

Series: "Church the Way It's Supposed to Be"

Sermon #8

"The Conversion of Cornelius"

Acts 10

Introduction: 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 had used "the keys of the kingdom" to open the door of faith to the Jews (Acts 2) and the Samaritans (Acts 8:14f), and now would complete his special ministry during this period of transition by opening the door to the Gentiles (see Acts 15:6-11). You should also read Acts 11:1-18 to get Peter's picture of this momentous event.

When God wants to do a work, He calls a man of God, empowers him with the Spirit of God, and enables him to preach the Word of God. This same program is seen in operation in this chapter.

I. PREPARATION. BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD - 10: 1-22

1 The Spirit prepares Cornelius (10: 1-8).

Caesarea was a Roman city, the Roman capital of Palestine. 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. See how possible it is to be religious but lost! Were it not for the fact that God in His grace spoke to Cornelius, he would never have become a believer. We see here a fulfillment of Christ's promise in John 7:17 - "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know the truth... " An angel spoke to him and told him to send for Peter. Why did not the angel give Cornelius the message himself? BECAUSE GOD HAS NOT GIVEN THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL TO ANGELS! What a privilege we have in telling the Gospel to lost souls, a 'privilege 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. The Spirit was leading in all of this (10: 19-20).

2. The Spirit prepares Peter (10:9-22).

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 (ceremonially speaking, cf. Lev. 11) and is commanded to kill and eat. His "Not so~ Lord!" reminds us of Mt. 16:22 where he told Christ not to go to the cross. Anyone who says "Lard" cannot say "Not so!" If He is truly Lord, we must obey Him. While Peter thinks upon this vision, which occurred three times, the Spirit speaks to him directly and tells him, "ARISE AND GO!" Peter did not go to the Gentiles because he understood the vision, but because THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF TOLD HIM TO GO (11:11-16).

Later he fully understood the meaning of the vision, that God had, through the cross, broken down all division between Jews and Gentiles.

II. OBEDIENCE OF THE MAN OF GOD - 10:23-33

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 reverence for the OT law. Peter did not go to the Gentiles because he was "obeying the Great Commission," but because the Spirit had distinctly commanded him to go. In fact, when he arrived at Cornelius' house, he asked, "For what intent have ye sent for me? (10:29). And when he preached, God had to interrupt him in order to accomplish His purpose -(10:44 and 11:15-16). 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 of Mk. 16:15-18, Lk. 24:44-49, and Acts 1:8, which meant they must preach "to the Jew first" and start in Jerusalem." This is why the Apostles remained in Jerusalem during the great persecution (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 inconsistency (see Gal. 2). During this period of transition (Acts 8-12) we see Peter moving off the scene and with him the kingdom message to Israel,

III. PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD' - 10:34-48

A **prepared preacher** and a **prepared congregation** make a wonderful team! Read neb. 11:6 in connection with vs. 35; Peter is not saying that all who "do good" are saved, He 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 vs. 42 he says, "And He commanded us to preach unto THE PEOPLE (meaning the Jews)," 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 vs. 43 when he says, " ..• whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins."

At this point the 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. (See Gal. 3: 2). The Jews with Peter were astonished that God would save the Gentiles! Led by the Spirit, Peter commands that they be baptized; and 11:3 suggests that Peter and his friends stayed with these new believers and ate with them.

As we will see in Acts 11 and 15, the conversion of the Gentiles created a 'great problem for the Jewish believers; NOT because they had "race prejudice," but because they did not understand "the mystery" of the Church (Eph. 3). They thought that the Gentiles could be saved only through Israel's rise as a Kingdom; but God revealed through Paul that through Israel's FALL the Gentiles were saved (Rom. 11:11-25). The message of the Kingdom given through the OT prophets (Acts 3:18-26) was replaced by the message of "the grace of God, revealed in its fullness through Paul (Acts 13:38-43). Israel as a nation was set aside and will not be prominent in God's program on earth again until after the Church had been raptured; (Read carefully Acts 15:13-18). To mix kingdom truth and Church truth is to confuse the Word of God and hinder the work of God.

The church's commission today is Mt. 28:19-20. We are to make disciples, which means evangelism; we are to 'baptize, which implies fellowship in a local assembly; we are to teach the Word. It is the Word of God that the Spirit used 'to convict the lost. Let us be busy sowing the seed of the Word, watering it with our prayers and tears (Ps , 126:5-6, Acts 20:19), and patiently waiting for the harvest.