

"Peter's Ministry"

Part 3

Acts 10

Introduction: As we begin tonight, I want to step back and do a short review to help us see something that is often missed in a study of Acts.

Acts 1:1-2

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

² *Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:*

Luke tells us here that his first writing to Theophilus was to show the work that Jesus **BEGAN** to do. This letter is to show Jesus' work continued through the Apostles. Jesus' work continued through the Apostles and now through the church even after He has ascended back to heaven. So, as we have been working our way through this letter, we are seeing what Jesus continued to do through His Apostles. One of the things we have looked at but possibly did not notice was, as the Gospel was spreading out into the world, there were some people saved who many would consider to be **UNLIKELY** to be saved and brought into the body of Jesus Christ. First there were the Samaritans who were saved through the preaching of Philip. We looked at how the Samaritans were considered to be half breeds and were despised by the Jews. Then there was the conversion of the Ethiopian who was a high ranking official under the Queen of Ethiopia. This is a man who many would see as someone who was very unlikely to come to Jesus Christ, but he was saved as Philip explained to him Isaiah 53. Then there was the conversion of Saul on the Damascus Road. He was a dedicated Pharisee who we learned, was completely set against, and was determined to eradicate Christianity. Saul hunted Christians, put them in prison, and gave his approval when they were put to death. In all of this we are seeing that God will save anyone who is willing to turn to Jesus Christ and believe that He died for their sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. Tonight, as we come to chapter 10, we are going to see more believers added to the body of Christ. We are going to meet a man named Cornelius who is another man who many would say was very unlikely to be a believer. He will prove to be very unique and we will see there are no people on the earth today that are like him. As we stepped out of chapter 9 last week the focus was upon Peter and how God was preparing him for the chapter that is before us tonight. It is very important that Peter is involved in this chapters because in this chapter the Gentiles are

going to be brought into the body of Jesus Christ. We see in Matthew 16 why it was that Peter had to be part of this chapter.

Matthew 16:18-19

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

It was Peter who had to open the door to the Gentiles.

➤ **The Gentiles and the Body of Christ**

Notice Acts 10:1

Here in this verse, we can learn much about Cornelius. He was an officer in the Roman army and he was the captain of a company of 100 soldiers. There were six of these companies in a cohort (a regiment of 600 soldiers) and there would be ten cohorts in a legion.

Therefore, a legion would have 6,000 soldiers. This is how the Roman army was organized. Rome had one of the greatest armies the world has ever known. During the height of the Empire, it was unconquerable. We are told in verse 1 that he was the captain of the Italian band. This means that his soldiers were from Italy.

Notice the words of Lenski:

"Thirty-two such Italian cohorts were stationed in the different provinces of the empire. They were made up of Italian volunteers and were considered the most loyal Roman troops."

The Romans were people who kept the Jews under great suppression. They taxed them very heavily and they took away their right to execute their own criminals. Cornelius was a man who was exceptionally loyal to Rome and therefore most patriotic Jews would have despised him. This is why he can be seen as a man who was not likely to be a Christian. But this man was different than most dedicated Romans.

Notice Acts 10:2

Cornelius was different than most Romans because he was a devout man who feared God which means he had a deep reverence for God. He gave much alms to the people also. This was not to the Romans but to the Jews. He had a heart for God's people. There were many Jews who were very poor and Cornelius who was probably paid well under the Romans used

what he could do to help out the poverty-stricken Jews. Acts 4 tells us of the needs among the Jews.

Acts 4:34-35

³⁴ *Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,*

³⁵ *And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*

Not only did the Jews use what they had to help their fellow Jews but so did Cornelius. Cornelius was also a man who prayed to God. Apparently, he had a regular prayer life and was very consistent.

Notice Acts 10:3-4

In this vision he was told that his prayers were heard by God. This now raises a question, "How can his prayers be heard by God?"

John 9:31

³¹ *Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.*

God does not hear the prayers of the unsaved so how are we to understand Acts 1-4 as dealing with Cornelius? Let us keep in mind that Acts is a transitional book. In this book there is a transition from Judaism to Christianity. Now there are many who will teach that Cornelius was saved here in Acts 10 but that is not correct. Cornelius was saved before this chapter. He is a born-again believer before this chapter ever opens and long before Peter comes to him. **But he was not a Christian until he received the Holy Spirit.** All believers who were saved in the Old Testament were born again.

John 3:1-3

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

² *The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

³ *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The Words which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus were spoken in the Old Testament. This is before the church started because the church will not start until Acts 2. Therefore, Old Testament believers were born-again but they were not Christians which means they were not part of the body of Jesus Christ. This is exactly where Cornelius was at. He was saved but he was not given the Holy Spirit as of yet therefore he was not a Christian. As I said when we started tonight, there is not one person on the earth like Cornelius today. Every person who is saved today is born-again and they have the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9

⁹ *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

The Apostles were born-again believers before the church was started.

John 13:10-11

¹⁰ *Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.*

¹¹ *For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.*

Jesus said the disciples were clean(saved) except for Judas. They were saved but they were not Christians until Acts 2.

Getting back to Cornelius, he was saved before he met Peter and that is how he was considered a devout man who feared God, gave to the poor, and prayed to God. These were all the fruits of His salvation. He was not saved by these things but he was saved by faith in the light that was given to him. Now he just needed the Holy Spirit to go from an Old Testament believer to a New Testament Christian. He was now in a new dispensation.

Notice Acts 10:4 again.

I wanted to bring your attention to the prayers of Cornelius. We do not know exactly what he prayed for but possibly it had to do with receiving the Holy Spirit. He had most likely heard of what was happening in Jerusalem and the spread of Christianity and he sought to know more. It seems as though this vision was connected to his prayers.

Application:

I just want to remind us of the importance of our prayers.

James 5:16-18

¹⁶ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

¹⁷ Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:**

¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

When we pray in the will of God, we can be sure that God hears our prayers and will move according to our prayers. With this thought there are a couple of thoughts to consider. First of all, if we are praying for a loved one or a friend to be saved let us understand that God will move and He will bring them to where they can hear the Gospel but the choice must be made by them to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. He will not force His will upon anyone.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

² *For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

³ *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;*

⁴ **Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**

God desires for all to be saved so when we pray for them God will make a way for them to hear the Gospel but the final decision is on the sinner.

The second point we need to consider is that sometimes our prayers are kept by the Lord and answered at a later time.

Revelation 8:1-3

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

² And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

³ And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Here we see that the prayers of all saints are going to be answered in the tribulation. These are the prayers of the saints who prayed for the Kingdom to come and for evil to be judged. These are prayers that have been stored for thousands of years. Let me show you one more example of how we are to be steadfast in prayer.

Genesis 25:

²⁰ And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

²¹ And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

²⁶ And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

Isaac was 40 years old when he started to pray for Rebekah to have children and the boys were not born until he was 60 years old. Therefore, he prayed for 20 years before he saw any results.

Conclusion:

Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;