

Lectures on the life of Peter

Part 11

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] Let us turn to Acts chapter 10.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people and prayed to God all way. He saw in a vision, evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming into him and saying unto him, Cornelius, and when he had looked on him he was afraid and said, what is it Lord? And he said unto him, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for memorial before God, and now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. He lodges with one Simon at Panos, whose house is by the seaside. He shall tell me what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which [00:01:01] spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called through his household servants and the devout soldier of them that waited on him continually, and when he had declared all these things unto them he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow as they went on their journey and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house of the prey about the sixth hour, and he became very hungry and would have eaten, but while they made ready he fell into a trance and saw heaven open, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheep nipped at the four corners and led down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything [00:02:01] that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that called not thou common. This was done twice, and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore and get thee down and go with them. Doubt him nothing, for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius, and said, Behold, I and he whom ye seek, what is the cause wherefore ye come? And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, [00:03:01] was warned from God by a holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he the men and lodged them, and on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." Now we'll read just down to verse 23 now and read a little further as we go along. As you see, this is the chapter that gives us the conversion of Cornelius.

The conversion of Cornelius is something of very special interest to we who are descendants of

Europeans.

That is, as we were saying this afternoon, when the nations were divided after the flood [00:04:02] and the three great branches of the human race descended from Noah, we find that it was the that Europe was settled by the descendants of Japheth, what we usually speak of as the white race. And Africa was peopled by the descendants of Ham, which is usually referred to as the black race. And Asia was peopled by the descendants of Shem. The Jews and the Arabs and all of those oriental peoples were descended from Shem. So we have Europe, Asia, and Africa peopled in the main by the descendants of Noah's three sons. Now those of us who are of Japheth's race, we find this chapter of special interest because this is the first instance in, [00:05:03] after the gospel was preached on the day of Pentecost, that we have a man from Europe accepting the gospel. Chapter eight is of special interest to the descendants of Ham because there we get the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch, which is the first instance we have of one of Ham's descendants being converted. And as we said this afternoon, after Stephen was stoned, it seems that the Lord then made it plain that he was leaving Israel.

They had refused the testimony that God had given from the day of Pentecost right up to that time, it's thought to be about seven years, that God gave the nation of Israel an opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. And when they stoned Stephen, they really said the same to the Holy Spirit as they had said to the Lord Jesus when he was here, we don't want you. [00:06:01] When Christ came, they crucified him. Now when God sent the Holy Spirit down, they couldn't crucify the Holy Spirit, but they stoned the man who was full of the Holy Spirit, that was Stephen. Then God turns to the whole world. He turns to whomever. So we get Eunuch converted, we get Saul converted, and here we have in this chapter the conversion of Cornelius.

Now this Cornelius apparently was of a high Roman family. He was a centurion in the Roman army that was stationed in Palestine at that time, because we must remember that this was the time of the height of the Roman Empire. Rome was ruled by the Caesar, I mean the empire was ruled by Caesar in Rome, and every part of the empire had its governors and its judges that were sent out there from Rome. And every part of the empire had an army of occupation to keep the local people in [00:07:03] order. And Cornelius was one of these men. He was a centurion. He was perhaps what we would call today a colonel, a man who was high up in the army. And only those of the nobility in Rome occupied those high positions. It was not possible in the Roman Empire for anyone to work his way up through the ranks to a position like that. A soldier who was just an ordinary soldier, he remained that, perhaps with very few exceptions. The officers of the army all came out of the higher ranks of the nobility of the high society in Rome. Such was this man Cornelius. Now it says he was a devout man.

That means he was a man who had a fear of God. He was a man who prayed to God, it says. It doesn't say [00:08:01] that he accepted the Jewish religion, but it does say that he had a very good rapport among the Jews. That is, the godly Jews who were in those areas, as they saw this Gentile, who they could see was not one of the ordinary kind that was just living to have a good time in the world, and that's like a lot of the soldiers of that time that didn't behave themselves very well and got into trouble. He was not of that type at all. He was an upright living man, and he had a good testimony. And apparently he was seeking the light. He was trying to be faithful to the light that he had, and he was seeking more, and he was praying to God. It says about him here that he feared God with all his heart.

And you know, when the Bible speaks about the household of a person, it not only means a man's

family, it means his servants. A man in his position would no doubt have a number of household [00:09:01] servants. There would be a servant girl to help his wife. If he had children, he would have perhaps more than one servant girl there to help his wife in the house. And if he had a little piece of land, he would have servants there to help him on that. And it seems that he gave such a good testimony that everyone who worked in his home had come under this influence and was a person that feared God. It says that he had a devout soldier. One of the soldiers who was under him was a devout man. That means he was a man who had a fear of God. And so this man was really seeking the truth. He was acting up to the light that he had. You know, dear friends, that's a very important thing. God is not going to hold us responsible for the light that we don't have, but he does hold us responsible for the light that we do have. Sometimes when we talk to people about the gospel, and they don't want to accept it, and they want to put up an argument, they say, well, what about the heathens out in some other countries that have never heard the [00:10:07] gospel? What about the people in the middle of Africa that no one's ever gone to? Or way out in some of the tribes down in South America that no one's ever gone to with the gospel? What about them? Well, my answer for those people is, you don't need to worry about them. You need to worry about yourself. God will take care of them. God will judge them according to the light that they have. If they don't have the light of the gospel, at least they have the light of creation. If they fall down and worship an idol of wood and stone, they know that an idol made of wood and stone didn't create them, and didn't create the sun, and didn't create the trees and the things they see around them. They must know that some higher power has created these things. So God will hold them responsible for the light that they have. He won't hold them responsible for the light that they don't have. But God holds you and me responsible for the light that we have, and we have much more [00:11:06] light. We live in the land of an open Bible. We live in a land where the gospel is preached on street corners, where people hand out text for people to read, where we can turn on the radio and listen to the gospel being preached, where we have every opportunity, where the laws of our land are based largely on the word of God, where we have liberty. Yes, we have many, many things that we have that we can give God thanks for, and that God will hold us responsible for. We live in a land where in God we trust is written on our coins, even, to remind people of God.

And of course we have people that want to take that off because they don't want to think of God. And we live in a land where the founding fathers were so oppressed in the old countries, not having liberty of religion, that they made that one of the cornerstones of the new republic, that there [00:12:03] should be complete liberty. And now people have gone to the other extreme, and instead of making it that there's liberty to worship God, they want to make it that it's liberty not to worship God if they don't want it. And I'm sure the founding fathers never had that in their minds. When they spoke about the liberty of religion, they never intended that that should be liberty for people to leave God out of their lives, because that is just going to take people down to a lost eternity. So you see, we're responsible for the life that we have. Now this man was living up to the life that he had, and it says he prayed to God always, and he gave much much alms to the people. That means he was liberal in giving to those who were in need.

Alms giving, that is helping those who are in need, is looked upon in scripture as a proof of a righteous person, a person who is seeking to please God, who just doesn't close up his heart [00:13:04] to the needs around him. This is a very important thing for us Christians to realize that that we should always be thinking of the needs of others and how we can help others. Now the Lord was about to answer this man's prayer, and so he causes him, it says, to have a vision. He saw in a vision, verse three, says evidently about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming into him and saying to him, Cornelius. Now the ninth hour of the day would be in our time three o'clock in the afternoon. You

see, the day at that time, they counted the day starting at six o'clock in the morning, the third hour was nine o'clock, the sixth hour was twelve o'clock, the ninth hour was three o'clock. Three o'clock in the afternoon, and he's apparently finished his day's work and he's resting in his house, [00:14:04] and he has a vision, probably went off to sleep, and God gives him a vision. God speaks like this sometimes. You know, many times we have dreams and we have, perhaps we think we have visions, and it's just there's no meaning to these things. But there are times when God speaks, even through a dream. There have been some special cases, even in our days, when God has given definite message in a dream, definite warning to people. And the Lord was about to answer this man's prayer, so he saw an angel of God coming into him in his vision, and he says, Cornelius, he says, and he says, what is it, Lord? He recognized the angel as a superior being. He recognized that this was the Lord speaking to him. He said, by prayers of mine arms I come up for memorial before God. God has heard your prayer, Cornelius. God has seen your heart, and God has noticed that you're a man who's in earnest and that you want to do what's right, and he's going to answer your prayer. He says, send men to Joppa and call for one Simon whose [00:15:08] surname is Peter. Now, he noticed this afternoon that after Peter had been serving the Lord there in the flames of Sharon, and after the daughters had been raised from the dead, it says, it came to pass that he carried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. I don't know how many of you know anything about tanneries, but a tannery isn't a very pleasant place to be around. A tannery is a place where they tan the hides of animals, and I tell you, the smell is very pleasant around the tannery. Well, Simon Peter was lodging there in the house of this Simon.

They tell me that right there in Joppa, because the Joppa of the Bible is Joppa, the port of Joppa in Palestine, in the land of Israel, that there are still tanneries right there by the seaside [00:16:02] that apparently have existed all these hundreds of years and still are a place where they tan hides, and this Simon the tanner apparently was a believer, and Simon Peter decided to stay there with him. Now, why do you think Peter was staying in the house of this Simon the tanner? Was he staying there because he wanted a nice place to stay at? He was staying there, I believe, because he wanted to be a help to Simon. Peter sought the Lord's mind. Peter sought to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and you know, sometimes in the Lord's work, you don't do things just because it's nice and just because it pleases you. You do things because it pleases the Lord, and the Word of God tells us that even Christ pleased not himself. You know, we live in a day when people just want to please themselves, and sad to say, this even infects Christians, and you find a lot of people just wanting to do what pleases themselves, instead of asking, is this something that pleases the Lord? [00:17:01] It wasn't a very pleasant thing to live there without constant smell of the tannery. Perhaps Peter got used to it after he was there a while, but anyhow, there he was in the house of Simon the tanner, and it was a little journey away, perhaps to go way up to this place where this Cornelius was, and so when the angel said, will you send to Joppa and ask for the house, and ask for Simon Peter, he's lodged in the house of Simon the tanner. So it says that immediately Cornelius was seven, and when the angel which speaks to Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and he thus told them that they were going continually, and when he had declared all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa. Two of his servants, and a godly soldier, he sends the three of them off. You take a journey and go there to Joppa, and inquire for Simon, [00:18:03] and tell him to come, because God tells me that he has a message for me. So off they go.

It took them a couple of days to get there. They started off apparently that afternoon, and I suppose they lodged somewhere for the night, and next day they get to Joppa, because they would have to walk in those days. Now the Lord has prepared Cornelius for the visit of Peter. Now the Lord has to prepare Peter to go to Cornelius, because you know Peter was a Jew, and in the Old Testament, the

Lord had forbidden the Jews to have social relationships with the Gentiles. They had to be a separate people. It was wrong for them to eat with the Gentiles. It was wrong for them to eat some of the food that the Gentiles ate. God had given them very strict laws that they weren't to eat any of the food, any pork or anything of the pig. They weren't to eat [00:19:08] of anything except the animals that chewed the cud and had the cloven hoof. They weren't to eat fish that didn't have scales, and the birds the Lord gives quite a list there in the Tent of Leviticus as the unclean birds that they were not to eat. They were only to eat clean animals, clean birds, and clean fish, because these were just good dietary laws, good sanitary laws for a person that didn't have inspection of food, such as we have today. But also, as far as the social contact was concerned, God wanted Israel to be a separate people for himself. But now, since Israel has refused the gospel, and God's going to send the gospel out worldwide, he was taking away these restrictions. And Peter would have to go to a house of a Gentile and probably eat the Gentile food, which was different food to what he'd been used to, [00:20:03] and also to remember that God was going to save Gentiles. The Gentiles were now not to be looked on as unclean, but as those that can be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus, just the same as the Jews. God was now dealing with the whole human race on one level, without distinction of race, color, creed, or anything else. God was taking now up man as a sinner, and seeking to bring him to see his need of a savior, and to put his trust in the Lord Jesus. Well, it's getting near 12 o'clock. It's the sixth hour, getting near 12 o'clock. And apparently, in this house of Simon the Tanner, where the servants and the ladies of the house are getting the meal ready. And Peter wants to make good use of the time. While he's waiting, he goes up on the house, stops to pray. You know, they have those flat-roofed houses, there's a place there where they would go up to pray there, to be quiet. So Peter goes up on the [00:21:04] house, stops to pray. And while he prays, he falls into a trance, kind of a dream. And he gets very hungry. And it says, he fell into this trance, and he saw heaven open, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheep knitted the four corners and let down to the earth. And in this great sheep, with all manner it says, are four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. There were wild beasts, four-footed beasts, the kind of animals that people usually eat, and the kind of animals that people don't usually eat. And there were reptiles, and they were forbidden altogether to the Jews, creeping things, lady snakes, fowls of the air, birds of different kinds. And then [00:22:03] he heard a voice, rise Peter, kill and eat. And he knew that this was the Lord speaking to him. No Lord, he said, I've never eaten anything common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, what thou dost cleanse, that call not thou common. And it says this was done three times. I believe it means that three times the Lord says to Peter, kill and eat. And three times the voice said, what God has cleansed, that call not thou common. And you know, the Bible says a three-fold cord in the book of Ecclesiastes isn't quickly broken. And the vessel was retrieved up, and Peter apparently woke up from his trance, and he's wondering to himself, now what does this mean? What's the meaning of this, of this vision that I've had? And while he's thinking this, the Holy Spirit speaks to him. You know, he does to [00:23:05] us sometimes. Sometimes we really feel as if the Lord himself is speaking to us, the Holy Spirit is speaking to our hearts. Peter, three men are down there looking for you. Go down, don't have anything, and go with them. And this was such a strong conviction with Peter, that these men, when he got down to the gate, threw it up. There were three men who arrived at the house, and they said, is a man named Simon Peter living here? Yes, this is the house. So Peter goes out, he says, what do you want? And they tell him about how the Lord had spoken to Cornelius.

So Peter there immediately saw the answer to his vision, to his sheep, that he had to go to the house of this Gentile to tell him the way of salvation. So Peter invites them in, and they put up for the night, and the next day they go off to the house of Cornelius. [00:24:01] Now, what's Cornelius doing in the meantime? Ah, that's lovely to see what Cornelius is doing. It says, as we come down now to verse

24, and the morrow after they entered into Caesarea, that is the next day they went off, Peter and those were with him, and Peter took several with him also. He took several, certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him, it says. He saw he was a very wise man. He took witnesses from among the Jewish people there who could see what was going to be done to testify. So there's quite a company of them. About six men went with him, and then these three that had gone, and Peter, and they arrived in Caesarea, and Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. Cornelius hadn't been idle. As soon as he sent off these servants to go and get Peter, [00:25:07] he gets around among his relatives and among his close friends. No doubt he'd spoken to them about the things of God, and they knew what his testimony was, and they too were seeking something that they hadn't found yet. So Cornelius gets his house full. He gets all these people to come, and they're all gathered there waiting, expecting the arrival of this man who's going to tell them how to be saved. You know that must have been a lovely audience. I heard a brother say once when he was speaking on this, he said, these people in that house of Cornelius, they must have been like a nest full of little birds. You know how the little birds wait with their mouths wide open for the mother or father bird to come and pop the worms in? Well, that's what those people must have been like. They were just waiting for someone to come and tell them the truth. They were looking for something. Oh, if we had more people like that today. You know, we live in a day of great indifference. [00:26:05] We live in a day of great apathy. People don't care whether they're right with God or whether they're not right with God. They just don't care. I hope there are none like that here tonight. I hope there's no person in this room tonight that just doesn't care. We need to care. These people cared. They were looking for something. They were dissatisfied. They were unsatisfied. They hadn't received what God wanted to give them because they didn't know about it. And now God's service was coming. The Apostle Peter. They'd probably never heard of Peter before, but they had heard something about Jesus, but they didn't know the meaning of his crucifixion. So Peter's coming, God's service, to explain it all to them. And Cornelius says, when Peter came in, well, first of all, when Peter came in, Cornelius fell down to worship him. You notice that? It says, verse 25, as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. [00:27:03] You know, I was speaking on this once to a converted Italian, and he says, well, isn't that a remarkable thing? He says, that is the idolatrous thing in my country still, that we worship creatures instead of God. And he says, it was right away back in that time that this Italian man falls down before Peter. So what does Peter do? Peter took him up, says, stand up. I myself also am a man. Peter wasn't going to receive worship. No, I'm a man just the same as you are. It's God that we've got to give the worship to, not to give the worship to men. And as he talked with him, went in and found that many were there come together. And then Peter explained all about this vision that he had. And finally, it says down there in verse... And then Cornelius explains what happened to him, and it says there in verse 33, [00:28:02] immediately therefore, I sent to thee, and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God? You're all here, we're just waiting to listen to what you tell us. What does Peter tell us? We get it, and I'll just read here what he says. 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 accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. That word, I say, ye know which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they flew and hanged on a [00:29:03] tree. But God raised him up the third day and showed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And commanded us to preach unto

the people and to justify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of the living and the dead. To him give all the prophets witness that his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. You notice what Peter preached? He preached Christ. He told them about the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And how that when the Lord rose from the dead, he sent the apostles out to preach and to say that he's the one who's going to be the judge of the living and the dead. And that those who accepted him as their savior would receive forgiveness of sins. You see, we've [00:30:04] noticed as we've gone through the Acts, Peter, whenever he preached, he always preached on this theme. When he preached to the Jews, he stressed the fact of the life of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, right through. He stressed the very great importance of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he says to them, you know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth. This was common knowledge that the Lord had spent three and a half years in ministry. But you see, the Lord in his three and a half years was not sent to the Gentiles. That is, he didn't go to them. He was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That was his mission. The mission, the works of the Gentiles as we get it here, was to be after the Lord had died. The Lord came and presented himself to Israel [00:31:09] as a nation, and they rejected him. Now the gospel is going out to the Gentiles. And although these Gentiles have heard something about Jesus, they didn't know the import of it. They think, well, this is some, he was a good Jew that the Jews got their jealous of, and they crucified him. Maybe that's all he knew. But Peter's explaining the meaning of it. Peter's explaining that he just didn't come for the Jews. He came for Gentiles. He came to save souls. He came to save everybody. And so he says to him, give all the prophets witness, even the Old Testament prophets, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive forgiveness of sins. Whosoever.

What does the word whosoever mean? Someone was asked that question once, and you know what they said? [00:32:04] Why, they said, that means you, or me, or anybody else. That's what whosoever means. Whosoever.

Whosoever will may come, the word says. Whosoever believes shall receive forgiveness of sins. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Someone might say to Nigel, wasn't this already a saved man? Why is it that he was to hear words whereby he would be saved? Didn't God answer his prayer? Does God answer the prayer of people that are not believers? Well, that's a good question.

The point is, you see, this man was acting up to the light that he had. He was acting up to the light that he had. He was faithful according to what he knew, and God was giving him the full light. [00:33:04] Now we live in a day when the full light of the gospels come out, although it may be that we could find people even in this country that are in a similar condition to Cornelius, that they've heard a very defective gospel, and they don't understand, and they've never really heard what we rightly call the full gospel. That is the gospel of a full and free salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they hear it, and it really comes home to them, if they really earn a seeking soul, they'll accept it. That was what this meant. He was faithful to the light that he had, and he was looking to God for giving more light, and God gave him more light. God always gives light where there's a seeker looking for light, and that's what Cornelius found. Why it says that while people were speaking these words, everyone in that room believed it. For those soul-prepared souls, not only Cornelius, but all of his friends, the whole house full, and it says the Holy Spirit. [00:34:06] While people yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the words, and they of the circumcision, that is those of those Jews who went with Peter, which believed were astonished, as many as came with

Peter, because upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yes, why they did. This is a marvelous thing. God is allowing the Gentiles to come in to bless them. This was something completely different to what they'd been used to. A complete turn about face to what had happened in the Old Testament.

The gospel was going out to Gentiles, and God gave them, caused them to speak in tongues the same as he caused the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and he caused this to happen here to prove to them that it was the same Holy Spirit that these people had received. And when [00:35:03] Peter says that, he says, can any man forbid water that he should not be baptized as well as we? Why, they've got a right to be outwardly received into the Christian profession.

They've got a right to be admitted into the kingdom of God. You see, Peter is using the keys. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and the first Jews were saved, and those 3,000 were baptized, Peter was using the key that the Lord gave him. He said he was giving the key to the kingdom of heaven, and Peter admitted the Jews the first time. Now he's using the other key to admit the Gentiles. God gave Peter that privilege. Paul was the one who became the apostle to explain the truth of the church, but Peter was the one who was chosen to admit them, the first ones, to let the first ones in as they were officially. Peter opened the door, and you know when the key's been used and the door's open, you don't need the key anymore. [00:36:04] And so you see, once the Gentiles were admitted, then the gospel continued on to the salvation of souls right down to our day. So this is the message that we have in this chapter. And dear friends, tonight, if there's one here still unsaved, may God cause you to receive the message that Cornelius and his household received, and to put your trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior. And if you do that, you will receive forgiveness of sins. You will have eternal life.

You will have the Lord as the one with you. You'll have God. God's Holy Spirit will indwell you, and will give you the power of the Christian life to go on and serve the Lord faithfully until he comes to take you home.