



STORY

Cornelius and Peter - Acts 10

7/21/03

TEACHER PRAYER

Lord Jesus, since Your love is too deep, broad, high, and wide to be detoured by such trivialities as a person's age, sex, race, or position in life, help me to show your wider, broader, higher and deeper love for all peoples. Use me as You used Peter wherever and however I may serve You by serving others. Amen.

OUTER AIM

A veteran Roman army officer is brought to know Jesus as his Savior.

INNER AIM

God's love for souls is wide enough and deep enough to seek out an officer in the military and bring him to salvation in Jesus. (see Eph. 3:18-19)

BACKGROUND AND VOCABULARY

(*Rupprecht Bible History References Vol.2, pp. 520-530*)

It has always been God's desire to save all souls all over the world through all history. But if the Jerusalem Christians did not get moving into other cities and then to other countries, such souls would not learn of their salvation. So God had to give Peter and other disciples the thrill of discovering that gentile souls could also be saved through Jesus. Then each convert could become a witness to Jesus in his own life situations, and so on and on...until today when even you and I are among the gentiles blessed with the Savior.

v.1

- ▶ *Caesarea* - The Roman capital of Palestine, named after Caesar Augustus, located on the Mediterranean seacoast about fifty miles NW of Jerusalem.
- ▶ a *centurion* is a Roman army commander of about 100 troopers.
- ▶ the *Italian Regiment* - these men were native Italians, not conscripted from a province.

v.2

- ▶ Although Cornelius was sincere, pious, and dedicated to the LORD Jehovah, he was still lacking what Peter could bring him--the revelation that the Savior had already arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
- ▶ Both Cornelius and Peter, the main characters in this story, needed to learn the scope of God's love for one and all.

v. 3-6

- ▶ Cornelius' prayers were reminders to God of His promises that included Gentiles in the width-depth-height of His love for sinners.
- ▶ The angel made mention of these prayers to reassure Cornelius that he had been on the right track in his spiritual quest.
- ▶ God's next step was to enlist a Christian to come to his rescue.

v. 7-8

These details are rehearsed also in vv. 30-33.

- ▶ Since Joppa (modern Jaffa) lay about thirty miles south of Caesarea, and they had set out soon after 3:00 pm, they did not arrive at Joppa until early afternoon the next day.

v. 9-16

- ▶ Here the scene shifts to God's working to correct Peter's (natural and Jewish) misconception that God's mercies did not include Gentiles.
- ▶ That's why He put the disciples into training to enlarge their perception of His love.

- ▶ They were going to learn how far from Jerusalem God would go to save a soul--how deep down into the dregs of society He would reach to salvage a soul--how wide afield into the pagan wilderness His love would range.
- ▶ To get Peter's cooperation in reaching out to gentiles, God needed to make Peter's heart convinced about the scope of His redeeming love.
- ▶ That was the purpose of the vision of the critters in the sheet being lowered from heaven (God's throne) and the heavenly voice directing him to share in whatever God declared OK.

v.14

- ▶ Even in the trance, Peter's response came from an inbred "kosher" conscience.
- ▶ The term *common* indicates that it did not qualify for sacrificing, and *unclean* that it was unfit for human consumption at any level, being outlawed in Leviticus 11.
- ▶ The whole "kosher" arrangement was a constant reminder that God had His fingers on Jewish everyday life (their stomachs, vessels, water supply, clothing, farming and hunting activities, business dealings, social customs, etc.), and that He was in control of how He wanted people to worship Him.
- ▶ Yet Peter did not readily surrender to the heavenly insistence (in triplicate!) that God can revoke His own Levitical restrictions as He sees fit.
- ▶ Peter had to learn that when God declares He "has cleansed" something (to erase its unsuitability), no human has the right to still disapprove.
- ▶ After all, it is God who makes the rules for humans, not vice versa.

v. 17-18

- ▶ Since Peter had no stomach for nonkosher foods, he was confused as to whether he dared go against God's ancient regulations delivered through Moses.
- ▶ In the midst of his mental disarray, the delegation arrived from Cornelius.

v. 20ff.

- ▶ Peter's concern over the puzzling vision was "put on hold" while the Spirit directed Peter to attend to the visitor--with assurances that they had been sent by God to locate Peter, and that Peter could go along, free of conscience pangs about being in the company of gentiles.

v. 21

- ▶ Though Peter gave them a less-than-warm welcome when he saw the Roman soldier, he invited them to declare the purpose of their call.

v. 22

- ▶ They presented their cause to Peter, humbly petitioning him to speak whatever he wished.

v. 23

- ▶ It was by now too late in the day to set out on a ten-hour walk; moreover, by now God's directives and Peter's love for souls had put aside his narrow Jewishness about inviting "unclean" persons to share his friend's roof, his table, and his linens.
- ▶ The next day, in the right God-pleasing frame of mind, Peter set forth for Caesarea, accompanied by Christian friends.
- ▶ They were soon to get a new revelation of how God looked at gentiles, and that would redirect them in their mission to preach the Savior to all folks.

v. 24-33 *Peter meets Cornelius*

v. 24

- ▶ In the fourth day of this new chapter in Cornelius' life, he eagerly awaited the return of his servants with Simon Peter; he was prepared to greet them with a house full of relatives and close friends who shared his devotion to Jehovah, the Covenant God.

v. 25

Cornelius' prostrate welcome was corrected by a kindly but firm hand, as Peter permitted no popish adoration.

v. 27-28

- ▶ Peter, who had to overcome generations of Jewishness, had learned the lesson of the trance/vision, and he opened his heart as he explained this to the group.

v. 29

- ▶ Since God had not as yet spelled out what Peter should do when he met with these gentiles, Peter was obliged to ask what they had in mind.

v. 30-33

- ▶ So Cornelius rehearsed it (cf. vv.3-7) and invited Peter to deliver whatever it was that God had on His mind for Peter to tell them.

vv. 34-43

- ▶ *Peter's sermon to Cornelius'* household clearly reveals that he had come to learn God's love was broad and long enough to cross over the ethnic barrier between Jew and Gentile.
- ▶ Peter traced the length of God's love, which reached from Judea through Galilee (v. 37) to all points beyond; that "whoever (with no ethnic limitations) believes in Him will receive remission of sins."
- ▶ The Christian message always includes these historical events, with emphasis on the truth that Jesus of Nazareth (an unlikely person from an unlikely place) was indeed the "anointed" agent of God the Father (v. 38), who survived death in his resurrection (v. 40) and will function as Judge over humanity, to grant remission of sins to whoever believes in Him.

v. 44-48

- ▶ *The Holy Spirit comes* to the gentiles also in this "Epiphany of the Gentiles".
- ▶ This should dispel any doubt lingering in the minds of anyone past, present, or future that God's love was broad/deep/long enough to bring gentiles into His family, for here Jesus' promise to bestow His Spirit upon His people (Acts 1:5) was again honored as the "Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word."
- ▶ In other words, they were converted then and there from their Old Testament faith in the coming Messiah, as the Spirit brought them the assurance that Jesus was already Savior, and not for Jews only, but for them also.

v. 45-46

- ▶ This was a new and marvelous discovery for the Jewish-background Christians, who up to now had not fully realized that their Jewish "Jesus" was also the gentile "Savior."

v. 46

- ▶ Their "tongue-speaking" should not be interpreted as an unearthly lingo, for at such an emotional moment as this they simply broke forth into their mother tongues (Italian and other Mediterranean dialects of the Indo-European family of languages), all of which were "foreign" to the Hebrews, of course.
- ▶ This whole subject of "tongue-speaking" (as it happened also on the first Christian Pentecost--Acts 2:4-11) has been largely misunderstood and misrepresented by Pentecostals as heavenly languages unknown to this earth.
- ▶ Scripture gives us to understand that "speaking in tongues" means they spoke in languages or dialects foreign to the Palestinian Jew.
- ▶ The miracle of the "tongue-speaking" at the first Pentecost lies in this that in that instance God also broke the language barrier (a barrier to the Gospel ever since Babel) by enabling Hebrews to speak in foreign languages. But they were **human, earthly languages**, after all.
- ▶ And that's what happened here. As in their mother tongues these people of Cornelius' household glorified

God for reaching out beyond Jewry to salvage even them.

- ▶ (Years later in the Corinth congregation its polyglot members needed to be corrected from their misuse of “tongue-speaking,” for they disturbed the worship service with personal messages blurted out in their mother tongue in the enthusiasm of the moment. See I Cor. 14)

v. 47

- ▶ Now then, since God had given them His five-star approval rating, who dared deny them acceptance into the earthly fellowship?
- ▶ So they were received into full membership in the company of saints via baptism, during which they also affirmed their faith in Jesus. Hallelujah!!

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for saving Cornelius and his friends and relatives. Thank You for a love that sees past all the things that sometimes keep us from caring whether someone knows about You, their Savior, or not. Lord, we know that no one is saved without faith in You. Help us to love more so that we do care about the salvation of others and do share the truth about You. Amen.

PRESENTATION

Teacher should present story by directly telling the story rather than reading it.

APPLICATIONS

1. Our approach to the neighbor or stranger (even “God-fearing, church-going, decent people”) avoids chastising them for what they may be lacking in their lives. Since we do not know if a person lacks the One Thing Needful, we find a way to present Jesus in a spirit of warmth, confident that our sharing the Scriptures and the Savior with them is a privilege entrusted to us by our God. Then we let the dialogue develop from there one step at a time.
2. We also do well to ferret out of our hearts any residual prejudice against others (Jews, Mexicans, Hmong, Negroes, Poles, etc.). A bad attitude about Jews, Catholics, and “Polacks” (ala Archie Bunker, the clown-prince of Bigotry) could short-circuit an opening for the Spirit’s working, making us unsuitable for His use. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” (I Jn.2:6) “We should love one another.” (I Jn.3:11) Note: We learn from Scripture (John 5:23; 6:53-58; 8:24; 11:25; 14:6, etc.) that God does not value false religions, those not founded on Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life--and no amount of devotion and piety can compensate for the loss of the Savior.
3. We can see that our social or cultural inhibitions hamper God’s ministry of the gospel. The privileged responsibility (calling) of the Christian in this world is to respond to any request “as in the presence of God to speak all the things commanded us by God” as the occasion warrants (10:33). One-on-one is how we usually begin; sometimes a small group gathered in a private home asks for pastoral service: This is how many of our CLC congregations first assembled.
4. This military person in a foreign land did not give up his worship of Jehovah, but influenced his whole household to join him in God’s kingdom. Cornelius serves as a “good conduct” example for anyone in the military.

5. God is indeed “impartial” (v.34), not prejudiced against any individual, race, or nationality. We in the CLC share that view, not resting on our family’s bloodline, or our grandpa’s status as a founding father in the CLC or some other status symbol of Lutheran patriotism. We realize that God looks on our heart for the right attitude (“whoever fears Him”) and in our lives for the right effects (“and works righteousness”) when He has a special assignment lined up for us. Whereas angels make announcements and give directions, God entrusts missionary and pastoral care as the Spirit’s work through the agency of fellow mortals. Isn’t that an amazing privilege for us?

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

I Thess. 5:17 - Pray without ceasing.

I Tim. 2:3-4 - God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Middle any of the above and...

Isaiah 43:1 - Thus says the LORD, who created you...”Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.”

Eph. 2:13 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.

1 John 1:7 - The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Upper any of the above and...

I Thess. 2:13 - When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

II Peter 3:9 - The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

HYMN CHOICES

“Salvation Unto Us has Come” TLH # 377

“By Grace I’m Saved, Grace Free and Boundless” TLH # 373

“Come, Holy Spirit, Come” TLH # 225

“Savior Sprinkle Many Nations” TLH #510