

With the spread of the gospel, we have already seen that the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, and other gentiles around Judea and Samaria, received Christ as Savior, and Lord. In our last two sessions we focused on Peter and Cornelius, who was a Roman Centurion. We observed how God orchestrated the events, so that in answer to Cornelius' prayers, Peter went to Joppa for the purpose of sharing the gospel.

Cornelius was a godly man, but he had not yet received the gospel message. Because he loved and worshipped God with all of his heart, God made a way for him to hear the gospel so that he might be saved. In tonight's passage we find out what happened when Peter was faithful in his witness, and Cornelius was open to the gospel message, and willing to receive Jesus in faith. Also, passage this evening, we will see as model of how God uses our personal testimonies to reach the lost. Please read along with me, Acts 10:34-48.

What Peter says in verses 34 and 35 is a huge departure from Jewish thought. If God shows no partiality, and He accepts anyone who fears Him and does what is righteousness to Him, then Gentiles are just as capable of having a personal relationship with God, as are the Jews. With these words Peter sweeps away all prejudice, and abolishes the idea of indoctrination into Judaism as a necessity in order for a person to be saved. God's salvation has been extended to the whole world through the witness of the church, and faith in Jesus Christ.

This is an unthinkable concept for the conservative Jew of that day, trapped in the traditions of his or her faith, but it is not without precedence in the scriptures. Consider Genesis 12 where God told Abram that all the nations would be blessed through him and his seed. Consider that God sent Jonah to the Ninevehites, so that they might repent, and be spared of God's judgment. God has always extended His love to all people, but He set aside Abraham, and his decedents, for a special purpose, through whom He brought the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Peter says that God accepts those who fear Him, and those who do what is right in God's sight. We must not interpret this verse to suggest salvation by works, for the gospel message clearly states that salvation is by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. But, the bible also says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom begins with an understanding of who God is. The application of wisdom is doing what is right in God's site, so that he or she will be acceptable to God. A person cannot seek God with all of his or her heart without submitting to His authority over their life.

In our culture, I fear that this is not always fully understood, and the church has promoted a cheapened sense of God's grace. In our zeal to win lost souls to Christ, we promote the idea that all you have to do is say a prayer, and be baptized, in order to be saved. Jesus said you must be born again. Salvation is preceded by repentance and faith. There must be a change in direction as a person turns from a life of sin, to a life submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ.

In verse 36, Peter transitions into sharing the gospel message. When he says, "He sent the message to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ -He is Lord of all," reveals the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. The Jewish people were a blessing to all the peoples of the world, because through their line the Messiah came, and through the Jewish people, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ began to go out to the whole world. Notice too that Peter calls Jesus, "Lord of all." A truly born again believer recognizes the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and His authority, beginning with their own lives, and then extending to all of creation.

Peter begins his testimony with a recognition that his listeners already knew about the gospel. This makes perfect sense when you think about it. Jesus was such a dynamic personality that word about Him spread quickly during His earthly ministry. People talked about His miracles. Those who received healing told others. Rumors circulated about His resurrection. Word spread throughout the region and Jesus had to be the topic of many conversations.

There is a difference between knowing about the gospel, and knowing Jesus. The gospel message is the means by which lost souls come to know Jesus, personally, as Lord and Savior. Salvation is not a matter of just having the knowledge about Jesus, but about receiving that knowledge in such a way that it impacts the heart, and changes a person's view of life, the world, and eternity.

In his testimony, Peter talks about Jesus, from the perspective of an eyewitness. Five times in the book of acts, the scripture refers to the Apostles as eyewitnesses. Peter speaks with authority, because he knows that his words are true. He was there. He saw it all. Before you or I can be an effective witness, we have to have real convictions about our faith. We have to settle in our hearts that the gospel is completely true. We have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes, but we do have a personal testimony of how He has changed our lives, and answered our prayers. We have His personal presence with us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If we talk about Jesus, but we have doubts about whom He is, or what He has done, we will not be able to convince others that they can be saved through faith in Him.

Peter said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and with power, at Jesus' baptism. This was an affirmation of Jesus' Messiah-ship. Messiah means the Anointed One. At His baptism, God anointed Jesus, and declared Him to be His Messiah. Jesus further proved that He is the Christ through the demonstration of His authority, by all kinds of miracles.

In spite of all this evidence, the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah, and put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, or more accurately, a Roman Cross made from a tree. This is an essential element of the gospel message. In Chapter 3, Peter said to the Jews, "You killed the author of life." In Chapter 4 he told them, "You crucified Him." In chapter 5, he told the Sanhedrin, "You killed Him by hanging Him on a tree." In Chapter 7, Stephen told the Jews, "You martyred Him."

There would be no salvation apart from the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for our sins. He was the perfect, sacrificial, lamb of God, who surrendered His life, assuming the cost of the penalty of my sin, and yours, so that we might be forgiven, and inherit eternal life. Jesus, who was God in the flesh, demonstrated His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, but on the third day, God raised Him from the dead.

It has often been said that when we share the gospel, we must not leave Jesus hanging on the cross. Jesus' sacrifice was essential, but we know that we have victory through His resurrection from the grave. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? The bible says that we must believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead in order to be saved. Without the resurrection there would be no hope for victory over sin and death. But, if we believe in our hearts that Jesus was whom the bible says, and we believe that Jesus proved it by His resurrection; then we have confidence of forgiveness of our sins, and eternal life in His name.

After delivering the basic truths of the gospel message, Peter returns to the theme of the eyewitnesses of these things. Those who were with Him, and put their trust in Him during His earthly ministry, those who saw Him crucified on a Roman Cross, were blessed to see Him alive after the resurrection. They ate with Him, and drank with Him. Jesus fellowshiped with them, and explained the gospel message. Once they were equipped, and filled with the Holy Spirit, He

sent them out to be His witnesses to testify to the lost world that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, appointed by God to judge the living, and the dead.

All of the prophets bear witness that everyone who places their faith in Jesus, receives forgiveness of sins through faith in His name. Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36, and other prophecies foretold this truth concerning the Messiah who was to come. The gospel message is that Messiah has come, and no matter who you are, your background, or your circumstances, you can be saved through faith in Jesus' name. Confess and repent of your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, and resurrection. Invite Him to take control of your life, so that you can be forgiven, and live with Him forever in heaven.

The Old Testament, written over a period of a couple of thousand years, has as a central theme, salvation through faith in the Messiah who was to come. The central theme of the New Testament is that the Messiah has come, just as God promised, and He is coming again, to take those who trust Him as Savior and Lord, so that we can be with Him forever. He is also coming to judge those who refuse to submit to His Lordship, by rejecting God's grace.

The bible says that before Peter could finish sharing the gospel, the Holy Spirit fell on those who listened to his message, as evidenced by them speaking in other languages. Remember that the word "tongues" used in Acts, by some translations, is best translated as other languages, not ecstatic utterances as is sometimes practiced today. In the book of Acts, speaking in tongues is an affirmation of God that the gospel includes a new people group. The words spoken were not gibberish, but they extolled, or glorified, God.

The bible says that the Jews who were with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. Receiving the Holy Spirit was a tremendous affirmation for those who believed, but it was also a sign to the early church concerning God's intent to offer salvation to the whole world through faith in Jesus Christ.

This event helped to usher in the understanding that there is equality before God between Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles were no longer to be considered as unclean, when the blood of Christ has cleansed them. Jews and Gentiles become brothers and sisters through faith in Jesus, and as we will see in the next passage, Peter has to defend this truth among the other Jewish believers.

When Peter saw that the gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, he took the initiative to baptize them in Jesus' name. Please note that they were not baptized so that they could be saved, but after they received Christ, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit, Peter baptized them. Jesus instructed the Apostles, as you go, make disciples, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We do not baptize the lost; we baptize those who have been saved.

Cornelius and the others were filled with joy, but they had many questions. They needed further discipleship, so that pleaded with Peter to stay with them for a while. Peter went from a righteous Jew who would not defile himself by associating with a Gentile, to living with them for a number of days. He accepted them as brothers and sisters in the faith. He ate with them, understanding what God tried to teach him in his vision.

The message for the church today is that no one is worthy of salvation, but God loves everyone, and offers salvation to all who will come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice on the cross. In Christ, God took on flesh, and offered His physical life as a sacrifice for our sins, so that through faith in Him we might be forgiven and have eternal life. But, Jesus not only died for us, by the authority of God He arose from the grave, and showed Himself to hundreds of eyewitnesses. We have their testimonies recorded in the pages of the New Testament. He ascended into heaven, and He is coming again to receive His own, and take us to our heavenly home.

If you have not already done so, why not trust Jesus even now? Confess and repent of your sins to God. Invite Jesus into your heart as Savior and Lord. Be sealed with His Holy Spirit. Begin your life of faith that leads to eternal life, and join with the rest of us in our daily walk with the Lord.