

“The Gentiles Receive the Gospel, Part 1”  
(Acts 10:23-33)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the Lord beginning to reach out to the Gentiles, first with the vision he gave to Cornelius:
  - a. Cornelius was an Italian, a Centurion – the commander of a hundred men.
    - (i) He was one who feared God – along with his household – turning from evil and doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord.
    - (ii) He was a devout man – giving money to the poor and praying continually.
    - (iii) He was what we call a God-fearer – one who had adopted the Jewish religion, but one who had not become a full Jew by being circumcised.
    - (iv) But most importantly, Cornelius was unconverted – he was as yet not saved.
      - (a) Under the Old Covenant, the Lord would have brought him all the way to salvation through the shadows – by looking to the One the Lord had promised to send.
      - (b) But under the New Covenant, with the fulfillment of those shadows, more was needed – he had to trust in the Promised One who had come.
  - b. It’s for this reason that having prepared Cornelius to receive Christ by His grace – since Cornelius could not have done the things that he did apart from God’s grace – the Lord now shows Cornelius where he must turn to hear the Gospel.
    - (i) The Lord sent an angel while Cornelius was praying
    - (ii) The angel directed him to send for Peter.
    - (iii) And immediately Cornelius obeyed and sent his messengers.
2. On the other end, we also saw that the Lord had to do something to prepare Peter to receive these messengers.
  - a. Remember, Jews had nothing to do with Gentiles, even God-fearing Gentiles.
  - b. It was unlawful even to associate or eat with them.
  - c. To prepare Peter then, the Lord gave him a vision.
    - (i) The vision was not as straight forward as the one He gave to Cornelius.
    - (ii) About noon, while he was praying on the housetop and while those in the house were preparing lunch, the Lord brought a meal down to Peter on a sheet.
    - (iii) The sheet contained several animals that were unclean, with the command to Peter to rise, kill, and eat.
    - (iv) Peter, being a good Jew and wondering whether this was a test, refused, saying, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.”

- (v) But the Lord told him, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”
- (vi) After this happened three times, the sheet was taken back into heaven. And while he was thinking about what it might mean, the messengers of Cornelius arrived at the gate looking for Peter.
- (vii) The Spirit told him to go with the men without any apprehension, because He had sent them.
- (viii) And when Peter met them, heard their account of how the angel appeared to Cornelius and how he had told them to send for him, he began to understand something of what the vision meant: the Lord was removing the dietary separation laws because he was intending on bringing the Gentiles now into His kingdom.
- (ix) Peter then invited them in, gave them lodging, and most likely shared a meal with these men, something a good Jew never would have done.

#### B. Preview.

1. Now in our passage we see:
  - a. Peter and six Jews accompany these Gentiles back to Caesarea.
  - b. Cornelius, in the meantime, believing that Peter will come, has gathered his relatives and close friends to receive Peter and the message he’s bringing.
  - c. Then, as they meet, we see they both have the opportunity to confirm to one another how the Lord has brought this meeting about.
2. This morning, we will consider:
  - a. Cornelius’ eager reception of Peter.
  - b. And Cornelius’ eagerness to hear the Gospel.

#### II. Sermon.

##### A. First, let’s consider Cornelius’ eager reception of Peter (vv. 23-29).

1. Peter went with the messengers.
  - a. We’ve already seen how the Lord was working in Peter’s heart to dispose him to go.
  - b. But he also took six brethren with him from Joppa (v. 23; cf. 11:12).
    - (i) He did so either for company or that they might be witnesses, since he was going to visit Gentiles.
    - (ii) Apparently, it wasn’t uncommon in those days for Christians to travel with their ministers so that they might minister to them or be ministered to in the Word by them.
    - (iii) The journey took about a day.
      - (a) Sometimes we forget that most people traveled on foot in those days.
      - (b) Both cities were on the coast, but were 35 miles apart.
2. When Peter arrived, Cornelius was not only waiting for him, he had also called his family and some of his friends together.
  - a. Cornelius was eagerly expecting him – which would have been encouraging to Peter.

- b. But Cornelius had gathered others as well.
  - (i) His family and near friends – remember, Cornelius feared the Lord and did what he could to minister to those around him to encourage them to do the same.
  - (ii) He didn't want to keep this good news to himself; he wanted to share it with those for whom he cared.
  - (iii) Again what a blessing this would be for Peter to find that someone had already gathered a crowd to hear the Gospel.
  - (iv) We see again the evangelistic/missionary thrust again of this book – not only with those who have the Gospel wanting to get it out, but even with those who are waiting to hear it, as they gather those they know together to hear it as well.
  - (v) The Lord wants us to share this treasure with others, and we should want to share it with them.
  - (vi) This account also encourages us that the Lord is able to do whatever is necessary to bring whomever He wishes to Himself.
  
- 3. But something else happened: When Peter entered, instead of greeting him, Cornelius fell down to worship him.
  - a. Perhaps Cornelius was only showing him honor as a great prince or king.
  - b. More likely, he may have thought Peter was a divine being, perhaps the Messiah himself.
  - c. It was certainly wrong for Cornelius to do this, but again it shows us something of his great desire for what the Lord had for him.
  
- 4. Cornelius responded wrongly, but not Peter: Peter, very humbly, would not allow this.
  - a. There are men in the world – such as Sun Myung Moon and others – who want men to think they're very special; even to worship them.
  - b. But not Peter:
    - (i) Peter knew who and what he was, and he knew it would be sin to take glory from his Lord and to give it to himself.
    - (ii) And so he lifted Cornelius up, assuring him that he was a man, just as Cornelius was.
      - (a) Men are not to be worshipped, only God.
      - (b) Point this out next time to a Jehovah's Witness: Righteous men and angels will not receive worship, but Jesus did (Matt. 2:11; 28:9).
      - (c) Peter would not allow Cornelius to believe that he was the treasure: but only the bearer of that treasure.
  - c. And so we see Cornelius' eager reception of Peter.
  
- B. Second, let's consider Cornelius' eagerness to hear the Gospel – which is why he was excited about receiving Peter in the first place: he had a hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God, again, only by the Spirit's working in him (vv. 28-33).
  - 1. First, Peter explained what the Lord had said to him (vv. 28-29).

- a. When Peter entered, he saw many people had gathered there – all of whom were Gentiles.
  - b. And so Peter begins by stating the obvious.
    - (i) “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him” (v. 28).
    - (ii) Peter knew this, but so did Cornelius.
      - (a) Having been around Jews as long as he had, Cornelius knew the Jews were to keep themselves separated from the uncircumcised – which is why we know Cornelius was a God-fearer and not a full proselyte to Judaism.
      - (b) They were not forbidden to speak to them or trade with them, but to eat with and become familiar with them.
      - (c) They were to treat the heathen in much the same way as we are now called to treat the unbeliever – we may talk to them, do business with them, evangelize them, but we are not to partner with them or enter into close relationships with them.
      - (d) We’ve already seen how the Jews who turned Jesus over to Pilate refused to enter into the Praetorium, so that they would be able to eat the Passover (John 18:28).
  - c. But Peter also told them what the Lord had shown him:
    - (i) Namely, that he shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean if the Lord is cleansing them by faith.
    - (ii) In Christ, the ceremonial and separation laws were ended, as we’ve seen.
    - (iii) As Paul tells us in the book of Ephesians, “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (2:13-16).
    - (iv) Christ broke down the middle wall of partition on the cross.
    - (v) Peter now sees this as the meaning of the vision the Lord gave him, which is why he went with the messengers without raising any objections.
    - (vi) Now he was ready to preach the Gospel to them.
2. Then, Peter asked Cornelius why he sent for him.
- a. It wasn’t that Peter hadn’t understood, but that he wanted to know how the Lord had dealt with Cornelius to tell him where to find Peter.
  - b. Cornelius told him about the angel’s appearing to him and ordering him to send for Peter.
    - (i) How four days earlier, he was praying at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), the time of the Temple sacrifice, the Jewish hour of prayer – again remember how the Lord speaks to us in prayer, how more time with the Lord will result in greater blessing and clearer direction.

- (ii) While he was praying, how an angel appeared to him – a man in shining garments – perhaps the radiance of God’s glory and holiness shining from him, as Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2), or as the two angels who appeared at Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:10).
  - (iii) He repeated the angel’s message:
    - (a) Your prayers have been heard, your alms remembered – God had been working in Cornelius’ heart to bring him to Himself; but the light of the Old Covenant wasn’t enough. He needed to hear about Christ.
    - (b) The angel told him that he must send for Peter, who was staying in Joppa at the house of Simon the tanner. He had words by which he and his household would be saved – the Gospel.
  - (iv) And so Cornelius immediately sent for him, and Peter was kind enough to come, showing that as a true servant of God, he was willing to come even to the household of a Gentile.
  - (v) These things would further confirm the meaning of the Lord’s vision to Peter.
3. And so we see here Cornelius’ eagerness to hear the Gospel.
- a. Again, not just for himself, but also for those near and dear to him.
    - (i) While he was waiting for the messengers to return with Peter, Cornelius gathered his family and friends to hear what the Lord had to say to them.
    - (ii) He knew that both his and their salvation depended on this message.
  - b. Peter, at the same time, knew he had a eager audience:
    - (i) Not just bodies filling the seats.
    - (ii) He had their attention: they weren’t there merely to listen, but to hear and obey.
  - c. One last thing to note is what they wanted to hear:
    - (i) They wanted to hear God’s Word: “Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (v. 33).
    - (ii) They didn’t want Peter’s or any man’s opinion: they wanted what God commanded – God’s truth.
    - (iii) This is the commission the Lord has given His ministers:
      - (a) They are not to preach what men want to hear, but they are to speak what God has given them, no matter how it is received by others.
      - (b) On our part, we are to listen and hear God’s Word, and submit to it, even if it isn’t what we wanted to hear.
      - (c) Very often the Lord calls us to do things that are very uncomfortable, but we must be willing to do whatever He directs.
      - (d) He only tells us the things that are right and good for us, so we should not refuse anything He says.
      - (e) This evening, we’ll consider the message Peter brings to them and how these Gentiles were brought savingly to Christ. Amen.