

“The Lord Turns to the Gentiles”
(Acts 10:1-8)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. For the time being, Luke has shifted our attention to Peter:
 - a. With the peace that existed throughout the area and for the church, Peter decides to take advantage of the situation to see how the churches are doing.
 - (i) With the church being in its infancy, it doesn't yet have officers.
 - (ii) And so the apostles took oversight from a central location: Jerusalem.
 - b. As he was traveling, he went down to visit the saints at Lydda:
 - (i) There he found a man who had been bedridden for eight years, but who also had the faith to be healed.
 - (ii) Seeing this, Peter, in the name of Jesus – who has authority over all aspects of the Creation to do as He wills – commands Aeneas to stand up and make his bed.
 - (iii) Immediately he arose, with the result that many came to the Lord.
 - c. This miracle at Lydda alerted the saints at Joppa to the fact that Peter was there, and so they called for him:
 - (i) One of their number – Tabitha, a woman full of faith and good works – had suddenly died.
 - (a) Remember, her good works were the evidences of God's grace in her soul.
 - (b) It moved her with compassion to the poor around her, so she was continually ministering to their needs by providing them with money and making them clothes.
 - (c) When she died, the poor realized that the one who cared for them was gone and so they – as well as the rest of the brethren – mourned her loss and set their hope on God to raise her.
 - (ii) Since they had heard Peter was near, they laid her body in an upper room, and then they sent for him.
 - (a) When he came, the widows all began to give a good testimony about her life, through her handiwork and through their tears.
 - (b) And when Peter had put them all out, he prayed, and turning to the body, he commanded her to rise.
 - (c) After she sat up, Peter helped her to her feet, called for the saints and presented Tabitha to them alive.
 - (d) Again, word spread throughout Joppa and many believed in the Lord.
2. Luke is tracing Peter's steps:
 - a. Certainly to show us the progress of the Gospel as it continues to spread throughout the Jewish population.
 - b. To confirm for us again the truth of the Gospel by recording the miracles God did through the apostles as well as the evidence of changed lives.

- c. And to show us what the Lord was intending to do next as He was moving Peter closer to the Gentiles He was intending to bring to Himself.

B. Preview.

1. This morning:
 - a. We see who it was among the Gentiles the Lord was first intending to save.
 - b. We see Him send an angel to alert Cornelius – a God-fearing Gentile – to the fact Peter is near, and to command him to send for him.
 - c. And we also see something of Cornelius' concern for his soul and for those he ministers to by immediately obeying the angel's commands.
2. Let's consider these things briefly:
 - a. And as we do, let's continue to keep our eyes focused on the Lord's Table.
 - b. We'll see here that though Cornelius feared the Lord – and that only by God's grace – he still could not be saved apart from believing in Jesus Christ.
 - c. As we consider this, let's renew our commitment also to trust and follow Him.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, the Lord begins His work among the Gentiles. “Now *there was* a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the *Jewish* people and prayed to God continually” (Acts 10:1-2).
 1. Now again consider the situation.
 - a. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria had been largely evangelized the second time.
 - (i) First through Christ.
 - (ii) Then through the apostles, Stephen, Philip and others.
 - (iii) However, the Jews as a nation had still rejected their Messiah: judgment was still coming.
 - b. And so the Lord was now turning to the Gentiles, beginning with those closest to Judaism: the God-fearers.
 - (i) He has already converted the apostle to the Gentiles – Paul – whom He'll send to the far reaches of the Roman Empire with the Gospel.
 - (ii) But before He sends Paul, He begins to deal with some of the Gentiles who were living in Judea through Peter.
 - (a) Those who had been strangers and aliens, separated from God and without hope in the world, were about to be brought near, adopted into the family of God and become fellow citizens with the saints and partakers of God's redemptive covenants.
 - (b) Apparently, this was still somewhat of a mystery to the apostles, as evidenced by this account, by Peter's arraignment before the apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 11) and by the Jerusalem counsel (15).
 - (c) It's very likely that some Gentiles had been in the synagogues when the Gospel was being preached and some had been converted; but this is the first time the Lord specifically designs to bring the Gospel to them.
 - (d) The man He begins with is Cornelius.

2. Who was Cornelius?

- a. We know first that he was an officer in Caesar's army.
- (i) Part of this army was quartered in Caesarea, a city which was recently rebuilt and fortified by Herod the Great, and called Caesarea in honor of Augustus Caesar.
 - (a) Caesarea was located on the coast, which made communication with Rome convenient.
 - (b) Ordinarily this is where the Roman Proconsul resided (Acts 23:23, 24; 25:6)m which would explain why the garrison was quartered there.
 - (ii) Cornelius was a centurion:
 - (a) A commander of one hundred men.
 - (b) He was a part of what was called the Italian cohort or regiment, made up of all native Romans/Italians, that the governor might be more certain of their faithfulness.
 - (c) It's interesting that a centurion was singled out in Jesus' ministry as having the greatest faith in all Israel (Matt. 8:10). Here another is singled out to be the first to receive the Lord's mercy as He begins specifically to turn to the Gentiles.
 - (d) The Jews despised these Roman soldiers more than others, since they enforced Rome's dominion over them, and this may be why the Lord begins with them: among the Gentiles – who were hated – they would be among the most hated.
 - (e) Remember, the Lord will use the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 11).
- b. Second, we know Cornelius was a religious man: He was not an idolater.
- (i) He was a godly and devout man who feared God.
 - (a) This means he respected God's authority and was afraid of offending Him through disobedience.
 - (b) He must have learned about the Lord and His will through the Jews, since they were the ones entrusted with the Scriptures (Rom. 9).
 - (c) But he was not circumcised or a full Jew: he was a God-fearer.
 - (ii) His family also feared the Lord:
 - (a) Which shows that he was not only concerned about the state of his own soul, but that of his household.
 - (b) He led them in the ways of the Lord.
 - (iii) He was gracious and merciful:
 - (a) He gave money to those in need – it seems among the Jews.
 - (1) Paul tells us, "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*" (Gal. 6:6).
 - (2) This is what Cornelius did.
 - (b) He also gave himself continually to prayer – his life was characterized by prayer.

- (c) Wherever the fear of the Lord is, there will be the fruits of that fear in acts of charity and prayer.
- (d) Cornelius feared the Lord.

B. Second, we see the Lord send His angel to Cornelius with the command for him to send for Peter: something he never would have done if the angel had not told him. “About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had *just* come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch *some* men to Joppa and send for a man *named* Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner *named* Simon, whose house is by the sea” (vv. 3-6).

1. First we see how the Lord sent message to Cornelius.
 - a. He was told by an angel in a vision:
 - (i) We are told it was at the ninth hour of the day.
 - (ii) The ninth hour was 3:00 p.m., the time of the evening sacrifice at the temple.
 - (iii) It was an hour the Jews observed as an hour of prayer.
 - (iv) Cornelius was connected with the Judaistic system and was also in prayer: Cornelius will say when Peter arrives, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour” (v. 30).
 - b. It was while he was praying an angel came to him.
 - (i) He knew he was an angel because of his shining garments (v. 30).
 - (ii) The angel called him by name to show him that the Lord knows all His creatures – He is omniscient – but also to show him that God had taken notice of him.
 - (iii) When Cornelius saw him, he was alarmed – terrified, afraid:
 - (a) Things we haven’t seen, haven’t experienced before, can generate fear.
 - (b) But it’s particularly fearful to have a holy angel appear not knowing why he is there. (Put yourself in his position).
 - c. Cornelius didn’t want to be left guessing why the angel appeared, and so he asked: “What is it, Lord?”
 - (i) Why are you here?
 - (ii) He wanted to know the truth – are you here for judgment – one who fears God is aware that he has offended Him – or are you here on a mission of mercy?
2. Second, we see the angel’s message:
 - a. The angel told him that God had remembered his prayers and alms.
 - (i) It’s not that Cornelius drew God’s attention through some pious efforts he made in his own strength, through his flesh.
 - (ii) It was that the Lord was already working in his heart to seek Him under the Old Covenant shadows, that Cornelius was seeking the Lord in faith, and that because he had, the Lord was answering his prayers and preparing to give him greater light.

- b. And so now he is to send to Joppa, to ask for Simon, who is also called Peter.
 - (i) He not only tells him the city, but also where Peter is staying, because he wants him to find him.
 - (ii) He is still in the house of Simon the tanner, which is by the sea.
 - (iii) The angel also told him why he should send for Peter:
 - (a) He had a message that Cornelius and his household needed to hear – the messengers will say to Peter, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was *divinely* directed by a holy angel to send for you *to come* to his house and hear a message from you” (v. 22).
 - (b) By this message he would be saved, both he and his household – Peter will report to the apostles at Jerusalem the words Cornelius said the angel spoke, “Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (Acts 11:13-14).
 - (a) Notice that once Christ came, the Old Covenant religion was no longer enough.
 - (b) Cornelius worshipped God under the shadows – he feared, worshipped and served the Lord, but he needed to hear the Gospel to be saved.
 - (c) It’s one thing to believe the promise before it is fulfilled – as those who were saved did in the Old Covenant – but to be saved now, one must believe the fulfillment of that promise.
 - (d) Those who continue to look to the promises and reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah cannot be saved.
 - (e) The Old Covenant service is no longer acceptable to Him, as His removal of it in AD 70 shows.
 - (f) Now to be faithful to God and to be justified in His sight, we must obey His commandment to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - (iv) Notice too regarding the angel that he could only point the way to the messengers of Christ, but not to Christ Himself.
 - (a) Why didn’t the angel just tell Cornelius what he needed to know? Why did he need to send for Peter?
 - (b) It’s because the Lord has entrusted the proclamation of His Gospel to men and not to angels.
 - (c) He has given that honor to His church – we are entrusted with this heavenly treasure (2 Tim. 1:14).
 - (d) Why are we entrusted with this task?
 - (1) Because He desires to magnify His power and grace even more by using such weak and sinful creatures, such as we.
 - (2) When we bring the Gospel to others with the evidence of a transformed life, this brings greater glory to God.
 - (3) The angel could not bring the message, but only show Cornelius where he might find someone who could.

C. Finally, we see Cornelius’ obedience to the angel. “When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his

personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa” (vv. 7-8).

1. Cornelius realized there was something he needed to hear that would save both him and his household, so there was no time to lose.
 - a. When the angel had gone, he immediately called for two of his servants and a soldier from among his personal attendants.
 - b. He explained the situation to them.
 - (i) Since their spiritual condition also depended on Peter’s message, this would encourage them to go quickly and bring him back.
 - (ii) Typically, the servant doesn’t know what his master is doing, but this master told them everything to encourage them in their task.
 - c. Then he sent them on their way.
 - (i) He sent three men who feared the Lord.
 - (ii) He knew the task was important, and he wouldn’t entrust it to anyone else.
 - (iii) The salvation of all their souls depended on their success.
 - (iv) This evening, we’ll see how the Lord prepared Peter for their arrival.

2. As I mentioned earlier, this should remind us of two things:
 - a. First, we need Jesus Christ as He is offered to us through the Gospel.
 - (i) No matter how good we think we are, no matter how many good works we think we have done, no matter how long we’ve been in a church, or even if we don’t think we need to be a part of a church, no one is saved apart from the grace of God offered in Christ.
 - (ii) If you believe yourself to be safe from hell but aren’t trusting in, loving and following Jesus Christ here this morning, you must trust in Him now.
 - (iii) And for those of you who do, remember how much you need Him as you come to the table.
 - (a) If you could have saved yourself through your works, Jesus wouldn’t have needed to die (Gal. 2:21).
 - (b) But you couldn’t, so He went to the cross.
 - (c) The Table reminds us of our need of Jesus this morning.
 - b. Second, let’s not forget the same applies to those around us.
 - (i) As Cornelius didn’t waste time sending for Peter for his sake and for the sake of those around him, let’s be careful not to waste time and opportunity as well.
 - (ii) We only have so much time, so many opportunities to tell others about Jesus before our lives are finished – let’s redeem those opportunities, buy them up for God’s glory in getting the Gospel out to our family, our loved ones and our neighbors, before our time is gone, and they are lost forever. Amen.
 - (iii) Now let’s prepare to come to the Lord’s Table.