

Cornelius-the seeker who Found Jesus Acts 10 v 30-48.

We continue our studies of the supernatural in the Bible. Angels play a prominent part, and it appears that there are prolonged periods where there were no angel visitations and other occasions when angels appear to be everywhere. Lots of supernatural things go on throughout the book of Acts, which was written by Luke to give an overview of the growth of the Church in its first few years.

We know a lot about the character of Peter from the stories about him in the Gospel. He was a natural leader, could be impulsive and yet was a good influence on the others. He was also a strong Jew, steeped in the traditions and religious practice of a first century follower of Yahweh. In chapter ten, we are told of his meeting with Cornelius, the Roman centurion, who it is commonly thought was the first Gentile convert. Please remind yourself that this was the very early days of Church when the vast majority of believers were Jews who would have sought to keep the Jewish Law whilst embracing new-found freedom in Jesus Christ. They were tempted to keep this new wonder to themselves, using the knowledge that they were God's chosen people as an excuse or reason.

I have had the privilege in visiting people and often in those visits people tell me their story of their faith journey. This may well be quite a bit of their discipleship, their walk behind Jesus, but it is also about how they came to faith-and each one is different. It's fantastic how God works in a customised, individual way. But the Gospel message remains essentially the same. We see in this passage the first non-Jewish converts and the call to preach to the Gentiles as well as Jews, but Peter's message is very similar to his first sermon in Acts 2, and the results are similar!

Peter based his sermon around THREE Points- Jesus' life and ministry, His death, and His resurrection. We are reading of a period here probably a few years after Jesus' death. These facts

were checkable- if Peter's listeners had serious issues with historicity of it then their hearts and ears would have remained closed. BUT, you can read here that they LISTENED. They had a desire to hear what Peter had to say.

Let's look first at the seeker, Cornelius.

We read that he was a good man and he prayed regularly to God. But still he felt that he hadn't got to that place with God that he needed to be at. He was the really good sort of person who recognises that he isn't good enough! He was well respected by the Jews, but he was trying to find God through virtuous deeds and a life well led.

However, he knew that something was missing, there was a hunger in him. These beautiful words written some three centuries later by St Augustine may have encapsulated Cornelius' feeling: *"Late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient, ever new. Late have I loved you. You have called to me, and have called out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light and have put my blindness to flight! You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace"*. When Peter revealed to him in his sermon that good works could never be enough to achieve salvation, it was only through faith that he would receive what he longed for, his heart was opened and he received what God wanted to give him.

He was a good man and so he received from God the means to be saved. God showed him what he needed to do- to call for Simon Peter, and God prepared Peter for that call. Cornelius did what he could with the limited knowledge he had, but God saw the goodness of his heart and showed him the way. This is an encouragement for us- we look around and see some genuinely good people, and we can accept that God is working directly with them- but he may call upon us to be Peter in that situation. But have no fear if you are a modern-day Cornelius or Peter because God will be present at the meeting! Those gathered to hear Peter Listened, their hearts were

OPENED, and they RESPONDED to the message. They recognised it as the message of hope and life because God the Holy Spirit was moving and His presence was demonstrated by the listeners receiving the gift of tongues and praising God. All these occurrences were as a result of God's working.

Talk about believers.

Talk about one of the issues of being Cornish. Peter had an element of the parochial about him. He had not understood that God's message was for the entire world. Even when Jesus had placed on the disciples the burden of the Great Commission, they had not changed their view. We all have prejudices which prevent us from reaching out. The world is a rapidly changing place and if we as Christians in Wrington believe that only a certain type of conventional person will appear in church then we have shocks aplenty to come. I was moved to read the opening verses of Ezekiel's vision of dry bones at the start of our Elders meeting this week and that's because I think there is a mighty work of God taking place in this country the like of which I've not seen for forty years or so. We must be ready, those who have started attending churches are seriously hungry, they study the Bible, they seek answers to their questions.

We are disciples of Jesus! Yes, no one has all the answers, seeking God will always have an element of mystery, but commit time to studying the Bible. Read it through, study the Gospels. Think about the Jesus you worship! But...note that Peter was in the right situation to accept God's vision-he was praying, JUST AS Daniel and others were doing when they heard from God. Peter faced a situation that was life-altering. It appears that Peter at first felt that this was a test to see if he could resist these pleasures, which he passed with ease. However, God is showing him that he is to see things differently and this doesn't mean just his dietary habits! The meaning of the vision became quickly apparent to Peter when three visitors arrive and told him why they had come. The Spirit within him

prepares him for what is to come-something that many Christians today testify to. I have found this many times in my life. Peter takes three men with him, so that when they arrive at Cornelius' home, there are seven including Peter to testify to what happens-this number was the minimum necessary in a Jewish court of law to be effective witnesses to an event. The case had been proved beyond doubt! Peter had to do so little. However, it is important to note that he practised hospitality when the messengers from Cornelius arrived. We read in v23 of chapter 10 that the messengers waited at the gate, sensitive to Jewish intolerance of Gentiles, yet Peter invites them to stay the night before the long journey back.

1. What does this say to us today? Are there archaic practises that we regard as vital that God sees as no longer important? We have limited resources, agreed, but it is so much more important that we use those resources-of money, time, energies-wisely. The circumcised believers may have been slightly out of touch, but by the end of Peter's testimony, they recognised the need for change. Are we as a fellowship; are you as an individual fighting against the call to change, to move forward?

2. Gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts when we first accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We know Jesus personally through His Spirit within us. However, there may be areas of our lives, personality, or attitude where we have not allowed the Spirit to go. Do we behave as Spirit-filled Christians in every aspect of our lives, recognising that in all we do and think that Christ's Lordship in our lives is unchallenged? Are you living wholly for Him or are you a 'put on a good face because it's a Sunday' person? The Holy Spirit waits to fill you in a way that you have never experienced before. What is preventing your welcome to Him?

3. Power of the Gospel. This man was good, genuinely good, but that wasn't enough to save him, he too needed to receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour. If you think that your behaviour however good will get you eternal life, think again! What God do you worship? Are

you founding your hope on the Jesus of the *Gospels* or some whimsical figure out of your imagination? The power of the Gospel, the same now as then.