

## *The Great Stories of the Early Church*

### *32 - Peter's Ministry 06*

#### *Cornelius05*

#### *Peter's Vision*

*Acts 10:17-48*

Acts 10:17-11:1

- 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 inquiry 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.
- 21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?
- 22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.
- 23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.
- 24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.
- 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.
- 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.
- 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.
- 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; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.
- 29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?
- 30 And 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, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.
- 32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.
- 33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.
- 34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of

persons:

- 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.  
36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ:  
(he is Lord of all:)  
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from  
Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;  
38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went  
about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.  
39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in  
Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:  
40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;  
41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat  
and drink with him after he rose from the dead.  
42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was  
ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.  
43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him  
shall receive remission of sins.  
44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.  
45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with  
Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.  
46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,  
47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the  
Holy Ghost as well as we?  
48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him  
to tarry certain days. KJV

### **Introduction:**

To be honest, this event looks like nothing that we ever experience as to the conversion of a soul. Nowhere in our world or within our frame of reference does or has an angel appeared to a seeking soul while at the same time a man of God is given a vision related to the appearance of the angel. And, we have never seen repenting souls so fallen upon by the power of the Holy Spirit that they spoke praises to God in languages they did not previously know. This is simply off the charts a bizarre and strange event.

But it really did happen. It is a part of church history and the record is provided by a Holy Spirit inspired writer who was received and believed by the early church as well as Christianity in general since that time.

### **I. History has recorded extraordinary conversions and events associated with the powerful moving of the Holy Spirit to bring sinners to Christ.**

The quietness of the Holy Spirit over the last century is indeed out of the ordinary and out of character for Him especially as we contrast that silence with the extraordinary things that He did in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the great problems we have is that Christians have not been made aware of their history so they have absorbed ‘status quo’ as the norm for Christianity when

it is anything but. The second problem is that those Christians who do know and have learned of the history of the working of the Holy Spirit have been so unimpressed that they have not diligently sought His working and those who have sought it have done so, for the most part, wrongly and from a false doctrinal understanding. It seems that in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity divided into two groups both of which were in error on the topic. There were those who were experiencing false manifestations and calling them the work of God and those who seemed to completely deny that God worked in power at all. What we have today is the consequence of those two teachings, errors on both sides.

We should, I believe, look at the story of Cornelius and pray, “Lord, fall on us in power as you have done on Your People in the past.” We should not merely relegate it to the list of strange stories that once occurred with no meaning to us.

## **II. Secondly, there are elements of the behavior of both Peter and Cornelius which should profoundly instruct us.**

- 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.  
21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?  
22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.  
23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

They both immediately and without question obeyed what was commanded them. Peter was so impressed by this revelation from God that he actually brought these Gentile men into Simon the tanners’ house and lodged them there, something that would not have ordinarily been done at all prior to this day. The thought that a communication from God had come to him was so authoritative that he immediately laid aside prejudices that he had carried for a lifetime.

For 20 centuries the Christians of this world lived under a solemn understanding that whatever was revealed clearly to them by God from either His Word or by His Spirit directly was to be obeyed implicitly and without question. The Word of God was not doubted as an absolute authority when it spoke on any matter.

But today that is no longer the case for many. The absolute commands of God are being questioned profoundly by people who have claimed a belief in the authority of His Word. “Come out from among them and be separate saith the Lord,” has been replaced with “be like them as much as possible and see if we can win them to Christ.” “Be ye holy as I am holy,” has disappeared as the governing principle of the lives of people claiming to be Christian. One wonders when TV and the internet will finally, if ever, cross the line to the point that ‘believers’ will cast them out as corrupt and vile.

- 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.
- 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

On the one hand, Cornelius erred when he fell down on the ground and worshiped Peter while Peter was absolutely correct in his response.

But here is the thing, Cornelius had such profound respect and devotion toward God that it seemed to him any person sent to him by God should be accorded the utmost honor and this was the way that Romans showed honor to one of high esteem. What has happened in our day is that neither the Lord nor His messengers are generally accorded honor at all, even by those who claim to be servants and worshipers of the Living God, so let us not be too hasty to criticize Cornelius.

As we have said previously in other messages, the sense of the sacred has disappeared not only from our world but from that which calls itself ‘Christianity’ for the most part. Without a sense of the sacred there is no basis for real worship and without worship there is no relationship with God except in one’s imagination.

We should be like Cornelius to the degree that if we are going to err in the subject of worship let it be that we have worshiped too much and not too little.

The so-called ‘liberty in Christ’ that many speak of and use as their excuse to be casual and even flippant in whatever they do that they call ‘worship,’ that liberty, I say, was never envisioned as an excuse to rob God of the awe and reverence that He, His worship, and His Word are to receive.

### **III. Finally, we should notice carefully the message of Peter which was so blessed by the Holy Spirit to Cornelius and his household.**

- 34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
- 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.
- 36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
- 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
- 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.
- 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:
- 40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;
- 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
- 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

First of all, we wonder if this was the totality of the message or merely a synopsis of it by Luke as he received it from those who witnessed the event. In either case, the beginning and the ending of it were in the same place, “whosoever believeth in Him shall receive the remission of sins.”

Of course Peter was also making the point that the “whosoever” was to include the Gentiles, a position that was just then becoming clear to Peter and not yet clear to the rest of the believing Jews.

In all the world, every person who truly believes receives remission of sins. Peter made it clear at the outset of the message that “believing” produced a certain kind of consistent behavior: a person “feared God” and “worked righteousness.”

Please understand that what Peter was saying was not what the majority of preachers say today. They say the words that “one must believe” and that “all who believe are forgiven of their sins” but the “faith” they speak of is not a thing which necessarily and consistently changes a person into a “devout” believer who stands in awe and submission to the Will of God and habitually lives a holy and godly life. No, the “faith” of modern preachers is not considered powerful enough to do any such thing nor do they consider a holy life as even necessary.

In the case of Cornelius, faith had already led him to pray consistently and give gifts to poor people (alms), to fast, to be godly (devout) and to do what God told him to do. Across the centuries this has been the evidence that one was truly converted. When James said, “I will show thee my faith by my works,” this is what he had in mind.

In our day, however, for the sake of money, preachers have determined to count as many lost folks to be Christians as possible and give them cover when their lives do not match up to the scriptural definition of “faith.”

They have developed a two stage salvation in which a person can be saved without a change of life and later decide, if he wants, to “make Jesus Lord” and live a consecrated life. But, no worries, both the serious believer and the casual one are both assured of heaven in the afterlife. The New Testament, however, knows of only one kind of true believer, the one who lives a godly life after having professed faith.

Then, I want you to notice the focus of Peter’s message was to encourage Cornelius that the message of the OT prophets was for him.

Since Cornelius was “devout” that meant that he was humble and in his humility, apparently, there was serious doubt that one such as himself could be saved. We do not know what the Centurion’s life had been like before he became acquainted with the Jewish scriptures but we can safely assume that it had been pretty rough. Commanding a squad of 100 pagan soldiers could not have been an easy thing. First of all, they were rough, violent, and wicked men. Secondly,

the tasks they were given had to do with maintaining order over a people who despised the very ground they walked on. There were patriots among the Jews who sought to find opportunities to kill representatives of Rome. And, Cornelius himself had been an unconverted pagan. It is doubtful if we can imagine what his life was before faith.

But now faith has come but the question is, can a Roman Centurion be forgiven of his sins and become a genuine child of God? Without fully understanding it he had become one and Peter has come to assure him that what he thought he read in the prophets was indeed true, the man of faith is received by God. To grant full assurance, the Holy Spirit fell on him and the believers of his household and Peter baptized them as an outward show of their inward cleansing. This was exactly the message that Cornelius needed to hear.

Finally, I want you to see the ultimate benefit of the gospel, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Though we live in a day when sin is essentially a joke, for the man of faith it is and always has been a serious issue.

First of all, the man of faith is a man who faces the truth, about God, about God’s Law and about himself. Seeing his sin along side the Holiness of God causes him great concern. Can God, will God, ever be able to forgive him the things he has done to violate His Law? If so, how? And, even if He forgives others, will He forgive me?

Please realize that for the one who seeks God with integrity this is a real issue, not a small one.

Since the creation of man, the devil has been trying to make the issue small and call into question the real commitment of God to do what He has said concerning it.

Gen 3:1-5

- 1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
- 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
- 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
- 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
- 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. KJV

Today we find the same process going on but it is men who wish to be identified as conservative evangelicals who are promoting this soft and compromising approach to sin.

Man’s problem with God is and always has been sin.

God’s command is and always has been repentance from sin and faith in the Finished Work of

His Son.

That was the message which Cornelius heard and it should be still the message that we hear.

In every land he who fears God and works righteousness is accepted with God.

News Flash: no one else is.

What Cornelius learned through this odd set of events is the message that God has proclaimed from the beginning, for that early time when the children of Seth began to call upon the name of the Lord. It is the only message that has ever come from heaven concerning how one might be right with God. Those who have thought to change it will all have a nasty surprise waiting for them at the Judgment Seat.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.