOU as well?

This was the FIRST STEP to Peter's new journey with Jesus - He had to get OUTSIDE HIS COMFORT ZONE WITH PEOPLE if he was going to move forward with God! - Are you WILLING?

The SECOND KEY is found in verse 19-20 - **"While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise, therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'**

The SECOND KEY to Peter's successful launch on his new journey was, **He was willing to follow by faith - and not falter to fears.**

The NUMBER ONE FACTOR that will stop many of you from coming on MONDAY NIGHTS to our FREE INDEED addiction ministry will be FEAR - You are afraid for OTHERS TO KNOW of your problems - Fear will keep you IN BONDAGE!

It is one thing to KNOW YOU NEED HELP - it is quite another to ACT ON THAT KNOWLEDGE - It is one thing to know YOU NEED FELLOWSHIP with other men or women in a SMALL GROUP - It is another to SIGN UP & SHOW UP when you are AFRAID OF PEOPLE!

This vision had challenged Peter's thinking - He was stunned by it! - that is why he was SITTING & PONDERING IT - The truth of it had BLOWN HIS MIND - Just as the TRUTH OF WHAT God is saying to you is MESSING WITH YOUR MIND!

But now, ALMOST INSTANTLY, came step 2 - Did he have the FAITH & COURAGE TO ACT - Did he have the faith to ALLOW HIS FEET to follow his CHANGING THOUGHTS? - Could he act on what he NOW UNDERSTOOD as truth?

You see, it is one thing to CHANGE YOUR OPINION of a particular subject - BUT, IT TAKES FAITH to overcome our fears and to act on those NEW CONVICTIONS!

Let's say that ALL YOUR LIFE you have believed that Georgia Bulldog fans were OBNOXIOUS, LOUD, ARROGANT FARMERS who got their diploma's at a DRIVE-THRU window in Athens - but suddenly one day one of your VERY OWN DAUGHTERS - no make that TWO of your daughters wants to GO TO SCHOOL IN ATHENS!

So, you begin to THINK DIFFERENTLY - Over time you realize they really do HAVE TO GO TO CLASS - They do appear to be LEARNING SOMETHING - They are GROWING & CHANGING.

But now they want you to GO TO A GAME - They want you to DRIVE OUT HWY 316 on a Saturday afternoon and SIT WITH "THOSE PEOPLE" - They have even asked you to WEAR RED & BLACK!

Yes, your thinking has changed, but are you **READY TO EMBRACE THEM** - Are you ready to **JOIN THEM** in cheering for a team whose mascot is an **UGLY, SLOBBERING BREED OF DOG!**

In a real sense, this is **EXACTLY WHERE PETER FINDS** himself - He is beginning to understand **WHAT GOD IS SAYING** to him - but is he ready to **ACT ON IT?** - Is he willing to **STEP OUT & GO WITH THESE MEN?**

For Peter **THE ANSWER** was yes - **WITHOUT HESITATION** he invited them in - then the **NEXT DAY** he departs with them!

If you don't think he **HAD SOME FEAR** to overcome - and some **PREJUDICE** to deal with - you have forgotten that **PETER WAS HUMAN** - just like you and me!

What are you **AFRAID OF** that is keeping you from **OBEDIENCE** - What is keeping you from **JOINING THAT SMALL GROUP** study? - What is keeping you from coming on Monday night and **DEALING WITH THAT SIN** that has a strong grip in your life? - High Schooler, why are you **FEARFUL** about showing up on **WEDNESDAY NIGHT?** - Yea, these guys might not **BE YOUR BUDDIES**, but what are you **AFRAID OF?**

Is it **FEAR OF PEOPLE** that you don't know? - Is it fear of **BEING UNCOVERED** as someone who really doesn't have it **ALL TOGETHER?** - Is it fear of **BEING REJECTED?** - **"If they knew who I REALLY AM, they wouldn't love me!"**

All of these are **REAL FEARS** - they are fears **WE ALL SHARE** - it is part of the **HUMAN EXPERIENCE** to be afraid of rejections & people who we don't know - Don't you see that we **ALL FACE THESE FEARS** - Trust me, Peter did - But **BY FAITH** he overcame them!

He was willing to **TAKE A CHANCE** on the truth God had **REVEALED TO HIM** - What truth is God revealing to you today? - What **ISSUE** has He raised in your life? - Are you ready to **STEP OUT & ACT** on the truth? - Or are you just going to **PONDER IT?**

In 2 Timothy 3:7, Paul spoke of **"those who are always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"** - These are those who thinking may change, but their actions never change.

What good is knowledge and understanding that never makes me a different person? - Do you have the FAITH TO OVERCOME your fears?

The third key to Peter's successful launch is found in verse 28-29 - **Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for."**

The third key for Peter was that **He acted without hesitation** - In other words, HE DIDN'T WAIT for a MORE CONVENIENT TIME - He didn't spend a month pondering whether he should GO OR STAY!

This is the MOST POWERFUL TOOL Satan has in his tool chest - **Procrastination!** - He gets us to wait - **He convinces us that we will make the change - just not today!**

We WILL ACT ON what God has spoken to us about in that Bible study - but there is NO HURRY - Then, we walk out of the MORNING SERVICE and by the time we get home the URGENCY TO OBEY is gone - and by the next morning, we have FORGOTTEN God's prompting AND MOVED ON!

I know this because I am SAD TO SAY it has happened to ME MANY TIMES - I have found that if I DON'T ACT QUICKLY on what the Lord is speaking to me about, LIFE GETS IN THE WAY - **The cares and concerns of this world DISTRACT ME FROM the Word God has sown in my heart!**

I have learned to keep a PEN & PAPER in my pocket when I am listening to a Bible Study - Maybe for the YOUNGER CROWD it could be your phone - But WRITE DOWN the things you feel the Holy Spirit is saying to you during a study - If you can, ACT ON NOW - if you can't, at least you have WRITTEN THEM DOWN and you can COME BACK to them later.

Don't let the QUIET VOICE of the Holy Spirit get lost in this NOISY WORLD - It will if you don't DO SOMETHING to keep those precious thoughts & impressions from BEING LOST!

Be a Peter - **Act without objection (and hesitation) as soon as you get that knock on your heart's door!**

Ecclesiastes 7:8 says, **"The end of a thing is better than the beginning."** - And this is often true when it comes TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH & CHANGE - For us to grow spiritually, God has to MAKE US UNCOMFORTABLE.

He has to STRETCH US - To grow requires FAITH, COURAGE & a willingness to FACE MY FEARS - We don't like it, but this is WHAT IT TAKES! - At least in the BEGINNING!

This is why the END IS SO MUCH BETTER - At the end of a Spiritual Journey, we have GROWN & MATURED - We have learned to CHERISH THE BETTER PLACE God has brought us to - What was SO UNCOMFORTABLE in the beginning has now become COZY & RIGHT!

This was the case EVENTUALLY WITH Peter - It took him a while to GET COMFORTABLE eating with us old Gentiles - It took him a WHILE TO STAY AROUND for the BBQ lunch after church - but eventually, PETER GOT IT.

And you will too - Launch something new IN YOUR LIFE this fall - take advantage of Wednesday nights with Pastor Sandy - or a small group Bible Study WITH SOME OTHER MEN OR WOMEN - or come on Monday night and deal with that SIN THAT HAS PLAGUED you for so long! - STEP OUT High Schooler - Give the group a chance!

But remember, a GOOD LAUNCH will require that we:

1. **Be willing to go outside our comfort zone!**
2. **Be willing to follow by faith and overcome our fears!**
3. **Be willing to act without hesitation!**

Don't let the cares of this world distract you from the good word God has sown in your heart! - LET'S PRAY.