

Text: Acts 10:24-48

Title: Peter preaches to Gentiles

Truth: Gentiles too can be saved.

Date/Location: Wednesday February 6, 2013, and 1/17, 24 and 2/1, 7, 14/2024

Introduction

Previously, I said that Cornelius was saved in the OT sense, but he was still required, because of the completion of the work of Christ, to be brought into the revelation of the new age.

Kent and Ryrie disagree with the analysis that he was saved already and say that 11:14 demonstrates he had yet to be saved. That is a very strong text in favor of their viewpoint. Others point to the fact that he was uncircumcised (11:3)—a point which is not convincing to me because circumcision was not required for salvation, a truth which is proven in Romans 4:9-12. Commentator David Peterson in the Pillar NT series suggests that Cornelius already had a God-given faith (p. 335) but still needed to hear the gospel and trust in Jesus.

I don't lightly ignore the understanding of Kent and Ryrie (and others), but it seems to me that a man with his character was, if not saved, about as close as one gets to OT salvation without being in Jerusalem and following the sacrificial system and being circumcised. Look again at the significant words that describe him as a godly man. For instance, he was a devout man. This word is used of saved Ananias (22:12, see 9:10), and of God's people in 2 Peter 2:9. A similar word is used in Luke 2:25, Acts 8:2, 13:43, 13:50, and 17:4, many of these instances of believers, some of people before they became Christians. Given the doctrine of total depravity, this devoutness appears to have been a work of God in the life of Cornelius through his faith, not a work of his own. I can accept if this was a work of God short of salvation but preparatory for it, and so I wouldn't make a huge deal out of this. God knows those who belong to Him anyway (2 Tim. 2:19).

Regardless, I agree that Cornelius *had to hear* the information that Peter was about to bring to him. He was lacking something needed to be on the one and only way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The transitional nature of the book of Acts may “feel” somewhat strange to us, but even truly saved people in an OT sense had to be brought up to date to believe in Jesus now that His ministry was history and was being proclaimed throughout the world. A person who lived early in church dispensation was *required* to hear the gospel and believe in it. God ensured that would happen for those truly devout people that He had already begun a good work in.

This is less precise than I like to be, but I *cannot* say that someone in this era needed to be saved twice, as if Cornelius were saved before, and then again after he heard of Jesus. But what do we do with the hypothetical situation where someone had the Cornelius-sort of faith, but died before Christ died, or died before the news of the new era reached them? We’ll leave that in God’s hands.

For now, we turn to the text to see what happened with Cornelius and Peter.

I. Peter Meets Cornelius, 24-27

- A. Peter and the traveling party did not waste any time. They obeyed the angelic command and the heavenly vision, and did what God told them to do. Notice that Peter traveled with six brothers (11:12), along with the three men that Cornelius had sent, so there was a traveling party of 10 men. The six men would serve as more than the requisite number of witnesses for the Jews back in Joppa, and elsewhere, to attest to the accuracy of Peter’s account of what happened.
- B. V. 24 and 27: In preparation for the meeting, Cornelius had called together his family and close friends. Something big was happening, and he wanted them to be part of it.
- C. It struck me that Cornelius was waiting for them. He knew what day they would likely be coming. He was eager to hear the message from God. **Application:** I trust that we too eagerly await the Word of God whenever there are opportunities to hear it. How about if we even gather beforehand, in *anticipation* of its delivery! This attitude is expected of a believer, who *loves* God’s word and meditates in it regularly.

- D. In verse 25, we read of Cornelius's bowing down to worship Peter. We can appreciate Cornelius' sincerity in thinking that this was a man of God bringing the message of God and he was to be respected. But the level of respect he shows is too high.
- E. Verse 26: Cornelius went way too far and Peter had to correct him immediately, even though Cornelius meant well. No one should bow to another man as in worship: not a pastor, not a priest, not a bishop, not a cardinal, not a pope, and not a statue of Peter! If a man of Peter's spiritual stature was just a man, then so is everyone else.
- We should note this to our Catholic friends, that Peter was not simply being modest, as if he deserved the worship but just humbly put it off. Rather, he recognized that he was not worthy of worship, and the reason was that he also was a (sinful) man. He was a messenger, not the substance of the message; not the substitute of Christ on earth; not worthy of worship.
- H. This reminds us too that Jesus Christ *is* worthy of our worship, because He is *more* than a mere man: He is God as well. See the portions of Scripture that record His receiving of worship: John 9:38, Luke 24:52, Matthew 28:9, 17.
- I. Verse 27: Peter found a whole crowd gathered. He had an evangelistic meeting set up for him by an angel and then in turn by Cornelius. It didn't take much effort on his part!

II. Explanation for Peter's Presence, 28-29

- A. Verse 28: The Law of Moses required the Jews to separate from people of other nations, particularly from their unclean diet, pagan practices, and from intermarriage with them, etc. "How unlawful it is" indicates that to what Peter is doing is not considered a minor breach of the law. The situation was probably defiling in the traditional Jewish mind, even if being in the presence of any Gentile is not necessarily condemned in the Law of Moses.
- B. "But God" – the phrase shows up again and again in the Bible (Luke 16:15, Acts 7:9, 13:30, Rom. 5:8, 1 Cor. 1:27, 2:10, 3:6-7, 10:13, Eph. 2:4, Phil. 2:27).

- C. God *showed* Peter – this means that God proved, made clear by evidence or reasoning, explained.
- D. What it was that Peter had learned was that he should not call any man common or unclean. With the verb “to call,” from the verb “to say or speak,” what is meant is that Peter learned he was not to *consider* anyone that way, which consideration would lead him to say so if he really believed it. So, he was to stop thinking of other people as unclean. This is a revolution in his whole worldview and way of thinking.
- E. The basis, of course, of his new-found understanding was the vision of the unclean food that he received a couple of days earlier. In that vision, with its very peculiar timing associated with the visitors, as well as the subsequent revelation that God gave in 10:20, Peter understood the connection of the food vision and the people to whom he was to minister. He would be able to reason from lesser to greater, namely that if God had declared foods clean so that the Jewish person could not say they were unclean, then the people they considered unclean, in part because of their unlawful diet, could also not be condemned as unclean either. God had removed that stigma.

The whole panorama of NT Biblical teaching comes in here and we understand from Mark 7 and elsewhere in the Pauline literature that food is a non-issue. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and faith and joy (Romans 14:17).

Therefore, Peter could definitively say, “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

- F. The usual objection that Peter could have raised (the easy excuse to stay home) was thus destroyed, and Peter had no objections left. He had to go (v. 29).
- G. He now asks what is the reason that Cornelius called him. I suspect that Peter had a good idea of what Cornelius needed, but it is always appropriate to put on a listening ear. This helped him to perceive in v. 47 that God had readied these Gentiles to receive the gospel.

III. Cornelius Reviews What Happened, v. 30-33

- A. Besides what we read in 10:1-8, an added detail is that the angel said that Peter would tell what God had commanded him. Cornelius commends Peter for doing well to come, and he reiterates that he and all his family and friends are present to hear the things commanded by God.
- B. Talk about an opportunity on a silver platter! Cornelius does not know exactly what to say that he needs. He doesn't know what he doesn't know! But what God has commanded Peter to do is to be a witness concerning Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). So, he begins to carry out that assignment in this Gentile home.

IV. Peter's Realization, v. 34-35

- A. What has happened before Peter's very eyes and ears heightens his amazement at the situation. The revolution is continuing to unfold in Peter's mind from when he pondered and was perplexed, then received more revelation, had a couple of days of travel to mull it over, and now he sees that God is really at work among people other than Jews or those of partial Jewish descent (Samaritans).
- B. Peter grasped a timeless principle: God does not show partiality. He is not a respecter of persons. He does not show favoritism. Ethnicity does not hold God hostage—He works outside of those boundaries. Actually, if we stop and think about it for a minute, ethnicity is not a boundary whatsoever. People are people! All are descended from Adam through Noah. (In fact, I suspect that there was ethnic and genetic variation *lost* at the flood. All that Adam and Eve produced was whittled down to Noah and his family. It seems likely that God had initially created an even *more* diverse world.) The principle works out this way: no one can say "God is agin' me 'cause I'm this or that ethnicity."
- C. Truly, the only basis that God cares about is whether a person fears Him and works righteousness. From the human side, this may sound like a works-based salvation, but the reality is that the disposition to fear God and the desire and ability to do good works

comes from God Himself. Works are not necessary *to* salvation, but they are necessary *of* salvation; they do not obtain salvation, but salvation works out in the form of good works.

- D. People who fear God have real faith in Him and demonstrate the liveliness of that faith. They are truly alive spiritually. These are the ones who are accepted by God.

V. Peter's Preaching, v. 36-43

Peter begins his God-ordained message, which is a summation of the gospel of Christ.

- A. The gospel is a message first to the people of Israel. What is the significance of this? Israel is God's people, privileged in several ways, and first chronologically to receive the gospel. They were primed to receive it, having been the guardians of the previous revelation, the promises, the temple service, the prophets, etc. They should have been ready in an instant once they heard it. But they were not.
- B. Peace through Jesus Christ. Spiritual peace, not war-peace. Salvation peace, with God.
- C. The Lordship of Christ. Please, please take note: Peter cannot get through the first sentence of the good news without mentioning Jesus is Lord of all. He is Lord of us. He is Lord of everyone and everything and everywhere and every nation.
- D. Location and time of it – in Judea and Galilee. It was an actual historical message. It happened after John's baptism. In verse 37, the "you know" indicates that the Gentiles had heard of this world-famous ministry, but they needed further explanation.
- E. Jesus, in the power of the Spirit of God, did all kinds of good deeds, healed the sick, cast out demons. The devil's oppressions were halted in many lives. God was with Him.
- F. We are witnesses of all that happened in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.
- G. Those people, the Jews, killed Him (with the help of the Romans is understood) by hanging Him on a tree.

- H. God raised Him from the dead on the third day. God openly showed Him to God's select witnesses, not to everyone. But there were many, as we learn from Paul in 1 Corinthians. The eyewitness testimony is expansive and deep. They did not just have a fleeting glimpse of the Lord or an apparition—they were *with* Him for long stretches of time. Some even ate and drank with Him.
- I. He commanded the apostles to preach and testify these things.
- J. One thing that they were obligated to preach is that Jesus was ordained by God to be the **judge of the living and dead**. It must be remembered that Jesus is not only savior and Lord—the two common titles we give to Him. But He is also and will be Judge! The offices of Jesus which have a bit of an “edge” to them do seem to fall easily on hard times.

The Lord will be the judge of the living and the dead. No matter their state of aliveness at the time of judgment: He will raise people from the dead so they can stand in the judgment.

The idea of Jesus as Judge permeates the New Testament. I did not initially realize the number of texts to that effect. See Acts 10:42, 17:31 and 24:25. See also John 5:26-30, 9:39, Rom. 2:16, 2 Tim. 4:1. See also Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Cor. 5:10. Also Matt. 16:27 with its idea of reward according to works.

Any enthronement text regarding Jesus can be marshalled here as well, since in a kingdom reign, the king naturally has prerogative as judge if he chooses to exercise it. Matt. 19:28, 25:31; and Rev. 20:4 speaks of souls on thrones, assigned judgment responsibilities.

In Revelation 20:11-15, we read of the future Great White Throne Judgment. The small and great stand before God, so it is easy to read this passage as teaching that in this particular case, God the Father is the judge. But John 5:21-23 teach us that God has committed all judgment to the Son, because He is the Son of Man. He partakes of humanity not only to suffer and die for us, not only to be a faithful high priest, not only to learn obedience by the things that he suffered, but also in order to be a perfectly-suited judge.

In one way, this is a scary thought. However, if we read John 5:24-25, we can be doubly assured. Jesus promises life to those who believe in Him. And, since He is the judge, He ought to know what He is talking about. People who believe in Him will not come into judgment but will pass from death into life!

K. If you believe in Him, as the prophets testified, through His name you will receive **remission of sins**. *Whoever* believes in Him will receive remission. This is ironic in a sense because the Person who is the judge is also the remitter of sins! But it is also good news because this judge can be merciful to those who trust Him because He promised to remit the sins of those who believe in Him.

I am assuming you know what “remission” of sins means. But as I thought about it, I realized that word is not self-defining. It is sort of like *removal* of sins, but it does more than just erase sins from our record. It is technically “the act of freeing from an obligation, guilt, or punishment, *pardon* or *cancellation*” (BDAG, s.v. ἄφεσις).

When you sin, that act brings guilt, which in turn means God is legitimately able to punish you for the sin. You own the fault, so you own the consequences, and cannot complain. This means you have an obligation toward God. This obligation is objective, not subjective. This means that you may not “feel” it to be the case, but it is true nonetheless. You should feel guilt when you are faced with the truth that God calls you to right behavior, right attitude, right thinking. But maybe you do not.

This makes for a good opportunity to ask if you have any felt guilt. Have you ever “felt” guilt or fault or blame or culpability? Has your conscience talked to you lately, or have you felt contrition about something? Is your “guilt capability” functioning properly? Or is it so frozen that you are unable to feel that and think that you are “alright” with people and with God? Seek to sensitize your conscience!

If God then, through faith in Christ, pardons the sin or cancels your guilt, then you are no longer subject to punishment for the sin. You are free from obligation, guilt is removed, eternal consequences cancelled (but not necessarily all effects).

Several sermons in Acts conclude with the idea of remission of sins. See Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 10:43 (all of Peter), and 13:38, 26:18 (Paul). The latter passage indicates the reason for the preaching that includes mention of remission of sins, namely that Jesus delivered this “template” message to the apostle. See also Luke 24:47 which teaches us disciples to preach remission of sins in Christ’s name to all the nations. The ordinance of the Lord’s Table has the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). The ministry of Jesus ended where it began—compare that verse from Matthew 26 with Mark 1:4, and Luke 1:77, and Luke 3:3.

Another word for *remission* is *forgiveness*. Col. 1:14, Eph. 1:7, John 20:23, Luke 5:24, Mark 3:28. Both terms are used to translate the Greek word for remission.

Often the message of remission (removal, forgiveness, elimination of grounds to hold something against someone) is tied in with a call for repentance, because repentance is that which from the human side results in God extending remission. It is not that repentance “cajoles” God to do it, but that God has promised forgiveness for all who repent.

Once remission is provided, in Christ of course, no more offering for sin is necessary (Hebrews 10:18).

The forgiven state offers a glorious freedom of conscience—not to do more bad—freedom from the gloom of impending judgment into the light of joyful service to the One who forgave you.

Following the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with her tears (Luke 7:37-50), if the Lord has forgiven you much, then you will love Him much. And if you are a Christian, that is the case.

VI. Salvation and Baptism, v. 44-48

- A. Whether Cornelius was heaven-bound before or got saved now, does not much matter at this point. He believed the gospel message which Peter preached. He received the special ministry of the Holy Spirit. **Application:** There is something similar with us—do not obsess about a date in the past. Just ask “do I believe in Christ”? Answer yes, and do so now!

- B. Peter may have given more detail on some points, some of which has been omitted in the inspired written record we have, but certainly he spoke no less than what we read here.
- C. Peter did not finish what he was preaching before the listeners responded in true faith. No invitation was necessary! This is how true salvation works. A person is often saved before you can even get to the invitation part. No cajoling and pushing and prodding is necessary for real faith to spring to life.
- D. The Holy Spirit took up residence in those people immediately. They did not have to wait; they did not have to make a public profession of faith; they did not have to be water baptized; they did not have to speak in tongues first (or at all, for that matter); they did not have to have laying on of hands. Belief was all that was needed (“when we believed,” 11:17).
- E. The response of the Jews with Peter was astonishment. They knew now that the Gentiles had received the Spirit because they heard them speak in tongues and magnify the Lord, just like at Pentecost. But this floored them because they were not accustomed to Gentiles being saved.
- It should not have been too much of a surprise to them because their previous Scriptures told of God’s care for Gentiles in numerous passages, including that God would bring them into His fold, so to speak (Amos 9:11-15, Zech 2:11, Isaiah 2:2-3).
- F. The next step for you after believing in Jesus is to be baptized. So naturally Peter responded by asking if anyone could think of a reason *not* to baptize these new believers. They had the Spirit, just like the Jewish believers did. They believed in the message of Christ, just like the Jewish believers did. Therefore, there was no hindrance. God’s non-partiality was proved out. Peter commanded the Jewish believers with him to baptize these new converts. This confirms that baptism is a “thing,” even for Gentiles, unlike the doctrine of a few who deny baptism for this age.

Conclusion

I thank God that God sent the good news through Jesus—and even included Gentiles.

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