

Peter Gives the Message!

Text: Acts 10:24-33, 34-43

Introduction:

Last time, we left off where Peter and Cornelius had met (up to verse 30), when Cornelius was about to explain the vision that he had received from the Lord. We recall that Cornelius (the Gentile centurion) had sent for Peter, in accordance with the command of the angel, which he had seen in the vision. And he was to send for Peter, so that Peter would tell him what he must do. Having sent for Peter, he had gathered his family and close friends together, as well, so that they could all hear the message of life and salvation together. And Peter, after receiving his own vision from the Lord, came with the messengers of Cornelius, up to Caesarea, so that Peter could preach the Gospel to them.

I. Cornelius Explains the Vision (he had received) to Peter

And so, in verse 29, Peter inquires as to the reason Cornelius had sent for him, wanting to gauge where Cornelius is at, before speaking God's truth to him.

"So 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, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God" (vs. 30-33).

And so, Cornelius here reiterates exactly what had happened to him, when he had received the vision, four days ago. Only here, we are given a little additional information, concerning the event, such as Cornelius's description of the angel ("a man" standing in "bright clothing"), and the fact that Cornelius was also "fasting," while he was praying. And clearly, the implication here then, is that Cornelius was seeking God with a sense of fervency, with a desire to receive a response from God, concerning an urgent matter. There was a longing on the part of Cornelius to fulfill a void of some sort, which had hindered him from laying hold of God, in the

freest sense. There was a blockage that he longed to have removed. And in the angel's response, we find a God-given solution. God orders him to send for Peter, who will then tell him what he must do. And in verses 34-43, we will find that Peter's message is merely a proclamation of the *fullness* of the Gospel of Christ, which Cornelius (and those with him), have yet to grasp. But when they do, as the Spirit utilizes the truth preached by Peter, to open their understanding, Cornelius's prayer will have been answered, and God will have accomplished His perfect design in Cornelius, Cornelius's family and friends, and Peter and company, who are to witness God's affirmation of His acceptance of the gentiles, into the fellowship of His people, in Christ! And so, the fasting, if nothing else, tells us that Cornelius was in fervent pursuit of God, concerning an urgent matter, which troubled his soul. This led Cornelius to send for Peter. And now Peter was here, ordained to speak the life-changing truth of Christ and His Gospel, to these ready and attentive gentiles!

Again, note that Peter is hearing all of this for the first time! God would have Peter learn from Cornelius, the specifics of the mission. Following, receiving the vision, Peter was simply told to go with the messengers, doubting nothing, because they were sent by God. Peter went, and after inquiring, was finally informed, regarding what he was actually called to do here. Peter evidenced God, at work in, and communicating with and through, the gentile, Cornelius, again further attesting to the fact that the Jew/Gentile barrier was completely broken down, in Christ!

And now, we move on to consider Peter's response, as he gives, "The Message!"

Peter Gives the Message!

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said; 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality...' That is to say, that Peter, in keeping with his vision (along with Cornelius's), is coming to fully recognize that God is breaking down the wall of separation, which once separated Jew and Gentile. The outward observances of the ceremonial/dietary law, and the outward sign of circumcision, are no longer distinctive factors, separating God's people from the world. God's vision is, and has always been (in accordance with His promise to Eve, Abraham..etc) much bigger than just bringing the Jewish nation into fellowship with Himself. His vision is worldwide. There is no partiality given to the Jew anymore, but all people are welcome on the same terms. No longer are those who have been given the sign of *outward* circumcision to be preferred, but rather, those who manifest the fruit of the *inward* circumcision,

are all welcome into God's presence, through Christ! This is the key emphasis of this entire section of Scripture, and it is the precursor to understanding verse 35.

Ultimately, God shows no partiality, but rather, "in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (vs. 35). Wow, it almost seems like Peter is here putting forth a works salvation, but, we have a context, don't we! Two key factors must be understood when seeking to understand these words:

1) Peter is *not* saying that one can be saved by these means. In fact, what he continues to say, eliminates that heretical notion altogether. The "faith in Christ alone" emphasis is given in the words that follow. However, what he is saying, in keeping with the context, is that God is not looking at outward ceremony or circumcision, as means of confirming his children. Rather, He is looking for *inward* change, namely the "walking in the fear of God" (respecting and reverencing Him in every sphere of life), which is confirmed in the *outward* fruit of working true righteousness. He is looking for the outward expression of fearing Him (a mark of true conversion and faith), expressed in works of righteousness, in keeping with His Word (and the commands of Christ).

2) While this is not a "salvation by works" proclamation, it is most certainly a very clear testimony, confirming that all true converts (Christians), will and must evidence these necessary signs of life, namely, a fear of God and righteous deeds. This is a great accompaniment to what James teaches in his epistle, namely, that our *faith* is justified (is proved to be a "living" faith, and not a dead "faith") by our good works. Again, the life of faith is proven by works of righteousness. The Spirit of Christ is seen, in the change that He brings out of those, who truly belong to Christ!

And so, brethren, while God makes no distinction in ethnic gender, He does make a distinction in the "profession" given, by all who claim to know Him in truth. And that distinction is seen by a fear of Him, manifest in good works. Hence, the necessity of good works is here emphasized, as that confirming factor of being accepted by God, as opposed to the former keeping of dietary/ceremonial laws, and outward circumcision.

[Read verses 36-38]. Here, we are given a summation of what Cornelius and those with him, would have known about Jesus. For, news about Jesus spread all around, and certain things, were pretty well understood, in a general sense. What were they?

1) That "peace" was preached through Jesus. By way of John the Baptist, Jesus, and their followers, the idea of "peace with God and peace on earth" were very common talking points, which spread from city to city. The message of peace with God, was proclaimed, as attached to this Jesus. And while there was confusion as to how "He brought peace," the general reality was proclaimed everywhere (vs. 36-37). [Peter also notes that Jesus is "Lord of all," indicating that the One who proclaimed peace in Himself, was able to back up, support, and secure those claims, by virtue of His authority and power. He is "Lord of all," warranting His right to proclaim peace in Himself, since all things (in heaven and on earth) are under the jurisdiction of His authority, power and reign.

2) That God had "anointed Jesus *of Nazareth* [a very specific "Jesus," so that there is no confusion regarding which "Jesus"] with the Holy Spirit and with power. This was confirmed both at His baptism (an audible voice; the voice of God from heaven spoke, expressing His delight in Jesus, when He was baptized...in front of all who were present), and in the miracles, which followed, accompanying the message that He preached. When the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus, at His baptism (like a descending dove), the Father vocally affirmed His anointing, and power was given Him, to work miraculous signs and wonders; road signs, shouting aloud, "This is My beloved Son, the Christ, in whom I am well pleased! Hear Him!" There was a general recognition of these realities, which spread all around, and Cornelius would have probably heard of them.

3) That He went about "doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil." Again, it was generally known by all, that throughout the whole of His life ministry, Jesus went about doing good, casting out demons, and healing people from all manner of diseases, ailments and afflictions, which were brought about by the devil. Jesus brought about relief to those who were oppressed physically and mentally by Satan. This was general knowledge.

However, there were certain things that everyone did not know, surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ. Certain facts; certain news had spread, and had grabbed the attention of even people from distant cities, but bringing it altogether, was still a necessity. And this culminated in the news, which Peter had. This was the very testimony, to which the Apostles were called to bear witness. They were to string the general news of events together, so that all would understand the truth, and by believing that truth, they would attain to the salvation hidden

within it! And this is particularly where Cornelius (and those with him), would be enlightened unto salvation.

[Read verse 39]. It is important that Peter establish the fact that all that was spread; the news which was spread about Jesus's works in Jerusalem and Judea, was directly witnessed first hand, by Peter and the Apostles. That which came, secondhand, to Cornelius and others, was witnessed firsthand by Peter and the Apostles. And so, he could directly attest to the rumors, as an eye witness. Again, this was one of the things that qualified him to be an Apostle. And furthermore, they were there when He was crucified, and unlawfully killed by the Jews and the Romans. But the testimony does not end there, and here is the critical capstone to the whole equation; that which brings it all together, clearing up any confusion over all of the facts, and making "salvific sense" of it all:

"Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (vs. 40-41).

Jesus's mission was not a failure. Indeed, His death was necessary. But furthermore, "I (and several of my companions), having been ordained by God, were chosen to bear witness to His resurrection. He arose three days later. And He revealed Himself to us; we ate and drank with Him...He was no phantom or ghost, but rather, He was raised in His crucified body! All of this culminates to a great and glorious end, Cornelius, and I am here to make known that end to you! I am here to give you the message of salvation found in this risen Christ!"

"And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." (vs. 42).

Having overcome death in His own resurrection; having been delivered from death by God, He has been given the keys to resurrection life, and He will now judge the living and the dead. "And here is the great hope Cornelius...here is what you need to hear from me; what you must understand, believe, and rest your very life upon..."

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His Name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission (forgiveness) of sins" (vs. 43).

And so, the Gospel of the resurrected Christ is proclaimed to Cornelius and those with him, offering them all hope in this Jesus! The One, whom they have heard of, through various bits and pieces of gossip and "spread news"; the One who has died, has also been raised from the

dead (something Cornelius did not know till now), as Supreme Ruler and Judge, offering free salvation; total forgiveness for sins, in Him...for all who believe! This was what Cornelius needed to hear and understand, and believe! He needed to believe *in* this Jesus! This was the answer to His fastings and prayers. And now, suddenly, all that the prophets of old had spoken, with a degree of vagueness; and all that was confusing about the news of Jesus of Nazareth, had come into a position of clarity! It all made sense! And they believed!

And it is at this point, as we will see next time, Lord willing, that the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius and those who are with him, indicating that the life of Christ was now in them! The eyes of their hearts and souls had been opened to the truth of the Gospel, and when they manifest that the gift of the Spirit has come upon and into them (a "Gentile Pentecost," as it were), Peter is compelled to baptize them, bringing them into the fellowship of Christ's Kingdom and Church!

AMEN!!!

[Note: God opens up the understanding...for those who humbly seek Him!...Fasting and prayer and meditation on the Word]