

The Conversion of Cornelius

Acts 10:24-48

Acts 10:24-48: *“And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ 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.’²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.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.²⁹ Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?’”*

³⁰ *So 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, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.³² Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’³³ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”*

³⁴ *Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.³⁶ The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—³⁷ that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by 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 killed by hanging on a tree.⁴⁰ Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.⁴² And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”*

⁴⁴ *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.⁴⁵ And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.⁴⁶ For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.*

Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.”

Background Notes

Right before He ascended into Heaven, the Lord said to His disciples, “*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). The outworking of this plan and purpose of the Lord is recorded in the book of Acts. In the first nine chapters, the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, in line with the first part of Acts 1:8. In Acts 10, the fulfillment of the last part of Acts 1:8 began: “*You shall be witnesses to me... to the end of the earth.*” In Acts 10 the door was opened for the gospel to spread to the whole world, as Gentiles were brought into the Church.

Remember that Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 16:19? God used Peter to open the door for the Jews in Acts 2-3, for the Samaritans in Acts 8, and for the Gentiles in Acts 10. The apostle Paul would become the great apostle to the Gentile world, but here in Acts 10 the Lord opened the door of the Church to the Gentile converts through the ministry of the apostle Peter. Both Peter and Cornelius had visions from the Lord – visions that brought them together in the Mediterranean seacoast city of Caesarea, where Cornelius was stationed. Cornelius was a Roman army officer, and Caesarea was the headquarters for the Roman authorities over Israel at that time.

Peter and some other brothers left Joppa and traveled, with the delegation sent by Cornelius, about thirty miles up the coast to Caesarea. There Cornelius and others were waiting to hear the gospel. What a great opportunity!

Doctrinal Points

1. God prepares the way for the walk of faith.

This doctrinal point is seen in the lives of both Peter and Cornelius. In Acts 10 God prepared the way before them.

In the case of Cornelius, it was not by chance that this Gentile soldier, who was a sincere seeker of God, was stationed in Israel. It was not by chance that he came in contact with the Hebrew Scriptures and the one true God of the Jewish people, and began to live in accordance with the light that he had received. It was not by chance that Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea, where Philip the evangelist lived. Perhaps some of the relatives and close friends of Cornelius had heard Philip preach - maybe even Cornelius himself. It was not by chance that Peter was only about thirty miles away down the coast at Joppa. God was certainly preparing the way for Cornelius in his walk of faith.

God was preparing Peter for the next step in his walk of faith as well. Peter and John had preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25), and God used Peter's ministry to bring the Samaritans into the Church. Although the Jews didn't consider the Samaritans to be "uncircumcised Gentiles," they didn't consider Samaritans to be full Jews either. And Peter undoubtedly heard about the conversion of the eunuch from Ethiopia (Acts 8). All of this certainly softened Peter up for his role in opening the door of the Church to the Gentiles.

When God called him to bring the gospel to Cornelius, Peter was lodging with Simon, a tanner who worked with the hides of clean and unclean animals. This at least prepared Peter for the vision of the sheet filled with all the animals, and the command of the Lord to eat meat that Peter considered unclean by the Old Testament Law. But the Lord said that these animals were cleansed and no longer unholy. All these events and experiences in Peter's life were preparing him for the next step in his walk of faith.

This principle, that God prepares the way for the walk of faith, is taught throughout the Bible. God prepared Moses. God prepared David. God prepared Paul. God prepared Peter. And God will prepare the way for you as well, if you are a believer and you are *walking by faith*. God will use all the experiences in your life, even the unhappy and tragic events, to prepare you for the next step in your walk of faith. God prepares the way for the walk of faith.

2. God directs the way for the walk of faith.

God not only *prepares* for the walk of faith, but He *directs* the walk of faith as well. This teaching is seen in the lives of both Peter and Cornelius. In Cornelius' vision, the angel directed Cornelius very specifically: "send men to Joppa and find Peter who is staying with a tanner named Simon whose house is by the sea" (v5 & 30-32)! Do you think we could have found Peter if these directions had been given to us? I sure hope so. Those are pretty specific directions! Even a child could have followed those directions.

And Peter was specifically directed in his walk of faith as well. In verses 19-20, when while Peter was reflecting on the vision that he had seen, the Spirit said, "*Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.*" Here again we see the Lord specifically directing Peter's walk of faith.

Does the Lord do this for the believer today? Yes! However, two things must be kept in mind:

- a. The walk of faith is ***step by step***. Too often we want God to drop a complete blueprint out of Heaven, giving us His detailed directions for the rest of our lives. But the walk of faith is not like that. It's a step-by-step process. God doesn't show us His whole plan for our lives all at once. But He will show us the next step, for sure - ***if*** we'll look to Him and follow Him.

b. The walk of faith is a **walk of faith!** It's not deciding to do our own thing and then trying to get God's approval of our own plans. No! The walk of faith is wanting to do God's will *completely* first of all, and then allowing Him to guide us *completely*, step by step, even though sometimes the way He leads may be unpleasant, and not the way we would have chosen.

Be prepared for some surprises and changes of direction along the way in your walk of faith. But be assured that God will direct you if you're willing to follow. God directs the way for the walk of faith.

Practical Application

Just believe - and you will be saved!

After Peter told Cornelius the facts of who Jesus is, and what He has done, and that He is alive from the dead, and the He will judge the living and the dead, verse 43 says, *"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."*

And guess what? Cornelius and his close friends and relatives **believed and were saved!**

Evidence of their salvation was the filling of the Holy Spirit: *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word" (v44)*. Notice that they were not saved by good works. They were not saved by baptism, because baptism came later (v48). They were not saved because they cried about their sins. And they were not saved because they did some kind of penance. They were saved because they believed with their hearts.

This message is still true today. Romans 10:13 says, *"Whoever will call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved."* And Acts 16:31 says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."*

How do you become a true Christian? Believe - and you will be saved!