

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon February 5, 2023

Acts 10: 1 – 48 “Epiphany: Pentecost for the Gentiles” – Part 3: Peter & Cornelius Meet v 24-33

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?” 30 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, 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 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.’ 33 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.”

I. Introduction

- a. Acts 10: “Epiphany: Pentecost for the Gentiles”
 - i. Part 1: The Vision of Cornelius v1-8 – Jan 22
 - ii. Part 2: Peter’s Vision v9-23 – Last week
 - iii. Part 3: Peter and Cornelius meet v24-33 - today
 - iv. Part 4: Peter’s Sermon v34-43
 - v. Part 5: The Conversion of the First Gentiles v44-48
- b. “This section is one of the most important units in Acts. Here the gospel goes out directly to a Gentile and his household for the first time. Everything is coordinated by God, as was the case with Saul’s conversion. The Spirit’s coming upon the group independently of any action by Peter also confirms God’s direction in what takes place, a point Peter makes very clearly when the controversial inclusion of the Gentiles is discussed in 11:15–18. In a sense this scene is the book’s turning point, as from here the gospel will fan out in all directions to people across a vast array of geographical regions, something Paul’s three missionary journeys will underscore.”¹
- c. The thrice repeated key principle from last week: “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This applies to the OT dietary code, and to the OT separation code that kept Jews from engaging in close fellowship with Gentiles. In the New Covenant age, we are free to eat together with the lost, receiving meats they put before us with a clean conscience, because in Christ, we are not to call common that which He has cleansed. The spread of the Gospel brings us into a new age of fellowship with the lost, observing God’s moral law, and becoming all things to all men. So, Peter’s conscience rests, and he goes to meet with the God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 380.

- d. The OT Jew-Gentile separation code broken down by Christ:
 - i. Eph 2:14-17 “14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”
- e. The OT dietary laws broken down by Christ:
 - i. Mark 7 “17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. 18 So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” 20 And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”
- f. Part 3: Peter and Cornelius meet v24-33 – today
 - i. Setting: v24
 - ii. Cornelius & Peter first meet v25,26
 - iii. Peter’s first words to the group v27-29
 - iv. Cornelius shares his vision and their readiness to hear God’s Word v30-33
 - v. Questions to know, love and obey God
- g. How eager are you to read, study, hear, memorize and know God’s Word? How does your eagerness or lack of eagerness show itself? Are you eager and active to help your family and friends hear God’s Word? As from God? All of His Word?
- h. In addition, does your big heart for the Lord sometimes lead you to make big mistakes as you pursue knowing Him? Does your fire for the Lord burn wild and miss the mark sometimes?
- i. Can you have a condescending attitude toward your neighbors who are outside of Christ, especially those whose cultural background is very different than your own?
- j. Would you describe your home as welcoming and hospitable? Is hospitality a priority for your family? How do you respond to invitations for in-home fellowship, especially from those whose background is different than yours?
- k. Are scheduled prayer and fasting a part of your life? Do you believe sincere hunger to know God shows up in regular prayer and fasting? Is such prayer and fasting ever done in vain?
- l. Do you believe the Lord has teachers available to help you grow up in Him? Are you prepared to have your life interrupted to be a witness for Christ?

II. Setting: v24

- a. 24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.
- b. So, after their journey from Joppa, they all arrive at Caesarea at Cornelius' home.
 - i. "It seems, it was above a day's journey, nearly two, from Joppa to Cesarea; for it was *the day after* they set out that *they entered into Cesarea* (v. 24), and the afternoon of that day, v. 30. It is probable that they travelled on foot; the apostles generally did so."²
- c. Peter finds Cornelius and his household prepared for him, and also Cornelius has gathered together his relatives and his trusted friends.
 - i. Cornelius' eagerness to hear the Word is on display from the very beginning. There's no sign of sluggishness.
 - ii. "The term translated as "relatives" (συγγενεῖς) denotes family members, in this case presumably Cornelius's wife and children; the term "close friends" (ἀναγκαῖοι φίλοι) refers to the most intimate friends, perhaps other soldiers from his unit who were God-fearers (cf. v. 7). Cornelius was evidently convinced that the divine message that he hoped to receive from Peter was relevant not only for himself but for other people as well. Luke's narrative gives the impression that Cornelius and his relatives and close friends were gathered in Cornelius's house, ready to hear Peter speak as soon as he arrives. Cornelius's encounter with God's angel has made him eager to encounter God's messenger and hear from him God's words."³
- d. Eagerness: an inward desire revealing itself with prompt diligence and exertion toward that which is desired. Note Cornelius' eagerness toward God and His Word.

III. Cornelius & Peter first meet v25,26

- a. 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."
- b. Cornelius is so excited and eager to hear the Word that he himself meets Peter as he arrives, and then he falls down and worships Peter, a big error in understanding, yet an expression of Cornelius sincere zeal to know the Lord.
 - i. "His worshipping a man was indeed culpable; but, considering his present ignorance, it was excusable, nay, and it was an evidence of something in him that was very commendable-and that was a great veneration for divine and heavenly things."⁴

² Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2108.

³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 10:23–24.

⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2108.

- c. Peter's understanding and kindness are demonstrated in his simple correction as he lifts Cornelius up as a fellow man, demonstrating Peter looks to the Lord as the only God, and that Peter embraced the Lord's message breaking down the hostility between Jew and Gentile. Note, sometimes big errors flow from big hearts, and our correction needs to be as fellow human beings, gentle and tender, wise enough to see the good intentions behind the error, like Peter.
 - i. "Peter's modest and indeed just and pious refusal of this honor that was done him (v. 26): *He took him up* into his arms, with his own hands (though time was when he little thought he should ever either receive so much respect from or show so much affection to an uncircumcised Gentile), *saying, "Stand up, I myself also am a man,* and therefore not to be worshipped thus." The good angels of the churches, like the good angels of heaven, cannot bear to have the least of that honor shown to them which is due to God only. *See thou do it not,* saith the angel to John (Rev. 19:10; 22:9), and in like manner the apostle to Cornelius. How careful was Paul *that no man should think of him above what he saw in him!* 2 Co. 12:6. Christ's faithful servants could better bear to be vilified than to be deified. Peter did not entertain a surmise that his great respect for him, though excessive, might contribute to the success of his preaching, and therefore if he will be deceived let him be deceived; no, let him know that Peter is a man, that *the treasure is in earthen vessels,* that he may value the treasure for its own sake."⁵
 - ii. Note, this same type of sentiment exists today in the celebrity preacher model where the key leader is placed on a pedestal and adored as some higher category of human being. Legitimate respect, in the hands of the undiscerning, can become starry-eyed idolatry. Leaders must be on guard against this and reject it like Peter did. We are all mere mortals, fallen, fallen, fallen, equally in need of Christ's death, equally beloved before the Father in Christ, the Beloved.

IV. Peter's first words to the group v27-29

- a. 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?"
- b. Peter's first message to the group is to emphasize God's message: "What God has cleansed you must not call common." Peter has been brought into the beautiful awareness of the global neighborhood of mankind, and he wants to quickly solve any discomfort arising from the Jew-Gentile distinction that would have been on the forefront of their minds.

⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2108.

- i. Note, strong cultural distinctions can often cause Christians to shrink back from loving our neighbors with our presence, kindness, and Gospel truth.
 - ii. “As Peter addresses Cornelius’s relatives and friends, he begins by making a deliberate, interpretive move from the vision that had puzzled him until now (vv. 11, 19) to the events in which God involves him by sending him to Gentiles, an interpretive move facilitated by the directive of the Spirit to accompany the three envoys of a Roman officer without questioning. Peter sees that the issue at stake is not just food but people. Peter voices the concerns that will be raised later by the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (11:3): since a Jew cannot associate with Gentiles (v. 28a–e), it is highly unusual that he has come to Cornelius’s house.”⁶
- c. About the Jew-Gentile separation
 - i. “The term translated as “not allowed” (ἀθέμιτος) refers to behavior which is forbidden. Most English versions translate with “unlawful;” a better rendering is “against our laws” (NLT) because it leaves the question open which specific laws Peter was afraid to violate; helpful is GNB, “a Jew is not allowed by his religion.” The Mosaic law does not forbid Israelites to eat with Gentiles. Jews are only forbidden to eat impure food, which they can [achieve] by eating only the vegetables that are part of the Gentiles’ diet. Nor does later Jewish tradition uniformly and unanimously stipulate a prohibition concerning Jews visiting Gentiles. But contact with Gentiles was always a potential source of moral defilement for Jews.”⁷
 - d. After smoothing out the Jew-Gentile question by referencing God’s message to “not call any man common or unclean”, Peter moves into the situation with a simple question, asking for what reason Cornelius sent for him.
- V. Cornelius shares his vision and their readiness to hear God’s Word v30-33
 - a. 30 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, 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 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.’ 33 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.”
 - b. By way of welcoming and answering Peter’s question, Cornelius recounts key details of his angelic vision and its message from God, emphasizing the timing

⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 10:27–29.

⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 10:27–29.

and that they all have the same God and that Cornelius, his household and his friends and family desire to learn from Peter about the One True God.

- i. “Cornelius reviews the sequence of events beginning four days ago, counting inclusively; it was three days ago by our counting of elapsed time. The chronology is this (our way of counting is in parentheses): day 1 (start), he sees the angel; day 2 (day 1), the emissaries arrive in Joppa; day 3 (day 2), they set out for Caesarea; day 4 (day 3), they arrive. God is directing the events all along the way, beginning with the angel who appears to Cornelius during prayer at the ninth hour (v. 3; see comments on 3:1). Cornelius basically repeats the account for the third time in the passage with some slight variation, a repetition that underscores the divine direction behind what is taking place.”⁸
- c. Cornelius’ experience emphasizes the importance of scheduled prayer and fasting as expressions of sincere love for God as we seek His Face.
 - i. Prayer without ceasing:
 1. “Observe, *At the ninth hour of the day*, three of the clock in the afternoon, most people were travelling or trading, working in the fields, visiting their friends, taking their pleasure, or taking a nap after dinner; yet then Cornelius was at his devotions, which shows how much he made religion his business; and then it was that he had this message from heaven. Those that would hear comfortably from God must be much in speaking to him.”⁹
 - ii. Fasting regularly before the Lord: Mt 6:16-18
 1. “Moreover, **when you fast**, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.
- d. Cornelius’ experience exemplifies the Lord’s attentiveness to sincere and humble prayers toward Him, and the Lord’s responsiveness to teach us when we reach out for His Word, for wisdom.
 - i. James 4:8 “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”
 - ii. Revelation 8:1-5 “1 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 394.

⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2109.

upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake."

- e. This event shows us how the Lord uses His people to serve and teach the Word to those who are eagerly, sincerely seeking the Lord. This is true for seekers who are yet to be born again and for those believers seeking to grow in Christ.
- f. Again, we see Cornelius' eagerness for the Word on display: "we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."
 - i. "To the end Peter may be more ready and willing to teach, Cornelius affirmeth that himself and the rest will be apt to be taught, and ready to obey God; for this serveth not a little to move the teacher to take pains with the hearers, when as he hopeth assuredly that they shall profit thereby."¹⁰
- g. "before God"
 - i. "...assuredly, so often as the Word of God is set before us, we must thus think with ourselves, that we have not to deal with a mortal man, but that God is present, and doth call us. For, from this respect of God ariseth the majesty of God's word, and reverence in hearing the same."¹¹
- h. "to hear all things"
 - i. "This only is true faith when we embrace not the one half of the Word of God alone, but addict [subject] ourselves wholly unto it; and yet, notwithstanding, there be few examples in the world of this full and universal faith, for the more part doth not submit themselves to the doctrine of God, as if they had made a covenant with God, save only so far forth as it pleaseth them. If any thing displease them they either carelessly contemn or mislike the same. But Cornelius doth wisely distinguish between God and man, for he maketh God the author of the doctrine, and leaveth nothing for man besides the ministry and embassage."¹²

VI. Questions to know, love and obey God

- a. How eager are you to read, study, hear, memorize and know God's Word? How does your eagerness or lack of eagerness show itself? Are you eager and active to help your family and friends hear God's Word? As from God? All of His Word?

¹⁰ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 435.

¹¹ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 435.

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