

Scripture Reading:

Acts 10:1 “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4 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. 5 Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. *[men sent & Peter's vision]*

19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." 21 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?" 22 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." 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 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. 29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" ”

"Peter Goes to the Gentiles"

Here in Luke's orderly account, almost all of chapters 10 & 11 and much of chapter 15 deal exclusively with the entrance of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of Jesus! We have seen where Luke can cover almost three years in a single verse when in his account about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus he says simply "after many days" and yet here we have almost three entire chapters discussing something that happened over just four days!

- Obviously, Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, considers this to be an important event in the history of the Church!

And it surely is! We as Gentiles should certainly praise God for what happened here at Caesarea! And we should give thanks for how God has continued bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles down through history as the Kingdom of His beloved Son fills the earth!

We are introduced at the beginning of chapter ten to a man named Cornelius. We are told that he is a righteous man and a Roman Centurion. As we saw last week, God had to give Peter a special vision three times to prepare him for what was to happen with these Gentiles at Caesarea... I suggested last week that you look up the Roman Centurions who are mentioned in the New Testament to consider how they are presented:

We discover that there are a number of Centurions mentioned and it can be surprising to see just how the Scripture presents them...

It is often easy to make and hold to true generalizations so much so, that we can overlook important details:

For example, when we think of this time in the early church, we usually would be thinking...

- **Jesus and Disciples: Good!**
- **Jews and Romans: Bad!**

Jesus and the disciples brought the Good News of salvation and the Jews and Romans conspired together to kill the Son of God.

- Now this is true generally, but we must remember that Judas was a disciple

We must also remember that faithful Jews took down the body of Jesus and thousands responded to the call of the Gospel at Pentecost and later.

- And even the Romans were not all bad!

The first Centurion we are introduced to had a daughter who had taken ill and sent servants to Jesus...

- Of this man Jesus said that he had faith such as our Lord had not found in all of Israel!

The next Centurion that we encounter is at the foot of the cross as Jesus is crucified and in the end he declared,

- “Truly this was the Son of God.”

Here in Acts ten we meet Cornelius whom we will consider at length, but he will not be the last centurion that Luke makes mention of in Acts. When Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and about to be beaten, it is a Roman Centurion who goes to the commander warning him that Paul is a citizen of Rome. And finally we meet a centurion named Julius who delivered Paul to Rome and saved him during the shipwreck when the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners. So we have a centurion with great faith, a centurion who is righteous and two who protect the life of Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

- These men do not fit the Hollywood, or even Sunday School image of the Romans!

These men were what we commonly refer to as God-fearers: Those in the Gentile world who had come to faith but not converted to Judaism: That is they were not circumcised or received at the Temple. Again, our “big picture” is often not complete: We think of the Old Testament as the story of Israel and the New Testament as the story of how God brought in the Gentiles and this is largely true. However, we must remember that Jews are still being saved in the New Testament as they come to have faith in Jesus AND there were many Gentiles converted in the Old Testament as well. Just a quick survey should remind of us this:

Joseph is sent ahead of God’s people into Egypt where he has a tremendous impact on that great nation.

Kings David and Solomon had an impact on many surrounding nations like King Hiram and the Queen of Sheba.

Daniel and his friends bring about the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar and many others in Babylon & Persia.

By the time of Queen Esther we see the reach of the Jews going from India to Africa

Our just God ultimately judged the wicked kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome but this does not mean there were not God-fearing people like Cornelius throughout these times and that God did not use these mighty kingdoms to judge and protect His people as we learn in great detail from the prophets.

Now I am sure that our evangelical antenna stood up just a bit when I referred to these gentiles as God-fearers and to their being converted.

- And well it should because we know that there is only one name under heaven by which men must be saved: Jesus!

King Nebuchadnezzar could not have received Christ... Could he? Well this is where the man who Peter was called on to visit can teach us much about God's plan of salvation...

Cornelius is introduced to us as a righteous man, a man whose prayers and alms have gone up before God as a memorial. Now we know from our systematic theology that only those who are in Christ are righteous and that the works of the wicked are an abomination to God:

- Now this is all true!
- So how can Luke refer to this centurion in this way BEFORE he is told about Jesus by Peter?

Well, Mike has made the point on Wednesday night a couple of times in the past few weeks, that if we do not run into places in the Bible that make us a little uneasy, then we are not reading our Bibles very carefully.

- You see we want to keep everything in nice neat little boxes that we can understand!

We as good reformers argue for the order-salutis of salvation: We know that everyone is born dead in their trespasses and sins, at some point the Holy Spirit regenerates their hearts, they are given the gift of faith, repent of their sins and receive Jesus at which point they are justified. Then out of thankfulness they obey God and their good works are accepted as they are Sanctified by the Spirit & in the end they will be resurrected and glorified for all eternity.

- We say that we believe that our salvation is ALL of grace, a gift from God, but we want all of this kept straight!

However, it is this type of narrow systematic that has led in large part to our confusion about the Old Testament and in the end why we tend to ignore it! IF people are only saved by trusting in Jesus, then how could anyone have been saved in the Old Testament? Now some will argue that no one in the Old Testament was saved until Jesus came and that is why He went to hell to preach the Good News. The only problem with this is that fact that this is not how the Bible speaks about these people in the Old Testament

- David is called righteous, a man after God's own heart!
- Or think about the long list of Saints in the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven!

These were all saved, not by confessing the name of Jesus, but by exercising the same gift of faith that we receive in looking forward to God's great work of salvation: The crushing of the serpent's seed by the seed of the woman promised all the way back in the garden. This is what Abel and Seth trusted in: This is what Rahab believed and even what King Nebuchadnezzar was humbled into believing.

- And just as is true with all New Testament Saints, none of them could have done so if that had not received God's gracious gift of faith.

So, here we have a Roman Centurion who did not yet know all the details of what Jesus had done: But who is called righteous! He is not called righteous because he could pray really good or because his alms giving was good enough to earn God's favor! This man had been regenerated by God, given the gift of faith and thus was able to pray aright and give alms that were acceptable to God! *[as your homework, read Romans 2 with this in mind as see if that solves some of the problems with this difficult text]*

Now the time has come for him to receive an earthly reward for this faithfulness, which was a gift of faith:

- A reward that would open the Kingdom and allow the fullness of the Gentiles to come in!

Peter is not called to Caesarea to convert Cornelius, but rather, just as Jesus came as a little baby to faithful Simeon who waited for God's Messiah, now faithful Cornelius is going to see the salvation of his God! And lest we forget the importance of sharing the Good News and think that God just does whatever He wants to get people saved, please notice that once again a man is sent!

- Peter now goes to preach the Good News to Cornelius just as we saw Ananias sent to Saul!
- Truly the feet of those who carry the Good News are beautiful!

We will consider Peter's message at length next week, but first I want us to consider some important lessons about Peter's coming to Caesarea. As we noted last week, Peter obeys the Spirit and goes with these men despite the misgivings from his Jewish traditions would have caused. Other Jewish Saints travel with him which is a testimony of the level of trust they had for Peter. Six of these men will go with Peter to Jerusalem as witnesses of what happened which will be very important *[Note: There may have been more than six that traveled!]*

Here we have another example of nameless and yet faithful Saints who contribute their small part to the advance of God's Kingdom: Faithfulness is SO important:

- As Dr. Francis Schaeffer would say, 'there are no little people' when it comes to God's work!

Now these men trusted Peter, but they did not worship Peter! When Peter approached Cornelius he follows his Roman customs and bows reverently before Peter. Peter quickly places his hand on him and lifts him up saying that he is also just a man...

- Such a simple lesson that has been often forgotten down through Church history.

The bronze statue of Peter at St. Peter's basilica has a big toe that has literally been worn down by those who have bowed to kiss it down through the years. I am sure that such a trip would be quite moving, but these Saints would have been better served by staying home and reading the Book of Acts! Lest we think it is safe to throw stones at their 'glass house' I am sure God is most displeased with much of the pride and division brought to His Church by the Protestants who rightly rejected this worship of Peter.

- We too would often be better served by more careful reading the Book of Acts!

There is something that Luke does in presenting how Peter came to Caesarea that I don't think we should miss: It helps us to understand just how significant this event is going to be.

- It will also help us to see its right application for us today!

We spoke last week about the Old Testament food laws demonstrating how God's people were to be holy and set apart from the sin and death Adam brought into this world. In the tabernacle and Temple God's people were reminded again about the problem of sin and just how Holy God really is!

- Only those who were Jews and not defiled were allowed to approach the courts.
- Only the Levites and Priests were allowed into the Holy place to present sacrifices and carry out their various duties.

And then only the High Priest on behalf of all the people could enter the Holy of Holies once a year after making the proper sacrifices for sin.

All of this showed the devastation brought upon mankind by sin and also how the problem of sin would be solved by the coming Messiah.

When Jesus came and gave His life for the sins of His people He cried it is finished and then the veil of the Temple was torn top to bottom: [Something that may have been visible from Golgotha!] The veil of separation had been destroyed:

- Mankind was no longer alienated from God because through the blood of Jesus all Saints could now enter the very presence of God as we do each week during our Lord's Day worship.

The Spirit of God carries us to the very throne room of God after which the writer of the Hebrews tell us that the Tabernacle and Temple was designed. So Peter has been shown a powerful vision that more fully explains what God has done:

- Those whom God has cleansed must not be called common!

Peter understands that this applies to men, but I suspect he still figured God was just going to have a whole lot of Gentiles become Jewish! But God is not going to bring the Gentiles to the Holy of Holies: He is going to send the Spirit to them!

Luke is very careful to tell us how Peter came to Caesarea: First we are told that he entered Caesarea in verse 24. Next we are told that he came into the house of Cornelius in verse 25. And finally we are told that he came into the room where the ready and willing Gentiles were waiting in verse 26.

I do not think it is just a coincidence that Peter's approach to these gathered people was similar to how the High Priest would come to the Temple, into the Holy place and then enter the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwelt. We will see next week that God clearly shows Peter, and then all of the Jews that His presence is no longer just in a Temple made with hands, but in the Temple of His people, both Jew and Gentile.

- The promise made to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth was going to be fulfilled.

We will consider Peter's message to those gathered next week, but in closing today our application comes from those who have gathered. Peter would have been reminded of the High Priest as he came into Caesarea, then into a home and finally into a room where he finds the presence of God the Holy Spirit... In the same way, the gathering of these faithful people should challenge us regarding the importance of attendance at Lord's Day worship!

- The writer of the Hebrews does not want us to miss that these are linked together
- And I trust you will see how practical all that I have tried to focus on this morning really is as we consider this stunning picture of our Lord's Day Worship from Hebrews chapter ten:

12 "But this Man [Jesus], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. 15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. 19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Cornelius had been told by God's messenger that he was to send for Peter and listen to what he had to say: Cornelius not only obeyed but gathered others of his friends and family to hear what Peter would have to say

- **Luke gives us the sense of how excited they were as they gathered**
- **It is a picture of how excited we should be when we gather for Lord's Day worship!**

Regular attendance for worship is one of the membership vows that we take here at Church of the King... We do so because it is a blessing that we all want to participate in, not forsaking our gathering together!

- **We also focus on this because it has become such a major failing of the American Church.**
- **For a host of reasons, attending church on Sunday has ceased to be much of a priority today!**

If we are tired, if there is recreation that we want to do, if there is a family reunion or a political function or just about anything else that comes up many allow these to become an excuse to miss church.

- **When we plan vacations or even move there is often little or no thought about where we will go to church.**

We know that we need a good job or school, we need a good place to stay and even might consider the climate:

- **But how often does having a good church home figure into our decision making these days?**

IF we were serious about what the writer of the Hebrews explained there in Chapter ten, our priorities would be much different.

- **Perhaps if folks pondered the warning that immediately follows they would be more careful:**

Hebrews 10:26 "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

As we mentioned last week, we are raising a new generation of covenant children and if we are good examples to them about the importance of right worship on the Lord's Day they will know of no other way!

- **This will be a blessing to them Lord-willing for their entire lives.**

Peter went to meet with the Gentiles just as God promised Cornelius that he would. God comes to meet with us each week during our Lord's Day worship just as He has promised us:

- **May God grant us the faith to respond to His call each week with the same diligence and enthusiasm that we saw with these very first Gentile members of the Church!**

Communion Meditation: Galatians 3:

"23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."