



Peter at the Home of Cornelius

Acts 10:24-48

The early church counted mass conversions when 3000 came to the faith at one time, and that number increases to 5000. But, it also included a ministry to the individual, as in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Now we are shown a whole family, or an extended family, coming to the faith.

The gospel from Jew to gentile

The connection with the preceding events is clear. The men of the household of Cornelius have come to the house where Peter is staying and he invites them in because it is too late in the day to begin their journey to Caesarea. This fact that he invites these gentiles into the home where he is staying, is already the beginning of the crumbling of the wall of partition between the Jews and the gentiles. The following morning they begin their trip to see Cornelius. Several men of Joppa accompany the Apostle. Was this for safety? Or was it to have witnesses of the great things which were about to happen? The following day they arrive at Caesarea. What a welcome the Apostle receives at the home of this gentile centurion! Cornelius has called his family and close friends together to listen to that which this man of God will have to tell them. He himself greets Peter. This officer of Rome is now in the presence of an officer of the Lamb and he falls down on his knees to worship him. What a respect this shows for the office of Peter! Although the centurion may not fall on his knees before generals of the Roman army, he does this before the Apostle of Jesus Christ. He is looking for something great and he will receive it too, but this honor goes too far, and Peter tells him to rise because, though he is an Apostle, he is only a man. We find similar incidents in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9-10 where the Apostle falls down before an angel. We must worship God alone. No man, regardless of station, or even an angel is worthy to be worshipped.

As Peter sees the situation in this house of Cornelius with so many people present, he first puts things in proper perspective. It is not lawful for a Jew to come into the home of one "*of another nation.*" (He uses a mild term and does not call them heathen or gentiles.) He had invited the ambassadors of Cornelius into the house where he was staying in Joppa and is now compounding the problem by going into the house of one of another nation. Israel was a people set apart. All of their ceremonies pointed to this fact. The scholars among the Jews had made these laws even stricter than the Old Testament intended. These ceremonies have fallen away with the coming of Jesus Christ, but, it is difficult for these Jewish members of the early church to realize this change and to become accustomed to the new ways! Peter informs his hearers that something has happened to him which has changed his outlook. God has revealed to him that he is not to call any man common or unclean. (That vessel with all manner of animals and creeping things in it and the instruction he receives upon seeing this vessel have made a profound impression on Peter. Because he has had this experience he did not hesitate to come.) "*Now tell me,*" he says, "*why you have sent for me.*" First he clears the air as to the relationship between Jew and gentile, and now asks the purpose of this invitation.

The prepared congregation

Cornelius informs him that he was in prayer at 3:00 in the afternoon four days ago, "*and a man stood before me in brilliant clothing who told me that my prayers had been heard and that my almsgiving had been noticed in the sight of God.*" This is a clear approval of the man's way of life. But, that is not enough. Therefore, he must send for Peter who is in Joppa and he is given the

address. It is so good that Peter has come at once. Seldom has a religious meeting been so well prepared. The people have come together to hear the word of the Lord from the mouth of Peter. Cornelius is able to pray, and he does; he is able to give alms, and he does; but there is much more which he does not know. This Apostle must come to instruct him in the way of life, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are here together eagerly awaiting the word of grace which will come from Peter's lips. An attentive audience is assured.

Peter's sermon

Peter begins to speak. While the whole speech may not be recorded; we are given the highlights. Peter speaks of four things. First he briefly reviews the works of Jesus. He then tells them about His death and resurrection. Thirdly, he announces the future judgment and Christ as Judge. Fourthly, he in agreement with the instruction of the prophets, leads hearers to faith in Jesus for remission of sins in agreement with the instruction of the prophets.

Because God is righteous, He is no respecter of persons. Those who fear God and live righteously before Him are acceptable to Him regardless of their national origin. Peter's hearers are familiar with many of the things which Jesus did and said. He is the Word which was sent to the children of Israel. Not only is He the Savior of men but He is also Lord of all. That fact may never be lost from sight. Great blessings come to those who believe in Him but He also asks their complete allegiance. The whole story began with the preaching of John and has gone on uninterruptedly to the present day. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit so that He was able to do all the mighty things which they have seen and heard. He did good and cast out those afflicted with spirit possession. Now, Peter is among those who are witnesses of all the things which took place because he was with Him since the earliest days.

Peter is moved as he relates these various things to those assembled here in the house of Cornelius. This Jesus, Who had brought peace, the people crucified! They hung Him on a tree to show their utter contempt. God, however, raised Him from the dead the third day. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ which these "*of another nation*" must hear. All of the good news is compressed into the statements that they slew Him and God raised Him from the dead. This is not hearsay! After the resurrection He was not made manifest to all men but only to those whom God had chosen beforehand. These ate and drank with Him after He rose from the grave! They are as certain about the living, resurrected Lord as they could be about any fact in their lives. Those who are witnesses of the life of the resurrected Christ were given the mission to go out with this word everywhere. They are to testify about everything pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth. They must testify that He is coming again as the Judge who will judge the living and the dead on the last day. He is Savior — indeed; He is also Judge! How have Cornelius and those with him in this house come to the faith? No doubt through their association with the Jews, through whom they became familiar with the word of God given in the Old Testament. The Jews must see the relation of the Old Testament to the Person and work of Christ, and so must also these who come from without. All the prophets bear witness to Jesus Christ. This was the reason for their speech, for their lives and work. The more the people study the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament the more they will realize that these Scriptures have been fulfilled in Christ. The Old Testament speaks of a "*forgiveness of sins*" but it does not show the people how this is possible. In the preaching of the Christ of the New Testament Scriptures it now becomes clear. He has paid for the sins of man! Now sins can be forgiven. This is gospel — the good news which they must believe.

The gift of the Spirit and baptism

When Peter has made known the heart of the gospel to those who are here assembled the Spirit falls on all them that hear. Seemingly the Spirit does not allow Peter to finish the words he has to say, because we read in chapter eleven that the Spirit fell on them when he began to speak. Here is no laying on of hands before the Spirit comes. He (the Spirit) comes before they are baptized. It is well for us to note the order of events here, because much is made of a certain order today. Those who had come from Joppa with Peter are amazed that the Spirit is also given to the gentiles. Peter must speak to them, and they should know the truth. But, to see that all the privileges of this communion with Christ are now theirs too — this is almost too much for these

Jews! That the Spirit has indeed been given to these gentiles is made evident by the fact that they begin to speak in tongues and magnify the name of God!

Peter now asks a rhetorical question. Is there anybody who would forbid these people to be baptized? They have the same faith as we. They have received the Spirit as well as we. Notice: Peter considers baptism necessary even though they have already received the Spirit in great measure so that they are able to speak in tongues. He commands others to baptize these people! Christ didn't baptize. Paul baptized very few (cf. 1 Corinthians 1). Now Peter also shows that he has come first of all to preach the gospel and lets others baptize "*in the name of Jesus Christ.*" Then they ask Peter to stay with them for a time. No doubt they want to hear more of the gospel.

What a breakthrough it is that a prominent Roman and his house come to the faith. This gospel can't be stopped! It will conquer the earth!

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Questions for discussion:

1. How difficult do you think it was for a man such as Peter to break with all the things he had been taught and follow God's leading?
2. How do we know that the ceremonial law was abolished? Or wasn't it?
3. Why do you think Jesus showed Himself only to His disciples after the resurrection? Wouldn't it have been effective to appear to enemies?
4. What can we learn from Peter's summary of the gospel?
5. Is baptism with the spirit more important than baptism with water?
6. Do you think it was a good thing that Peter had witnesses with him?
7. Why were they not baptized into the name of the Trinity?