

~ACTS~

Lesson 31- One Body in Christ: Salvation to the Gentiles (pt 1)

Today we begin looking at chapter 10 in our study through the book of Acts. And this chapter marks a major milestone in the formation of the Church. A milestone that in my opinion can be ranked even as high as the Day of Pentecost, because this is the chapter when the Gentiles are brought into the body of Christ.

Chapter 10 takes place around 41AD, about 9 years after the cross and it is such a pivotal point in Christianity because it marks a new beginning in the Church. Not only is this the beginning of the Gentiles being brought into the flock of God, but it also marks the beginning of the revelation that all those in Christ are free from the bondage of the Law. The revelation that Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone apart from the works of the Law. Which up until this point was not completely made clear to the Jews. So that's a major Truth that we are going to see unfold as we go through this chapter.

Up until this point, since the Day of Pentecost in 32AD, only Jews had been born again and received the Holy Spirit. And over the course of our study in Acts we have been slowly seeing the barriers fall away as God has been moving on His Church. First it was the acceptance of the Hellenistic Jews and proselytes into the body of Christ, Acts 2:10, 38; 6:5-6; then the Samaritans received the Gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, Acts 8:17; and for the past two years God has had Peter living with Simon the tanner which was a despicable trade to the Jews, Acts 9:43. But all this was to prepare Peter for the ultimate barrier to come crashing down as Salvation is given to the Gentiles apart from the works of the Law. This has been the plan of Salvation from before the foundation of the world. It was always God's plan for the nations to be brought into the flock of God, **John 10:16**. This is what God promised Abraham, **Gen 22:18**; Gal 3:8. Chapter 10 marks the beginning of this long-awaited promise coming to pass. Let's start with the first two verses, 1-2...

1-2) There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Caesarea was an extravagant city built by Herod the Great between 22-10bc and named after the emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. It was the capital of the Roman province of Judea. This is where the Roman governors lived, such as Pontius Pilate, Felix and Festus. And also in this city lived a Roman centurion named **Cornelius**. This was the capital of the Roman province in Judea so there was naturally a large Roman army in this city. Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian Regiment. Centurions were leaders of about 100 men and the Italian cohort was made up of soldiers from Italy who were considered the most loyal to Rome.

Cornelius was a devout soldier, but also, Luke says he was a **devout man and one who feared God with all his household**. Cornelius wasn't a Christian and he wasn't a Jew or even a Jewish proselyte, but he was a pious man who had abandoned the gods of Rome and was seeking after the One True God of the Jews. Remember what we said last week about one who fears God. The fear of God will lead you to Jesus and that is exactly what happens to Cornelius. Verse 2 says he **gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always**. This man has a heart for God, and he is seeking His face. Not through the means of Judaism, but desires a true fellowship with God. This phrase, **gave alms generously**, ποιῶν τε ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς is the same description and wording Luke used with Tabitha in Acts 9:36 saying she did charitable deeds, ἐλεημοσυνῶν ὧν ἐποίει. And Cornelius **prayed to God always**, δεόμενος τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ παντός. This literally means he was beseeching God through everything. Cornelius was a devout and pious man. One who had positioned his heart to seek God. We don't know exactly what he was praying, but we know he was earnestly seeking God. So God hears his prayers and sends an angel to come to speak to him...

3) About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”

The ninth hour was 3pm, Acts 3:1, and was one of the three times of prayer in the day, 3rd, 6th, and 9th. And an angel calls his name... Cornelius. So, he answers in verse 4...

4) And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Fear is usually the first response from people who see angels and why usually the first words out of an angel's mouth is “fear not.” Angels are awesome beings, so this is why Cornelius calls him lord (lower case “l”), and the angel begins giving him a message. **“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.”** This was the piety and devotion to God that Luke described in verse 2. Cornelius had a heart eager for God and when someone is seeking God, they will find Him, **Matt 7:7-8; 2 Chron 16:9**. Even though Cornelius wasn't saved, his heart was seeking God, and God responded...

5-6) Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”

Acts 11:14 says, *“who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.”* God is using willing hearts in this scenario. God came to Cornelius as a response to his prayers and it seems that his prayer is to be enlightened to the Truth of Salvation. And Peter is God's chosen vessel to preach the Gospel.

But here is an interesting question. Why Peter? Why didn't God have the angel preach the Gospel to Cornelius? Why go through all the trouble to send for Peter? The answer is because it gives God pleasure to fellowship with His children. Angels can do a lot, but we are His chosen vessels entrusted with the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel on His behalf, 2 Cor 5:18-21. God wants to work with His children in the plan of redemption. This gives Him joy. The other question is, why Peter? If you remember, Philip is just down the street, Acts 8:40. In fact, Luke even called him Philip the evangelist in Acts 21:8 and he is still living in Caesarea. Logistically this seems to make sense rather than having Peter travel 35 miles north. But God wanted the door opened to the Gentiles through the hand of Peter to prevent any kind of schism between the Jews and Gentiles. God is sending Peter to be His witness to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. He was there at Pentecost, Peter was there in Samaria, and now here with the Gentiles, **Acts 15:7-9**. Cornelius acts in obedience to the angel's direction, verses 7-8...

7-8) And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. ⁸ So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius chooses three men for the assignment, two of his personal household servants, which shows his status, and one soldier from among his cohort. Luke uses the same word “devout” to describe his soldier as well. No doubt this man also had a heart for God. Cornelius gathers his trusted men and **explained all these things to them**. This word “explained” ἐξηγήσομαι, has the sense of a military leader laying out the plan of the mission to his men. By this time it is probably about 5pm. Joppa is 35 miles away, normally a two day journey, however these three men arrive in Joppa the next day around noon.

9) The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.

If the men left Caesarea around 5pm the day before and they arrive around noon the next day, this means they would have had to travel most of the night. Notice God's perfect timing, the three men are nearing the city, it's about the sixth hour, 12 noon, and Peter goes up on the roof to pray. This was probably a common thing for Peter, but Luke mentions that he was hungry.

10) Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

We are not sure if Peter was hungry because he was fasting or just because it was lunch time and he smelled the food they were preparing below, but at that time **he fell into a trance**. God begins to show him a vision to prepare him for his soon to be visitors from Cornelius.

11) and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.

This is an amazing vision that has huge implications to the foundations of Christian doctrine. Here is a more literal translation to get the full effect of what Peter is seeing... And he beheld heaven having been opened, and coming down to him a vessel, something like a great sheet having been bound and being placed down upon the earth by four rulers, ἀρχαῖς. The NKJV translates this word as corners, but out of the 224 times this word is used in the Bible it is always translated as ruler, principalities, beginning, in first place. Only here and again in Acts 11:5 when Peter recounts this vision is this translated as “corners.” I personally think Peter is seeing this sheet being let down by four angelic-like rulers.

Something else of interest is this word “bound,” δεδεμένον, literally “having been bound,” is always used in the sense of being bound in chains or bound by some authoritative means, Acts 9:2; 12:6; 20:22. This sheet is not hemmed by a rope, but rather this sheet is bound in the sense that it must be loosed. Now hold that thought because we will be coming back to that later in chapter 10. Let’s see what is inside this sheet.

12-15) In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” ¹⁵ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

There are two revelations that God is showing Peter in this vision. The first thing we learn is that God is removing the dietary restrictions of the Law, which then foreshadow the deeper meaning that unfolds later in the story. Inside this sheet are a mixture of clean and unclean animals because Luke doesn’t make the distinction that they are all unclean, in fact he leaves it general and says, “πάντα τὰ τετράποδα τῆς γῆς” all the four-footed animals of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the reptiles, and the birds of the air.” So in this sheet there is a mixture of clean and unclean animals, and God tells Peter to kill and eat.

This was a shock to Peter and he cries out, “Not so Lord!” That’s good old Simon Peter shining through. Saying the first thing that comes to his mouth. First meeting with Jesus, Luke 5:5; when Jesus said He must die and be raised on the third day, Matt 16:22; when Jesus came to wash the disciples feet, John 13:8. But he says this because the Law strictly forbids Jews to eat certain unclean animals, and no doubt this sheet is full of unclean animals. Peter is not refusing God’s command; he is just shocked at the proposal. Lenski says the force of this reply is, “Goodness Lord, do not ask me to do that! I have never eaten anything unclean.” The forceful reaction of Peter tells us how much these traditions still had a hold over many in the early church.

Why would God tell Peter to break a Mosaic regulation regarding cleanness or uncleanness? The answer is in verse 15, **“What God has cleansed you must not call common.”** The Old Covenant dietary commands of the Law were annulled when Jesus cried out, Tetelestai, it is finished!” John 19:30. The whole purpose of these dietary commandments was to set the Jews apart from the rest of the world as His chosen people. And they were chosen for one purpose, not for salvation, but for service. They were elected for the service of ushering in the Messiah to the world. But now that Jesus has come, the purpose of the Law and the even the purpose of the Jews has been made complete, and God has declared all things clean. There are many New Testament verses on this, Col 2:16-17; Rom 14:3, 20; 1 Cor 8:8, 10:25-27; 1 Tim 4:3-5; Heb

9:9-10; 13:9, but I think the best is what Jesus said to the Pharisees, **Matt 15:11, 17-18**. It is always a matter of the heart.

This is all new revelation that God is giving Peter but notice God's patience in verse 16...

16) This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

God had to speak to Peter three times. My conjecture is God did this to get through Peter's stubborn mind. There was another time Jesus had to speak three times to Peter. That was on the shore of Galilee and when He asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" John 21:15-17. And before that, remember in Gethsemane when Jesus came back three times and found Peter, James, and John asleep, Matt 26:36-46. These three times just shows the patience and mercy of our Lord.

Now God gives Peter a chance to put this newfound revelation into action immediately. But we are going to notice that this vision wasn't just about food. It has a much deeper significance in the foundation of Christianity and God's plan of redemption.

17) Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

Notice he is wondering and pondering this vision, and in the meantime the men from Cornelius arrive at his house.

18-20) And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹ While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. ²⁰ Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

It is right here in this moment when the Spirit speaks to Peter and reveals the true significance of this vision. And the Spirit says, **go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.**

21-22) Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

Peter is obedient to the Holy Spirit and just like the Spirit said, God arranged this entire meeting. Notice the perfect timing of God. While Peter has this vision, three Gentiles come to talk to Peter. This is significant because before this vision, if three Gentiles were to come to his house, Peter would have nothing to do with these men, but now he knows these men came at the command of God. And God is summoning Peter to a Gentiles house to speak. A couple hours earlier, Peter would have kicked them out of his house, but now look at his response...

23) Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter invites them into the house to spend the night! So what changed his mind? God revealed the true meaning of the vision to him, that he is to no longer call any man unclean. Look at what he says to Cornelius in **verse 28**. This would have been unthinkable just a few hours before, but now everything has changed because God spoke to him. So the next day Peter heads back to Caesarea to see Cornelius

24) And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Notice the faith of Cornelius. He gathers all his friends and relatives and he is ready to hear from God.

25-26) 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.”

Cornelius is so excited he falls down and worships Peter, but Peter quickly corrects him. Notice Peter never takes the glory for himself. The glory always goes to Jesus Christ.

27) And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

Peter is surrounded by Gentiles in a Gentile home, and he is not timid about telling them how he feels about it. But he knows this is the will of God, so he speaks to everyone there...

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.”

Peter is so blunt. He says, “You know, I shouldn’t even be here now, but God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unclean.” Peter’s world just got changed upside down. All the traditions Peter had grown up with his whole life just got smashed down, as God is breaking down the barrier between Jew and Gentile in one clean sweep. Remember, this is nine years after the cross and Peter is just now getting this revelation. No more is there a separation between people or ethnicity or race. And as we will see next week in verse 34 Peter says, *I perceive that God shows no partiality*. Jesus came as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and He did this so that all might be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth, 1 Tim 2:4. This is God’s will. This has been the plan of redemption from before the foundation of the world, that all nations of the world would be blessed and have Everlasting Life through Jesus.

Next week we will continue chapter 10 and see how the Salvation of God was given to the Gentiles, and the outpouring of the falling upon Cornelius and his household.