

## Acts 10:34-38

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak: “Now I really am beginning to understand that God does not show favoritism, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup>He sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

<sup>37</sup>“You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. <sup>38</sup>God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him.

## Good News of Peace

### I.

Sometimes a person just needs to hear things straight from the horse’s mouth, so to speak. An eyewitness account is invaluable. This military man, living in a foreign country, had learned many things about the culture he was living in. He had studied their history. It seemed that there were some recent events that would all gel perfectly with what he had learned of the nation’s past history.

There were just some things that needed further clarification. The best way to get that clarification was from someone who had been close to the events that had transpired—someone who had seen it all. Just a little interview would go such a long way to further the military man’s understanding.

There were some hurdles to clear, however. It is not unusual for the local population to want nothing to do with members of a foreign military living in their midst. The people of *this* particular culture took that even further. They really didn’t want anything to do with foreigners at all—military or non-military.

Even so, some correspondence was in order. He couldn’t send an email; not because that was too insecure a means of communication, but because the eyewitness whose information he sought didn’t have an email address. He didn’t even have a phone. The postal service was nonexistent, really, so the only way was to send a personal courier with the message.

In fact, the military man was following the instructions he had received in a vision. An angel told Cornelius: “Now send men to Joppa to get a man named Simon, who is called Peter” (Acts 10:5, EHV).

Cornelius had been learning all about the culture and the religion of the people he was living among in Caesarea. He was what the Jewish people called a “righteous Gentile.” He had learned the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. He had abandoned the gods of his own people and had been converted to the God of the people his own nation was occupying.

Cornelius had read Moses and the Prophets. He had not yet become a full Gentile convert to Judaism, but he was trying to worship the One true God in the best way he knew.

Perhaps he had some questions, like: “What must I do to be right with God?” That would be a question lots of Jewish believers would also ask themselves.

Beyond the typical questions about Judaism there had been some confusing stories going around. The proof that he had heard some of those confusing stories is related when Peter said in the words of today’s text: “You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached” (Acts 10:37, EHV).

News about Jesus’ teaching and miracles had been widely circulated. He had heard the story about Jesus being anointed by the Holy Spirit when John the Baptist baptized him. Cornelius was even aware of the story about Jesus dying on the cross. But there were conflicting reports about what happened to his body. There were also conflicting reports about the followers of Jesus still preaching in his Name.

He absolutely wanted to know more from someone who had been an eyewitness. Cornelius sent his envoys to find Simon Peter to ask him to come and explain more. He might have been unwilling to ask if it hadn't been for the angel telling him to do it.

As Cornelius would have known, Peter might have been reluctant to come, except that he also received a vision. Three times Peter was given a vision that instructed him to kill and eat animals that had been declared unclean in God's Ceremonial Law which governed the worship of the Jewish people.

Perhaps the vision was given repeatedly because of Peter's notorious stubbornness; it might have taken some doing to finally convince him that God's Ceremonial Law was no longer in effect for Christians. God had to punctuate his vision to Peter by saying: "What God has made clean, you must not continue to call unclean" (Acts 10:15, EHV).

When he got to Cornelius' house, Peter actually went inside! Something that would have been unthinkable in his not-so-distant past. He told Cornelius and all those who were gathered: "You understand how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to associate with or visit anyone who is not a Jew. But God showed me that I should no longer continue to call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>That is why I came without objection when you sent for me" (Acts 10:28-29, EHV).

## II.

I wonder sometimes how much we are like the old-style Peter—the one before God showed him this vision. After the resurrection of Jesus, Peter had been bold to speak about his Lord and Savior. Fearlessly he stood and addressed the Pentecost crowd. Nothing would make him back down; not even the taunts and jeers fired at him and the other disciples that maybe they were drunk. In fact, that just seemed to add fuel to the fire in his soul that led him to preach a powerful sermon that told his fellow Jews that Jesus was their long-promised Messiah.

But speaking to Gentiles? Associating with Gentiles? That was outside his wheelhouse.

Maybe that describes many Christians today. We want to speak only to those we are comfortable with.

For some people, those of a different race might make talking about Jesus seem difficult. Some living among us speak a different language and have brought the culture from their home country that makes it seem too hard for us to speak to them about Jesus, or maybe we feel unqualified.

Perhaps even *those* barriers seem rather insignificant compared to a few others. It has become increasingly unpopular to tell others their religious beliefs are wrong. That's not talking about doctrinal differences among Christians; how comfortable are you talking to someone from a non-Christian religion? A Buddhist, or someone who practices Islam, or some other religion?

Also of increased difficulty is talking to the secular religious people. You know the ones I'm talking about. Some are outright atheists. Some say they believe in science, or only in what they can see and touch with their own eyes and hands, or only believe in what can be proven.

How easy is it to write them all off? How easy is it to just be a Peter and want to stay in the comfort of your own bubble? To just sit in church with fellow Christians and never talk about Jesus outside these walls?

## III.

"Then Peter began to speak: 'Now I really am beginning to understand that God does not show favoritism, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35, EHV). In his formative years, Peter had learned that God accepted Jews simply because they were Jews and rejected anyone who was a Gentile—a non-Jew. Now he had learned to know better. Many things had been showing him this, but

especially that recently-seen vision.

Some people read the second part of that passage on the screen and think that Peter was referring to people like Cornelius who do their best earn God's favor. That gets back to Cornelius' possible question: "What must I do to be right with God?" Perhaps Peter could have answered: "I'm sorry, but you are too late." "Huh? What do you mean, too late? Too late to be saved?"

Not too late to be saved, too late to *do* anything. Jesus already did it all. Peter explains this way: "He sent his word to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36, EHV). Good news of peace in Jesus. Only by faith in Jesus are sins removed from a person's record.

Though Cornelius had learned much through his study of the Old Testament, peace through Jesus wasn't part of what he had learned. As a military man, when Cornelius heard the word "peace" he might have been thinking of the lack of war. In a sense, that's true. Sin separates people from God. It makes us his enemies. There's nothing but conflict between the natural, sinful nature and God.

But *we* don't have to go through such conflict. Jesus already did it. Jesus already fought the battle that paid for the sins of the world.

Peter says: "You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. <sup>38</sup>God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:37-38, EHV).

This is why Cornelius wanted to hear from Peter. He *had* heard about these things that had happened in Galilee. But he didn't hear the whole story. Peter speaks about Jesus' death and resurrection in the words after our text and concludes by saying: "Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43, EHV).

#### IV.

That's what Cornelius and his friends needed to know. That's what everyone needs to know. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. God shows no favoritism.

I think it's safe to say that non of you are of Jewish descent—at least, not that you know of. How important it is to know that God doesn't show favoritism and exclude you from being called children of God.

But that's what *everyone* needs to know. Remember all those people you find it difficult to talk to about Jesus? Without him they are doomed. They need the same information Cornelius craved—the same information you have—the same information Peter began to willingly proclaim to Gentiles. Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.

Everyone who believes receives that forgiveness because Jesus already made the payment for everyone. You can tell the drug dealer and the gang banger and the adherent to non-Christian religions, "Jesus paid for all your sins." To the secular people who wonder what good thoughts and prayers are, you can say, "come and see what the Lord Jesus has already done for you."

For those who ask: "What must I do to be right with God?" Tell them, "I'm sorry, but you are too late. Jesus already did it all for your salvation."

Tell them all "The good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36, EHV). Amen.