

Acts #23
The Conversion of Cornelius
Acts 10:1-48

This chapter is one of the most important in the entire Book of Acts, for it records the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles. Peter has used “**the keys of the kingdom**” to open the door of faith to the Jews (Acts 2), and the Samaritans (Acts 8:14ff), and now would complete his special ministry during this period of transition by opening the door to the Gentiles.

Look with me tonight as we study Acts 10 and the conversion of Cornelius.

Verses 1-8 read like this, “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spoke unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”

Caesarea was a city situated on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and was a beautiful, flourishing city. It was built by Herod the Great, and named in honor of Augustus Caesar, the Roman emperor at that time. Historians tell us that in the history of the world there has probably never been another city that rose to such heights of splendor in so short a time, only to fall into desolation as quickly as it rose. **In the space of approximately ten years Caesarea grew from an obscure fortress to the most flourishing and beautiful city in all of Syria.** Today it lies in absolute ruins, no trace of its former glory remaining.

Cornelius was a God-fearing Gentile who did not know the truth of the Gospel. He was devout, honest, generous, and sincere; but he was not a saved man. Therefore, the outstanding trait that Cornelius had was that he was honestly seeking after salvation, and we have been promised in John 7:17, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know the truth...” Be assured, beloved, the person who really wants to know God, and prays for that knowledge, will receive it.

And then we are told in verse 3, “He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour (3pm) of the day an angel of God coming to him, and saying unto him,

Cornelius.” **You will notice that the angel told him to send for Peter.** Have you ever wondered why the angel didn’t just tell Cornelius how to be saved and have the whole thing over with? **Because God had not given the ministry of the Gospel to angels.** What a privilege we have in telling the Gospel to lost souls, a privilege that even angels cannot have.

Peter was 30 miles away at Joppa, but with soldier-like obedience, Cornelius called for two servants and a guard and sent them on this important mission.

Look at verses 9-22, “On the next day, as they went on their journey, and drew near unto the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; in which were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spoke unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men who were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause for which ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.”

Whenever God is at work, He leads at both ends of the line. He prepares us for what He is preparing for us.

Peter sees all kinds of creatures, both clean and unclean, and is commanded to kill and eat. But Peter being a man that was familiar with the Old Testament Laws recorded in Leviticus 11, very quickly replied, “Not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”

It is evident that Peter did not understand the vision. He had not yet realized that in the economy of God it was transition time. He had forgotten the teachings of Jesus that said, “You cannot put new wine in old wineskins.”

Peter did not realize that the sheet represented the church. I think the Lord is saying to him, “Peter, here is a picture of the church, clean and unclean

people, common and uncommon, men and women for different backgrounds and cultures and traditions. Here is the new way it is going to be, Peter. Don't ever say that someone I have made clean is not clean."

You see, the message of the vision was not about eating at all, it was about the church. Christ was preparing His man for what was to come.

While Peter thinks on this vision, the Holy Spirit speaks to him directly and tells him, "Arise and go." **Now Peter did not go to the Gentiles because he understood the vision, but because the Holy Spirit had told him to go.** It was much later that he fully understood the meaning of the vision, that God, through the cross, had broken down all divisions between Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, male and female.

Look at verses 23-33, "Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the next day Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the next day after, they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without objection, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the seaside: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

We must keep in mind that up to this point the Apostles had not preached to the Gentiles. Even the Samaritans (Acts 8) were "half breed" Jews with a reverence for the Old Testament Law.

We must also keep in mind that Peter did not go to the Gentiles because he was obeying the "Great Commission" but because the Holy Spirit had distinctly commanded him to go. In fact, when he arrived at Cornelius' house Peter had no intention of preaching to them, and even asked the question in verse 29, "For what intent have you sent for me?"

Like the other Apostles, Peter was still clinging to the message of the kingdom, and he knew that the Gentiles could not be saved until the Jews had accepted their Messiah and He had set up His kingdom. Peter and his associates were operating under the commissions in Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:44-49, and Acts 1:8, which meant they must preach **“to the Jew first”** and start **“in Jerusalem.”** That is why the Apostles remained in Jerusalem during the great persecution (Acts 8:1).

But now Peter was going to learn that God was introducing a new program – the church, not the kingdom. Please do not assume that Peter understood all about this new program; in fact, Paul had to rebuke Peter for his misunderstanding and inconsistency (Galatians 2). During this period of transition (Acts 8-12) we see Peter moving off the scene and with him the kingdom message to Israel.

Look at verses 34-48, “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained of God to be the Judge of living and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the word. And they of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then asked they him to tarry certain days.”

A prepared preacher and a prepared congregation make a wonderful team.

Peter begins with the message of Christ to Israel, starting with the ministry of John the Baptist. He states that Cornelius and his friends knew already the message about Christ’s miracles, His death, and His resurrection; but that these events were related to Israel. In verse 42 he says, “And He commanded us to preach unto the people” (meaning Israel, which is what they did

up to that time. What Peter is saying is simply that Christ came to save the nation of Israel, but now he realizes that with God there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. He reaches the key truth in verse 43 when he says, "...whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins."

At this point the Holy Spirit interrupted Peter and wrought a miracle in the hearts of these Gentiles. They believed the Word! And when they believed, the Spirit was poured out upon them, the evidence being that they spoke with tongues. Remember, we are told in 1 Corinthians 14:22 that tongues were an outward sign. The other Jews that were with Peter were astonished that God would save the Gentiles. Led by the Spirit, Peter commands that they be baptized. But how did they know they had been saved? They spoke in tongues.

Look with me once more at the relationship in Acts between the Holy Spirit and baptism. In Acts 2, the Jews believed and had to be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8, the Samaritans believed and were baptized, but they received the Holy Spirit by the lay on of the Apostles' hands. But here is Acts 10 we are on true "Church ground," for these Gentiles heard the Word, believed in Jesus Christ as Savior, received the Holy Spirit, and then were baptized. Acts 2:38 and Acts 8:14-17 do not apply today.

The Church's commission today is Matthew 28:19-20, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." We are to make disciples, which means evangelism; we are to baptize, which implies fellowship in a local assembly; and we are to teach the Word of God.

It is the Word of God that the Spirit uses to convict the lost. Let us be busy carrying out God's will for our lives in this church by sowing the seed of the Word, by watering it with our prayers and tears, and trusting God for the harvest.

If you are not saved, why not come tonight?