

33. The Lord Worked in the Life of Cornelius

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the needs of people. In the early church, the leaders ministered to both the physical and spiritual needs of people. We also want to show our children by example the importance of ministering to the needs of the people with whom the Lord brings them in contact. In our topic today, we are going to see how the Lord led Peter to begin to minister to the spiritual needs of the Gentiles.

In Acts 10, we see how the Lord brought the message of His death and resurrection to the Gentiles. In Acts 10:1-2, we read, “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” Here, we are introduced to Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman centurion. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army that was in charge of one hundred men. These soldiers were from the country of Italy.

We learn several things about Cornelius. First, we see that he was a devout man. The word translated “devout” means a *godly man*. In 2 Peter 2:9, we read, “*Then*, the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” Although Cornelius was a Roman soldier, he had learned about God and had a great reverence and respect for God. However, we will see that he had not yet had the death and resurrection of Christ explained to him.

Second, we see that Cornelius was one who feared God with all of his household. Acts 10:34-35 says, “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.’” In these verses, we see that Peter recognized that Cornelius had a great reverence for God. We see that Peter said that those who have a reverence for God are accepted by God, because God recognizes that they have true faith in Him regardless of their nation or background. God does not show partiality. We also see that Cornelius had taught his whole household about God so that his entire household had a reverence for God.

Third, we see that Cornelius gave alms generously to the people. The word translated “alms” means *acts of charity or donations to the poor*. Here, we see that Cornelius had a great concern for the poor and needy. We see in Acts 10:31 that the angel had told Cornelius, “‘And said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.’”” God looked at the heart of Cornelius and knew that He had a great reverence for God and it was that reverence for God that caused Cornelius to have a concern for the poor and needy.

Fourth, we see that Cornelius was a man of prayer. The word translated “always” means *constantly or continually*. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” That was exactly what Cornelius did. In fact, verse 4 says, “‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.’” God recognized the faith of Cornelius just as God had always recognized those who had true faith whether they were Jews or Gentiles. However, God wanted Cornelius to learn to

have a personal relationship by coming to the Father through Christ.

As a result, God sent an angel to speak to Cornelius through a vision. Acts 10:3-6 says, “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!’ 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. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.’” God could have revealed the message about the death and resurrection of Christ to Cornelius directly just as God did in to Saul in Acts 9.

However, God knew that the Jewish believers would never give full acceptance to the Gentiles if God spoke to Cornelius directly. This is illustrated in Acts 11:15-18 where Peter told the Jews what God had done. Those verses say, “‘And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” Here, we see that God had to convince the Jews that the Gentiles could also be saved by faith.

God had a much greater plan when Christ died and rose again than even the believing Jews could understand. A part of the plan of God was to bring the Jews and the Gentiles together in the church through the death and resurrection of Christ. Ephesians 2:14-18 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” The plan of God was to make Jewish believers and Gentile believers one in the body of Christ so that we can all have peace with God.

As a result, God sent an angel to Cornelius to speak to him. At first, Cornelius was fearful when he saw the angel in the vision. However, the angel immediately told Cornelius that his prayers and his ministry to the needy had caused God to recognize the faith of Cornelius. Now God wanted Cornelius to know what he must do to show true faith. Cornelius was told to send men to Joppa to the house of Simon the tanner whose house was close to the beach. At that house, they were to ask for Simon Peter. The angel told Cornelius that Simon Peter would tell Cornelius what he must do.

It had been the plan of God throughout the years for the Gentiles to hear how to have faith in God through the Jews. Psalm 67:1-4 says, “God be merciful to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us. Selah. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and

sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah.” Since the Jewish nation had failed to share the message of faith with the people of the nations, God was now calling the church to take the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to the nations.

As we have seen, Peter was often the spokesman for the other apostles as the message of the death and resurrection of Christ began to spread among the Jews. Now, God was going to give Peter the privilege of being the first apostle to take that message to the Gentiles. However, the Lord also chose to have that request come to Peter through a Gentile. Ephesians 3:4-6 says, “By which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Here, we see that the Holy Spirit chose to reveal the plan of God to Peter and the other apostles through the request of a Gentile.

Later, God would reveal to John that this plan would include people of every language and ethnic group. John wrote in Revelation 5:9-10, “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.’” The plan of God to provide salvation to all who will believe includes people of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Certainly, Cornelius could not understand that he was a part of the plan of God as he sent men to get Peter. In the same way, Peter did not understand what God was doing when he received this request. The plan of the Lord is much greater than any human can imagine.

Acts 10:7-8 says, “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. So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.” Cornelius may not have understood the plan of God, but he was obedient to the Lord. He then called two of his servants and a devout soldier. He explained to these three men exactly what the Lord had told him in the vision so that they understood why they were going to go to Joppa. Then, Cornelius sent the three of them to Joppa to get Peter to come with them to the city of Caesarea.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the way that the Lord is working in their lives. We want them to learn the blessings that come with obedience to the Lord as we carry out the plan that the Lord has for each of our lives. That plan will be different for each of our children so we want to show them the importance of letting the Holy Spirit lead us in our lives so that they can also learn to be led by the Spirit. The Lord will bring great blessing to their lives as they are obedient to the Spirit. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to be led by the Holy Spirit.