

## 26—Acts 10.1-48—Salvation Comes to the Gentiles

- I. Introduction
  - a. Pardon me for thinking this story is the bigger miracle. The salvation of religious people seems far more difficult than raising the dead.
  - b. Throw in the mix a Christian and Apostle with built in prejudices and we have an amazing story of the risen Lord Jesus moving heaven and earth to save a pious Gentile. An absolute miracle.
- II. Main Point
  - a. This book is about the acts of the risen Lord Jesus to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Particularly, this chapter describes the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.
- III. Outline
  - a. The Importance of this Story
  - b. The Natural Cornelius
  - c. The Devout Cornelius
  - d. Peter, the new missionary to the Gentiles
  - e. The Saved Cornelius
- IV. Exposition
  - a. Out of the gate, we should notice the length of this story—48 verses. That says something. This is an Important Marker in the Storyline of Redemption.
    - i. It's also long because this is a unique turning point in the story of Acts! It is almost exactly as long as the Spirit's coming at Pentecost. In fact, you could say this is another Pentecost of sorts as the Spirit falls upon the Gentiles.
  - b. Now, let's consider this new character in the story, Cornelius. Who is he by nature?
    - i. When we first hear about him, he is probably at least a middle-aged man. We do not get any background before Luke tells us he is a pious man.
      1. I think it is important that we not come to this text and leave behind some important theology.
        - a. Though we do not have the story of his life, we can say certain things about Cornelius because the Bible says these things about every human being.
        - b. Simply stated—by nature, Cornelius is a sinner who is separated from God like the rest of mankind.
        - c. In the words of Paul in (Rom. 3:9-12) <sup>9</sup> What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one"
        - d. Our confession of faith says: "We believe that man was created in holiness but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy state, by consequence of which all mankind are now sinners and are under condemnation of eternal ruin.
      2. Cornelius was not born devout!
        - a. I say this to say, Cornelius has heard from someone, maybe his parents, what it means to live like this. I mean, he lives in Judea. There are synagogues throughout the entire region. He has watched devout people live their lives on a regular basis.
      3. No matter how devout he is at this point in this life, he is NOT SAVED!
        - a. How can I say this?
          - i. (Acts 11:13-14) <sup>13</sup> And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup> he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved

1. I think the Bible is very clear about two categories of people.
  - a. One is either lost and separated from Christ
  - b. Or, one has been saved and in union with Christ.
2. Those who are lost are not all serial killers.
  - a. Some people are not as bad as they could be. But all fall short of the glory of God.
  - b. As Paul states in Rom. 14, everything done apart from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23) whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
3. There are some really nice people in the world and I am grateful for God's common grace on the world. Evil is restrained more than we know.
  - a. But these people are under condemnation because we all enter the world in union with Adam.
  - b. However, any sinner can be forgiven if he repents and believes in Jesus and therefore are now in union with Jesus.
- iii. God will be glorified! Moralism does not save. There is no salvation apart from faith in Christ.
- c. Now, with that said, let's look at Cornelius' character in our text.
  - i. As though speaking in the present tense: *who is he now?*
    1. He lives in Caesarea. This was the central command for the Roman government in Judea. He's a military man who is a centurion in charge of 100 men. His group is part of the Italian cohort which is 600 men.
    2. He is a devout man.
      - a. He could be devout in any number of ways. He could be a devout husband or soldier. He could be religiously devout in one or more of the gods of Rome.
        - i. There are devout Muslims and Hindus or any sort of religion.
      - b. But Cornelius is described as devout in three ways:
        - i. Who feared God with all his household
        - ii. Who gave alms generously to the people
        - iii. And who prayed continually to God
    - c. In other words, you can be all of these things and still under the wrath of God.
      - i. He is devout but lost.
      - ii. See, we can become like the people we are around for good or ill. Kids can be taught how to be righteous. There's a lot of advantages in this world to obeying the commandments.
        1. In fact, you can have a pretty successful business if you do.
        2. The rich, successful, young ruler said he kept the commandments from his youth but Jesus said he lacked one thing.
          - a. What did he lack? Jesus!
          - b. Even the righteous (self-righteous) need forgiveness.
3. If this was enough for Cornelius to enter the Kingdom, then why does an angel visit him?
  - a. It's not enough and the messenger comes with instructions to send for a man named Peter.
  - b. It seems that what Cornelius has learned about God has him longing for more.
    - i. He was a Gentile. There were ways for Gentiles to join the covenant community.
    - ii. From what we know about him, it doesn't appear that he has gone that far which required circumcision and adopting all the laws of Moses.

- iii. I think he stands hopeful that there is a way to God but he doesn't know the WAY. The angel says in (Acts 10:4) "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.
  - 1. In other words, these acts have been remembered by God.
  - 2. It seems God not only remembers prayers and alms giving but the evil people do like in Jonah (Jon. 1:2) "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."
- iv. Each week we pray on Wednesday night for an unreached people group.
  - 1. I've heard many stories over the years of devout Muslims having dreams about someone they needed to talk to someone. For whatever reason, they are seeking answers and God sends them the message of the gospel.
- 4. Peter will later say this: (Acts 10:34-35) <sup>34</sup> So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.
  - a. What does it mean that one is acceptable to God?
    - i. Well, it cannot mean these things merit salvation apart from Jesus. Peter is there to give him the gospel that he might repent and believe in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins.
    - ii. I take it to mean like what Paul told Timothy: (2 Tim. 3:14-15) <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
      - 1. So, Timothy was probably a good kid. His grandmother and mother had taught him the scriptures which are able to make you wise FOR SALVATION.
      - 2. It seems Cornelius had learned some of the Scriptures from someone. How else could he know how to fear God if he did not know who God was?
        - a. But the fear of the Lord is only the beginning of knowledge.
        - b. Storms are enough to make one fear the Lord but not enough to save you.
        - c. Cornelius needs to hear the gospel.
    - ii. Cornelius obeys the angel's instructions and sends for Peter.
      - 1. A devout man but a lost man. Cornelius needs to hear another message from one of God's witnesses. That's how it works.
        - a. (Rom. 10:14-15) <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"
        - b. This part is going to be harder than you think. Jesus will work to change Peter and then send him.
- d. Well, let's move to the man with the message: Peter.

- i. We will get to work this out more next week and then again in Acts 15 but let's take a look at a problem that arises.
- ii. The problem is that most Jews, even those who had become Christians, would not go into a Gentile's home nor invite a Gentile into their home.
  1. Cornelius has sent three servants to fetch Peter. But will Peter come?
  2. If Peter doesn't come who will tell Cornelius the gospel?
  3. If he doesn't believe the gospel, what will happen? Eternal condemnation.
- iii. Peter is in Joppa.
  1. Ironically, Joppa is the city from which Jonah boarded a ship to flee from God so that he would not speak the message of God to the Ninevites because he knew God was merciful.
  2. Let's see what Peter will do.
    - a. He goes up on the rooftop to pray.
    - b. He becomes very hungry.
    - c. He fell into a trance.
      - i. This gets explained as a vision.
    - d. He sees the sky open up and something like a huge sheet coming down upon the earth.
    - e. In it are all kinds of animals even pigs which Jews do not eat.
    - f. How will he make sense of this?
      - i. A voice comes to him: Arise, Peter; kill and eat.
      - ii. He replies: By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.
        1. To do so under the old covenant would mean defilement.
      - iii. A voice repeats the saying two more times and then the sheet is taken up.
    - g. You might be wondering what these animals have to do with getting the gospel to the Cornelius.
      - i. Gentiles eat bacon. Probably meat sacrificed to idols. And well, probably just about anything.
      - ii. To get the gospel to the Gentiles, one must interact with Gentiles. That would probably involve table fellowship. But even touching one of them who had eaten these unclean animals, transfers to the person touched.
      - iii. It would have been difficult to avoid being defiled.
    - h. Therefore, the Lord had moved heaven and earth to make it clear to Peter that these animals are no longer unclean or common.
      - i. The work of Jesus on the cross and resurrection has changed that.
    - i. While he is pondering what all this meant, Cornelius' men arrive.
      - i. Perfect timing.
    - j. Though Peter has been in a trance and seen a vision and heard a voice three times, he still hasn't figured it all out.
      - i. But the men are at the gate.
      - ii. While last week Peter was only led by circumstances, this text says the Spirit directly said to him: (Acts 10:20) "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without judging, **for** I have sent them."
      - iii. This is a key moment in the continuation of gospel to the ends of the earth.

- iv. So much so, if God doesn't intervene here, the gospel doesn't go to Cornelius right now.
  - k. Peter obeys the Spirit and goes down.
    - i. He tells the men that he is the one they are looking for.
    - ii. He inquires about the reason they have come.
    - iii. The men repeat the same message we heard in the beginning.
  - l. Upon hearing their reply, Peter invites them in.
    - i. This is unbelievable. This doesn't happen unless the risen Lord Jesus acts through all the means we have just talked about.
    - ii. Peter's whole life and teaching tells him not to invite Gentiles into your home.
    - iii. They spend the rest of the day there, and leave the next morning for Caesarea.
    - iv. We are told that there are 6 Jewish Christians from Joppa that go with them too. This event needed more witnesses!
  - m. They arrive at Cornelius' house. Again, this is not normal for Jews.
    - i. When Peter arrives, Cornelius falls at his feet and worships.
    - ii. Promptly, Peter pulls him and says, look I'm just a mortal man, not God.
    - iii. He finds it necessary to explain something they already know that it is unlawful...or it is their ancient custom...not to join or come to anyone of another nation.
    - iv. BUT...God...God v. 28 has shown him that he not to call any person common or unclean.
  - n. That problem, for now, is solved.
    - i. Peter is there in the home of Gentiles. He hears the story once again from Cornelius. We are gathered here to listen to the message God has sent to us from you.
      - 1. No more barriers. The dividing wall has been taken down.
      - 2. There is no partiality with Peter now because God had shown him that there is no partiality in God.
- iv. Before we hear Peter's message and see the result, we need to pause and consider any prejudices we might have.
  - 1. If we are to be witnesses for Christ and the gospel to go forth from us as we've seen in Acts, we must not have any barriers.
    - a. Who's welcome here? Can you interact with people who are different from you? People who are not from around here?
  - 2. God moved heaven and earth to bring Peter into the home of a Gentile...people like us. He is the new missionary to the Gentiles. Something that was not on his radar the day before.
    - a. Why would we hesitate at going to anyone too?
- e. Let's see what happens when the new missionary preaches the gospel to Cornelius.
  - i. There are essentially three points to his message. Though I think this is a selected summary of the whole message, we hear the essential parts.
    - 1. First, Jesus Christ is Lord of all, Gentiles included. As Lord of all nations, all nations must give an account to him. Those who are enemies are not at peace with the Lord of the earth.
      - a. Peter was sent to bring good tidings to the enemies. That peace through Jesus Christ has come.

- b. Much of what Peter is about to say, they already know. As Paul will say to King Agrippa, these things did not happen under a rock. They live in Judea. They know what has happened even though they might not know what it means.
- c. Peter affirms that from Galilee, after the baptism of John, God anointed Jesus and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.
- d. Peter claims they were eyewitness to his death on the tree as he bore sin's curse. But God raised him from the dead for which they were eyewitnesses of as well. They even ate and drank with the risen Lord Jesus.
- e. But how? How can enemies like these Gentiles have peace with the Lord?
- 2. Because, his second point is that the Lord Jesus is Judge of the living and the dead.
  - a. This was the message Jesus sent them to proclaim. To reject Jesus as Lord would end in judgment.
- 3. So, how do they escape? Well, his third point is that Jesus is also the Savior.
  - a. He is the one the prophets bore witness to that—hear this—everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.
  - b. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.
- ii. At this point, the devout Cornelius is saved. He believes. He is forgiven.
  - 1. The Spirit falls upon he and his household.
  - 2. It is Pentecost all over again but in the home of Gentiles!
  - 3. They speak with tongues just as the Jews who repented and believed in Acts 2.
    - a. They are magnifying God! Psalm 67 is happening right here.
    - b. All the Christians hear and understand.
  - 4. Peter asks if anyone can refuse these who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit?
    - a. None object and they are baptized.
- iii. The pious, God fearing, alms giving, continually praying man is saved.

#### V. Response

- a. Reminder: Cornelius was devout, feared God, gave generously, and prayed continually yet he is NOT saved.
  - i. The reality is you can be all these things and not have a saving relationship with Jesus.
  - ii. And in Acts 2 we see devout Jews who are not saved. (Acts 2:5) 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. They later ask (Acts 2:37-38) "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Some people have come into the church. Learned the lingo. They've assimilated into one the crowd.
  - i. But they have never been born again.
  - ii. You haven't been forgiven.
  - iii. There are many religions that offer you moralism.
  - iv. But Jesus offer pardon to wretched sinners like us...even the nice ones.
  - v. Do you lack one thing? Do you have forgiveness in Jesus?