

Part 29 – Cornelius and Peter

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, April 06, 2016

† Acts 10:1-20

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,
2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.
3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.
4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.
5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:
6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.
7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;
8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.
9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:
10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:
12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.
14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.
15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.
16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.
17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,
18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.
19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.
20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

We left off last Wednesday with the continuing ministry of Peter. We read where he healed a man of the palsy and raised a woman named Tabitha/Dorcas from the dead. We last saw that he was in Joppa staying with a man named Simon a Tanner and that is where we pick up from tonight. So, we have a lot to cover and I hope we can get through all 20 of these verses. If I feel we do not cover it good enough we will have to come back to it next Wednesday.

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

Now the narrative moves from Joppa to Caesarea. Caesarea is located roughly 40-miles from Joppa, that's where Peter is right now, in Joppa, 40-miles away. Then we are introduced to a new name, Cornelius.

First of all Cornelius is a Latin name. He is a Roman centurion which means he was a captain in the Roman army and had the command over 100 men. His particular regiment is made up from men from Italy, which is why they are called the "Italian band." And you thought it was a bunch of musicians from Italy didn't you?

Since Cornelius is a Roman that means he is considered to be a Gentile. The Jews would consider him a foreigner. Some may even refer to him as a dog. As far as the Jews were concerned, they were to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. Peter himself says this if you look down in verse 28 of this chapter where he says: **Acts 10:28** And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation;

This is a very important thing to realize. This is the Lord opening up the plan of Salvation to all the world. Just as he told his disciples to do in the first Chapter of Acts: **Acts 1:8** But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

And that is exactly how God's plan unfolded. First, with the salvation of the Jews on the Day of Pentecost in Judea when Peter preached and the Holy Ghost fell upon them and over 3,000 were saved. Then when Stephen visited Samaria and salvation came to those people. And now to the uttermost part of the earth, this Gentile Roman Centurion named Cornelius. And, as I said last week, the Lord has to do some molding on Bro. Peter to get him to come around to the right way of thinking.

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

So, obviously this Gentile is very different from most. Instead of worshiping the Roman gods like most of his fellow countrymen, he worships the true God of Heaven. Sometime in his life he has had his eyes opened to the truth about false idol worship. Obviously he has yet to hear about Jesus Christ yet but that is soon going to change.

Notice that "all his house" also fears God. This is a good man that instructs his family on the right way of worship and living a Godly life. We also see that he believed in giving and helping others and he was a man of prayer. It says he "prayed to God alway." This is one unique individual in that day and time.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

The Lord is speaking to Cornelius through a vision. God uses an angel to speak to him. Notice that it is the ninth hour of the day. This would be 3:00 pm in our time. This was also the time of the Jews public prayer. So while Cornelius is being spoken to in a vision, Peter over in Joppa is praying in the ninth hour.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

I want to pause right here for a minute and address something. Throughout my years in the ministry I have heard several different preachers make the following statement: "You know, God doesn't hear the prayers of a lost person except for the prayers of asking the Lord to save him."

I too used to subscribe to that thought, however, over the years, especially the past 10-years, I have devoted countless hours to the study of God's Word. I'm not saying I know everything there is to know, far from it, but I am of the conviction that we need to place everything on what God's Word actually says and we need to rightly divide the Word of Truth to understand it.

Where the basic thought comes from that God doesn't hear a sinners prayer is from [John 9:31: Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth](#). Now, if we take that one verse of Scripture and base all of our theology and doctrine upon this one verse then yes, it appears that God does not hear sinners. The only problem with that is you have to take into account the Scripture before this. If you read the previous verses you will find this was the instance when Jesus healed a blind man and after that the Pharisees accused him of not being of God because he healed on the Sabbath and then the Jews accused the blind man of lying and his parents had to vouch for him, and then the Jews told the blind man that Jesus was a sinner. That's when the blind man jumped in and said "[whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, wheeas I was blind, now I see](#)."

Then after some more arguing back and forth the blind man made the statement that we read in [John 9:31: Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth](#).

So we have to take this statement in its context. The blind man was specifically speaking of Jesus having the power to heal and to be heard by God and that there was no way this miracle would have happened if Jesus was a sinner because God doesn't work like that.

Getting back to Cornelius... Cornelius was a believer in God. He was one that prayed to God always the Bible says. However, Cornelius has not trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior yet. But, God is giving him the information he needs to be able to come to the knowledge of Christ. God does this because Cornelius was seeking God. So the Angel of the Lord says this to him: [Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God](#). So, yes, God heard his prayers and noticed his good heart to give alms and they were a memorial before God. A **memorial** means something in remembrance of. God remembered the faithfulness and prayers of Cornelius and so he is going to guide him toward the light of Christ.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Now the Angel of the Lord directs Cornelius what to do. He tells him to send some of his men to Joppa and get Peter. He even tells him where Peter is staying; "[with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side](#)."

Now I want to say something about this Simon the Tanner. I don't want you to think that Simon is a guy with a really good sun tan. He's not laying out there by the pool in Joppa soaking up the sun getting a nice tan.

A Tanner is a profession. You've heard the expression, "I'm gonna tan your hide." Well, that's what a tanner does, he tans the hides of animals to be used for making leather which was used for sandals and girdles and other such things. You may recall that John the Baptist wore a girdle made of leather: [Matthew 3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey](#).

The thing about being a Tanner was that the Jews wanted nothing to do with them. They considered what they did to be an unclean profession with the slaughter of animals and everything involved with it. So these Tanners were not normally people that the Jews or the disciples would be hanging out with. But we find that Peter goes to stay at this particular Tanner's house which the Bible says was "[by the sea side](#)." The reason it was by the seaside was because of the salt that was needed to tan hides so Tanners would live near the sea.

Peter is slowly being molded into the Lord's way of thinking when it comes to getting out of the Jewish traditions and laws. The Peter of the Gospels would never have considered staying in a Tanner's home.

7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius obeys the Angel of the Lord and calls for some of his trusted men to go and find Peter in Joppa.

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

The men make it to Joppa the next day and the Bible says that Peter was up on the housetop praying about the sixth hour. We have talked about it several times, but it was common for the Jews to have places on the tops of their houses where they would go to pray and meditate and have family devotions. Their house tops were flat and they would build walls around the top where they would be in private. That's where Peter is.

"[about the sixth hour](#)." The sixth hour is 12:00 noon our time. Most devout Jews prayed 3-times a day; 9:00 AM which is the 3rd hour, 12:00 Noon which is the 6th hour, and 3:00 PM which is the 9th hour. The Psalmist, David, said this: [Psalms 55:17 Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice](#).

And of course we know that Daniel prayed 3-times a day: [Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime](#).

This tradition of praying 3-times a day carried on over into the early New Testament Church. Of course we, as Christians, are not commanded to pray at 3 specific times of day, but instead we are told to "[Pray without ceasing](#)." (1 Thess. 5:17).

10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

The Bible says that Peter “fell into a trance.” Usually when we hear the word trance we think of someone under a spell of some kind like a hypnotist has put someone in a trance. But the word “trance” comes from the Greek word “ekstasis” which is where we get our English word “ecstasy” from. It means “a displacement of the mind.” The word “trance” is used 3-times in our King James Bible, twice in this occurrence with Peter, and 1-time used by Paul after he was in the Temple and the Jews stirred up the people against him and he was defending himself he said: **Acts 22:17-18:** And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; 18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

Have you ever been sitting somewhere looking off into space and start thinking about something and suddenly your mind is a million miles away? It's like you are in a world of your own and everything around you just kind of fades into the background? I've done that several times but I don't believe I've ever received a heavenly message or vision during those trances that I was in. But Peter being up on the rooftop praying and in hunger is so concentrated on his prayers and getting a connection with the Lord that he his mind has fallen into another dimension, a Heavenly induced dimension.

I noticed something about the men in the Bible that God gives visions to... they are men that are devoted to the Lord and they are about the Father's business. Peter was praying, Paul was in the Temple to pray and worship, Zacharias was in the Temple praying at the Altar of Incense when the Lord came to him in a vision and told him that he was going to have a son, John the Baptist. Friends, if we want to receive visions from the Lord we need to be about the Father's business.

11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

What a vivid vision! Peter sees what appears to be a large sheet being let down from heaven and it is filled with all sorts of animals, both clean and unclean. So this is a mixture of both the approved animals of their Jewish laws and unapproved. But the Lord tells Peter to “kill and eat.” This is going to propose a problem for Peter because he is used to his Jewish traditions and laws. Turn with me to the Book of Leviticus chapter 11 and let's look at some of these clean and unclean animals:

READ SECTIONS FROM CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS 11:1-47

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Obviously Peter is reluctant to eat of these animals. He said he has “never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” You can only imagine how hard this would have to be for a man like Peter to overcome. Notice that the Lord shows the vision

to Peter 3-times. Do you think that was a coincidence? Remember – **Mark 14:30** And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

One day when I get time I'm going to do a study on the significance of the number 3 in the life of Peter. I think that would be a very interesting study.

17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

So, while Peter is up on the rooftop having visions of meat coming from the sky, doubting and wondering what in the world all of this means, the men the Cornelius sent arrive and are asking for him.

19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

The Lord tells Peter to get down and go with the men and to stop doubting the vision. He tells him that He has sent them to him. This isn't the first time that Peter doubted. If you remember in the Gospels when the disciples were in the boat and they looked out and Jesus was walking on the water and they thought he was some kind of ghost and Jesus assured them that it was him but Peter wanted proof? Listen to what happened:

Matthew 14:28-31

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

I know I have said this several times in the past but I am so thankful that the Bible tells us about Peter and all of his mistakes and problems and doubting. It sure makes me feel a little better about myself knowing that God can still use an imperfect man to do His will. If he can use Peter then he certainly can use me and you.

That wraps things up for tonight's study. Lord willing we will finish out this chapter next Wednesday.