

#34 - Cornelius - Acts 10:1-48

Engage:

There is one more important segment from our 5 part look at Acts to consider in this survey of the biblical presentation of God's Redemption Story. So far we seen the ascension of Jesus after His resurrection and His great commission proclamation for followers of Jesus to be His witnesses to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1); the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost and the introduction of the gospel to the Jewish population (Acts 2); the beginning of persecution of Christians (Acts 4) and God's calling of Saul to be His special witness to the Gentiles (Acts 9). In this story we will see the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles – and in particular Cornelius (Acts 10).

"With the conversion of Cornelius, the outreach of the church is enlarged to include the Gentiles as well. But it takes an unusual vision, a stubborn vessel (Peter), and a well-timed visit to break down centuries of deep-seated prejudice" (DW, November, 1982).

Thoughts about the story:

Acts 10:1-8 – Cornelius, a devout Gentile believer

Cornelius was a very special person. How so? He was a Gentile Roman soldier (a centurion) who was the leader of at least 100 men. Some were even commanders of a regiment (1/6 of a legion or 600 men). He and his family were "devout and God-fearing" people. He was not only a leader of soldiers, but he was also a leader of his family. He was generous to "those in need and prayed to God." And he had received a vision from God. God rewarded his faithfulness as we will soon see in the story (see Hebrews 11:6).

Yet Cornelius still needed to hear the gospel. That is the reason for the vision and the angel which called him to send for Peter to come. This came to Cornelius during a normal time of prayer according to normal Jewish religious practice. Again we are shown that our God sees (Genesis 16:13) and responds appropriately.

Acts 10:9-22 – Peter, God's man who is called to take the gospel to Cornelius

Not only did Cornelius have a vision, but Peter heard a voice. It was not just one time, but three times! Note: Peter was found to be in prayer when the voice spoke to him. Could it be that God is better able to use people who pray? Although we do not know, could it be that Paul was praying that God would lead him to a special person to work with?

"For Peter, almost every major lesson had to be repeated three times before he got the message. Three times he denied the Lord (Matthew 26:34); three times he was commanded by Christ to feed God's flock (John 21:15-17); and three times the sheet rose and fell before Peter saw the significance of it (Acts 10:9-16)." (DW, November, 2002).

Up to this time, Peter thought that eating certain kinds of animals was forbidden because they were considered unclean (Leviticus 11). But God wanted him to know that if He had made something clean, it was no longer to be considered impure. "Jesus had already laid the groundwork for setting aside the laws of clean and unclean food (Matthew 15:11; see 1 Timothy 4:3-5)" (NIV Study Bible).

As Peter pondered over the meaning of this vision, three men sent by Cornelius came to the place where Peter was staying in Joppa. (Joppa is about 30 miles south of Caesarea.) Peter received a vision which followed the voice from God. He was told to go with these men. This time Peter did not hesitate. He invited the men to stay overnight and the next day he went with them to meet Cornelius.

Acts 10:23-33 – The obedience of Peter to go to Cornelius

The story of the early church is filled with instances where people are called to get out of their comfort zones. This is one of them.

Peter did not go alone to Caesarea. He took some of the brothers along (six in number - Acts 11:12). This is disciple making in action as people were trained on the job.

When Peter arrived, Cornelius “fell at his feet.” Peter immediately told him to “stand up.” Peter knew that he was just a man who had become God’s messenger – and a man who had been forgiven by the Lord – and a man who was answering the call of God.

Peter asked Cornelius why he had been sent for. Cornelius told Peter about his vision and that he wanted to “listen to everything the Lord had commanded” Peter to tell them.

Note: “Four days ago” - “The Jews counted a part of a day: (1) the day the angel appeared to Cornelius, (2) the day the messengers came to Joppa and Peter received a vision, (3) the day the group set out from Joppa and (4) the day they arrived at Cornelius’s house” (NIV Study Bible).

Acts 10:34-48 – Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius and others

Peter’s message began with a profound statement: “I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism** but **accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.**” Thus we see that character is important to God, whereas position in life, ethnic background or material wealth is not (See James 2:1). Cornelius was a worshiper of God, but he did not know Jesus Christ. That was the reason for Peter being sent to Cornelius. (Note: A bold prayer to pray is that God would send a Cornelius your way.)

Peter summarized the life of Jesus on earth (His inauguration at His baptism, His servanthood, His death, resurrection and appearances) and then stated that God had appointed Jesus as “judge of the living and the dead.” He was helping fulfill the great commission given by Jesus right before He ascended back to heaven to be a witness to the world about Jesus and His offer of forgiveness and eternal life (Acts 1:7-8). Peter then proclaimed that “**everyone who believes** (present active participle verb) in Him” will receive forgiveness.

After making this proclamation, the Holy Spirit came on “all who heard the message.” This “amazed the circumcised believers who had come with Peter because the Holy Spirit had been given also to the Gentiles. This was evident because they spoke in “tongues” (other languages) and praised God.

Peter realized that the new believers need to be “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” in water. And so they were baptized. Peter stayed on a few days before he left.

Note: Cornelius and Peter both needed one another to understand God's will. Cornelius needed Peter to share the gospel message of Jesus and Peter needed Cornelius to show him that God will accept anyone who is God-fearing. The same experience happens today. We truly need one another to see how God works to reveal His will.

Cornelius wanted Peter to stay a few days and he did. Follow up is necessary in the case of every new believer.

Quote:

"The church is designed by God to be a vibrant, redeeming community of compassion, service, love, and worship. It is not a fraternity of fans of the faith." (unknown)

Summary:

"God has a great and exciting plan for taking the message of Christ to the ends of the earth. His method of accomplishing it is through men He has given to His Son as witnesses. They will teach others who will in turn teach others also. They are people who are—

- trained through association with godly people;
- open to God's direction;
- committed to the Lordship of Christ;
- committed to sharing the gospel,

This plan continues today. May God grant us the joy of taking part in His grand plan—the Great Commission of Christ" (Leroy Eims).

Discussion starters:

- In what ways does the life of Cornelius before his conversion challenge you? Do you imitate his lifestyle? If not, how can you?

- Have you ever had the problem of with a belief that has kept you from reaching out to others like Peter did with Cornelius? In what ways do you believe that God would have you to be more open-minded toward others who are different than you? In what ways could you become a better witness to people different than you?