

Acts 10:1-23

ACTS-[2]-PETER & CORNELIUS

PRELIMS. Having looked at Stephen's ministry, Philip's ministry, Saul's ministry, we are now studying Peter's movements as an Apostle. He has healed a paralytic man at Lydda and the whole community "*turned to the Lord*"[9:35] and at Joppa Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, and "*many people believed in the Lord*"[9:42]

CORNELIUS' VISION

Cornelius was a Roman **soldier** – in charge of 100 men! He wasn't a Jew, he came from **Italy**! Here he was in Caesarea, 30 miles north of Joppa where Peter was, and 65 miles north-west of Jerusalem. It is all **good** stuff we read about him! He is **devout**, he fears **God**, he **prays regularly**, and he gives **generously**! **APP** He is hard to 'beat' actually! How many of us, here this morning, have **all** of these qualities?

I can't help thinking, this man was 'right with God' although I can't find a commentator who agrees with me! Didn't Solomon say, after his long and dedicated study of life on earth, that the "*whole duty of man* (was to) *fear God and keep His commandments*"? There **are** times when the 'world' put us to **shame** – they can be **more** principled/disciplined than Xns are! Jesus said 'the children of this world are **wiser** than the children of light' [L16:8] It seems there are many, who, **if** they had **our privileges** and **opportunities**, would excel the best of us! Didn't Jesus Himself say that if His mighty works had been done in Tyre/Sidon it **would** have **repented long ago**! Even **Sodom** would not have been destroyed if it were better privileged![Mat 11:21-24]?

Of course Cornelius, had never been under the gospel and **could not** therefore have been a **Christian**-believer – but he was a **God**-believer in accordance with the '**light**' that he was given him. Just like all the OT saints who did not have the full light of the gospel – but **were trusting** and **depending** on as much of God's **Word** that was revealed!

However, the **Gentile's 'time had come'**! It was '**hidden**' from them for ages, but now their 'time had come', and God was about to open up His glorious grace to **all** the world and **reveal** to them His Son who had been **promised** long ago! In fact it was to Italians, Romans, where Cornelius came from, that Paul wrote and said he was set apart for the **gospel** which God had "*promised beforehand through the prophets*"[Rom 1:2].

God's promise to **Abraham** that the **nations** would be blessed through that same faith in that same God, had now come!

Well, one day, about 3pm, Cornelius received a **vision**! "*He distinctly saw an angel of God who **came** to him and said 'Cornelius' "*[3]. What a **privilege**! You **can't make** yourself see a vision – it is a gift! You can pray, you can give generously, you can be devout, you can fear God, but you can't give yourself a vision! At least, not a proper one – you can drink too much and start 'seeing things' – but that's not the result of God visiting you – that is the result of evil spirits responding to your folly!

Cornelius, "*stared*" at the angel – "*in fear*" – there must have been something different/**authoritative** about him! Our culture conceives of angels as cuddly babies with dimples – very **attractive** and inviting! But in Scripture, everyone who met an angel, were very much **afraid**! Being a God-fearer, Cornelius **immediately discerned** him as a Messenger of the Lord "*What is it, Lord?*"! He had **great respect** for him.

APP People talk about the Lord speaking to them and giving them a message! There is one thing that will **always** be true when God gives us a message! We will be **more sober** after it! We will **not** be **flippant**! We will 'go softly'. We will **not** be **bumptious/proud**! We will be **humble** and feel **inadequate**! You will be **quieter** rather than **louder**! That was the case with **Moses** at the burning bush! With **Isaiah** in the Temple "*Woe to me...I am ruined. For I am a man of **unclean lips***"! Peter fell down "*Depart from me, for I am a **sinful** man*" that was Peter's **preparation** for ministry "*from henceforth you will catch men*"![Luke 5:8]

There are of course, 'visitations' from the Lord which leave us **strengthened** and **encouraged** – but never boastful or over-confident!

Angel said a **wonderful** thing to Cornelius "*Your prayers and **gifts** to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before **God***"[4] **APP** How wonderful it would be if **we** had this vision? We think like that don't we?

And yet, as Xns, **we do have** the **assurance** and **promise** that went **with** this vision! It was the **message**, not the messenger that was important! When we wish we had such a vision, we are saying it is the vision that is important – whereas it is the **message** coming from God that's important.

Every Xn should value dearly all the promises of God – and God **has promised** that He **hears** and **answers** their prayers and that He **rewards**

the righteous? Why should anyone be **jealous** of Cornelius, when they have the very same message from God! Listen: “**Before** they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear”[Isa 65:24] “Seek and you **shall** find, knock and it **shall** be opened” “**Surely** there is a **reward** for the righteous” [Ps 58:11] “but he who sows righteousness reaps a **sure reward**”[Pro11:18] We need to **discern** between the gift and the **wrapping** paper! Jesus said 'Every **drop** of **water** will be **rewarded**!' No one, but no one, is wasting their time, when they pray or serve God!

The angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa and get Peter to come. 'No problem', says Cornelius, 'I know just the man to send!' He had another God-fearer' in his ranks “a devout soldier who was one of his attendants”[7]. Its good to have a 'like-minded' colleague for such errands! Cornelius would want to have a spiritually minded confidant.

PETER'S VISION

God works at both ends, once again! Peter went up to the flatt roof-top to pray at **noon**! I have often wondered how the ancient world organised things so well **without clocks** and **watches**! There was a **bell** which tolled every 3hrs – at 9, 12, 3, 6, which was a help. No doubt a bell tolled which prompted Peter to go to pray! However, noon was **not** a time when **Jews** went to pray! So it seems Peter had his **own times** of prayer!

Once again we have God visiting and revealing something to His saints! Some unbelievers say Peter fell **asleep** (as we can do at prayer!), but no, he did not go to sleep. It was a vision from God. He saw a large sheet held by the 4 corners filled with all kinds of animals – even non-kosher, unclean animals! And a voice saying “Get up Peter. Kill and eat”[13]

This was **anathema** to a Jew – to eat any kind of animal. “**Surely not, Lord**”[14] He knew it was the **Lord**. Note the **strength** of his objection “**Surely not**”! Peter is a strong customer – but impetuous. Well, God reveals the vision **3 times**– no doubt for **effect** and reassurance for Peter!

Now notice that when God reveals something to us, it is His **Spirit** that **works through** of the **mind**! We still have to use our **minds** and **reasons**! Even in those days when God used visions/miracles, etc, the saints had to **interpret** them! “While Peter was **wondering** about the **meaning** of the vision”[17]. The Spirit speaks to us as we **meditate** on His Word! God had spoken, so they had to **think**! The OT saints had not

only the **written** Word of God to think about, but the **spoken** Word of God! It was as Peter was **considering** the Word spoken by God, that the **Spirit** came! Look: “While Peter was **still thinking** about the vision, the **Spirit** said to him...”[19]! The Word **and** the Spirit work **together** – they **work** in **harmony**! If you are going to be blessed, you will experience **both**! Listen to the inspired King David “The **Spirit** of the Lord **spoke** through me; His **word** was on my tongue” [2 Sam23:2]! Paul said “the sword of the **Spirit** is the **Word** of the Lord”[Eph 6:17]

We mentioned earlier in these studies that God was **slowly changing** Peter - living with a **tanner** showed how Peter **already** had a change of mind towards the Gentiles. One commentator says that this passage is not so much about the conversion of the Gentiles as the conversion of Peter! (Re his attitude to Gentiles of course!)

Here is how God finally **convinced** him that there was now **no difference** as far as God's saving **grace** was concerned, between Jew and Gentile. God was now opening the **flood-gates** to the Gentiles! **Individual** believers in the OT were added to the covenant people, Rahab, Ruth, and many others had come to **trust** in the living God, but now the **nations** were to be blessed by hearing the gospel and receiving grace from God! The blessings promised to **Abraham** that **all nations** would be blessed through him, was now to be realised!

What **happened next** is what every preacher of the gospel in Scotland would give almost anything for!! Just imagine, a **deputation** coming to the **manse door** and saying, 'We have a lovely guy, a really good living fellow and he is searching for God and he understands that you have something special - we would love **if we could come** and listen to what you have to say! In fact we have a houseful of people gathered right now – could you come and speak to us?’!! That is the gist of [v22]

We get so frustrated when we have so little unbelievers showing interest in our ministry! Maybe the reason is the same reason that Peter could **not** have **handled** this situation months ago! **He** was **not prepared** and **equipped** for the situation– perhaps in all three departments, **spiritually, theologically, emotionally**! He had so much to learn about Gentiles and their way of life and their **understanding**. He still thought in **Jewish categories** – just as we might still think in Xn categories when speaking and trying to win unbelievers! God does know what He is doing-with us!