

Cornelius: A Case of Conversion

Acts 10-11

Introduction:

1. Scripture reading: Acts 10:1
2. In this we have presented to us another case of conversion. I would like for us to examine this conversion using the following plan:
 - 1) First, we wish to observe the man himself, before his conversion; and
 - 2) Secondly, to trace out what was done for him, and what was done by him, up to the time that he was rejoicing as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Man Cornelius Before Conversion

- A. Here we have a very interesting description of what would be called, in our modern phraseology, an unconverted man. He was a soldier in an army generally composed of heathen, cruel men. He was an officer with the rank of centurion, e.i, he had 100 men under him.
 1. He was over the Italian regiment-- probably the regiment that was responsible for the safety of the provincial governor. If so, Cornelius was one of the most influential officers in Palestine. He was an officer of good report.
 2. But we are also told that he was "*a devout man*" -- a very remarkable circumstance for an officer in a heathen army. And lest we might conclude that he was a devout pagan-worshipper, it is added, that "*he feared God with all his house.*"
 - a. This shows that he was not only a devout worshipper of the true God himself, but that he had brought up his whole family in the same religious habits.
 - b. This expression that "*he feared God with all his house*" includes his servants; because it is said further on that he called to him "*two of his devout servants.*"
 - c. Here was a man then of great religious zeal.
 3. He was not one of those worshippers of God, so common in the world, who forget the needs of the poor. For we are told in the next place, that "*he gave much alms to the people.*"
 - a. The people mentioned here are Jewish people. He was in authority over the Jewish people in the city of Caesarea, and He gave much alms to them-- a benevolent man.
 4. But this is not all: you will find many men today who are benevolent, very benevolent, but who have no religious character whatsoever. They have been brought up to have a kind disposition, perhaps from good, pious fathers and mothers; they have been brought up from childhood to have pity for the poor and distressed.
 - a. But in addition to this man's benevolence, we are told that he "*prayed to God always*" -- he was a praying man.
 - b. He was a man of good report among all the nations of the Jews (10:22).
 5. Let us put all these statements together and see what kind of a character we have: a devout man who feared God with all his house, including his servants; who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God regularly, habitually.
 - a. This is the man whose conversion to the Lord we are about to study. But perhaps you are ready to ask, "What conversion did he need? What changes were needed in his life?"

- b. This is a legitimate question, and I hope you will keep it in mind-- for later in the lesson we will come to the answer. What change was needed by this man in order to become a Christian in the true sense of the word.
- B.** His character already puts to shame a great many of those who profess to be good Christians; but before we see the answer to our question, I wish you would look at this case from another point of view.
- 1. I know a great many men who are so good already, though out of Christ, that they have no fears about the future. They will tell you how honest they are; how truthful they are; how prompt to pay every debt and fulfil every responsibility to their family; they try to be good husbands and fathers, good neighbors and citizens; and that they even do their share of providing for the needs of the poor in their community.
 - a. And they said, "I can't see what there is for me to fear." And so they are content to live and die as they are.
 - 2. Now if there should be one of this class here this service, man or woman, I ask you to place your portrait along side that of Cornelius, and see which of you give a better appearance-- which of you stands higher in the scale of excellence.
 - 3. He was a devout man; he gave much alms to the people, he feared God; and his whole family, including servants, did the same, and he prayed to God continually.
 - a. If **that** man needed to hear words by which he might be saved, don't you need something of the same kind?
 - b. If that man did hear such words, wouldn't it be wise for you to listen to those same words that you might have the salvation of your soul as well?

After all that is said about the excellent character of Cornelius, Cornelius knew that he was a sinner. Cornelius had never approached God in the appointed way to secure the forgiveness of a single sin; because he didn't know how.

- 1. There are many good men and women in this city today who are sinners and don't know how to approach God for forgiveness.

II. What Cornelius Needed

- A.** Let us look at this case and see what this man really needed in order that he might stand complete in Christ, as a disciple of the Lord, ready for death and eternity. (Verse 3)
- 1. According to his custom, he was praying at the ninth hour of the day, or 3 PM, one of his regular hours of prayer.
 - a. Notice it was not just before he went to bed, when he might be too sleepy to pray fervently; nor at some leisure house, but in the middle of the afternoon he had an appointed hour of prayer which he didn't neglect.
 - 2. As he was praying-- we can see, and he could see afterwards-- God chose that very moment to begin to make up what he lacked in being a Christian. How similar to the case of the Ethiopian Treasurer. The Ethiopian was riding along in his chariot, reading the book of Isaiah, studying the prophet's words about the death of the Lord Jesus, which he could not understand, just at that moment God brings the preacher to the side of his chariot, to show him the way of salvation.

3. Now this man was earnestly praying to the invisible God and God had heard his prayers, and remembered his giving of alms; for God, by friends, never forgets one good thing we do, even if it is nothing more than giving a cup of water to one of his disciples.
4. Just then an angel stands visible before Cornelius in the room. How beautiful these creatures must be! He says, "*Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*" (V. 4)
 - a. Now when we hear the angel say this, we remember again the question we raised a while ago: If this man has led such a life, and this angel's message is true, what more does he need?
 - b. Cornelius must yet be lacking something, for the angel does not stop with telling him that his prayers and his alms had gone up for a memorial before God, but he adds, "*Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose sur-name is Peter. He lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side, that you may hear words from him.*"
 - 1) When the story is retold in the next chapter it is expressed this way, "*That you may hear words by which you and your house may be saved.*"
 - 2) So Cornelius had yet to hear a message by which he might be saved.
- C. Cornelius was a very prompt man. I like a man who does not dilly-dally about things-- who goes right to work. It was now past the middle of the afternoon, but he called two of his devout servants and a devout soldier, and he told these three men all that the angel had said, and started them to Joppa.
 1. They could not get there that night, but they got there the next day about noon. From the state of the church then, it would appear that these men were on a hopeless errand; for up till this time, no uncircumcised person had ever been preached the gospel.
 2. Normally Peter would have said, "No, I can't go with you." But God sent a vision to Peter on the house-top of Simon's house and persuaded Peter to go along with these men. And he did so the next day, taking some six Jewish brethren of Joppa with him.
 3. They got to the house of Cornelius about the same time of day that they had started for Joppa; and when Cornelius saw them coming he went out and fell down at the feet of Peter, to do him homage as a messenger from God. But Peter said, "*Stand up, I myself, also am a man.*"
- D. While the three men were on their journey, Cornelius, knowing the time it would take to go to Joppa and come back, had invited to his house a large number of his kinsmen and friends.
 1. Peter, on coming in, said" "*You know that it is un lawful for me to go into the house of a man of another nation: but God hath shown me that I should not call any man unclean. With what intend did you send for me?"* (Vs.28-29)
 2. Cornelius stated the facts and then said; "*We are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee by the Lord.*" (Acts 10:33) Oh, what an audience!
- E. Then Peter opened his mouth and said, "*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him*" (10:34-35).

Appropriate introduction.

1. Then he went on to preach to his audience the Word which God send, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. "*That word,*" he says, "*you know.*" (v.36-37). They were not ignorant of it. They had

- lived there in Palestine. They had heard it over and over again in the last few years. Every hill and valley had rung with it.
2. The word how that Jesus went about doing good; how the Jews took Him and slew him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead, and commanded his apostles to preach the good news unto the people, and to testify of Him, that whosoever believeth on Him shall receive the remission of sins-- shall be saved.
 3. The defect in Cornelius and his friends was not that they had not heard of Jesus-- that they had not heard the whole story of his birth, burial, and resurrection. It was something else and we shall discover it shortly.
- F.** While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his house, as it had come on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and they began to speak in other tongues, praising God.
1. That was a surprise to Peter and the six Jews who had come with him from Joppa.
 2. Peter finished his sermon and said to the six Jews, "*Who shall forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.*" And that is the end of the story.
- G.** We can now see that there was just one thing added to that good man so far as his intellect was concerned; there was added the information that it was his privilege, as well as that of the Jews, to become a member of the Lord's Church.
1. And so far as his actions or conduct was concerned, all that he was required to do, was to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 2. I tell you, my good friends, there are many good people this morning who do not need to be told to repent-- for they are striving to live god-fearing lives already. They are praying people and people who "*fear God with all their house.*"
 - a. And yet they lack the same action that Cornelius lacked in order to stand as they ought to stand.
 - b. The words of Peter to Cornelius are applicable to all such good people today-- "*And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*"
- H.** Perhaps someone in the audience is ready to say to me, "But preacher, Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before he was baptized. Shouldn't we too wait until we have received the Holy Spirit and then be baptized?"
1. First, let me say that Cornelius certainly did receive the Holy Spirit in a miraculous measure as the apostles on Pentecost before he was baptized in water.
 - a. Cornelius and his house spoke in other tongues with the Holy Spirit.
 2. But you say you should wait for Holy Spirit baptism before water baptism, why not also say you should wait to see an angel before being baptized? Cornelius saw one.
 - a. Of course we see that seeing an angel is not a required prerequisite to being baptized. Neither is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 3. If you will look closely at this text you will find why that miracle was worked on Cornelius-- that it was not for a change in him, but for the instruction, or the benefit, of Peter and those Jews, and the ones to whom he would relate this conversion.

- a. God uses this miracles to convince the Jews that an uncircumcised man should be dealt with as the circumcised; for "*In every nation, he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted to him.*"
- b. This miraculous gift of the Spirit, then, was not intended to work a change in Cornelius and his friends, but to make it plain to everyone that the Gentiles had the privilege of entering the kingdom on the same terms with the Jews.
 - 1) It settled the question forever: and as no one has since denied this right of the Gentiles, no one else has received the Holy Spirit as Cornelius did before baptism.

CONCLUSION:

1. Cornelius had indirectly promised to be prompt in obeying the Lord, whenever he should learn what he had to do; and now he fulfills his pledge, and goes on his way rejoicing.
 - a. He knows now that his sins are all blotted from God's remembrance, and they are the same as if they had never been.
2. I would like to see that good man--and I expect too one day-- I want to see him and have a good long talk with him. I'm going to ask him, "Cornelius, we don't know anything about you after your baptism, and I would like to know how you got along."
 - a. I think I know what his answer will be, something like this: "Well, I was a devout man before the apostle baptized me, but I was more devout afterwards. I taught my household; I have alms to the people before I became a Christian; I prayed to God regularly and constantly before, but I prayed with more love and more zeal, with deeper satisfaction to my soul, all the rest of my days."
 - b. I hope that this will be his story, and I'm sure that it will be. It will be grand to hear about the influence he had on others through the rest of his life and how many others were brought to Christ by his discipleship.
3. My friend this morning, it doesn't mater how good you are, if you are outside of Christ you will be lost. Will you be a prompt as Cornelius was in obeying the Lord? Come to christ now!