

16. The Lord of all

November 24, 2013

It's easy to forget where we came from and how wretched and hopeless we were before the Lord Jesus saved us from our spiritual pit; it's easy to think that God saved us because we were special and He needed us for some crazy reasons.

At the same time, we could even come up with an outrageous notion that certain types of people can not and should not be saved.

According to the Bible we read and believe, at the foot of the cross it is a leveled ground without a single wall. In other words, God has absolutely no racial, social, or financial preference for whom He wants to save. And guess what, He doesn't even ask for our opinion or permission to save other sinners. Imagine that.

In this chapter apostle Peter gets to have an all out face to face meeting with the Gentiles. As an orthodox Jew all of his life, Peter was programmed that the Gentiles were just a little bit better class than slaves, but they were often considered 'dogs' because they were spiritually unclean, non-kosher people.

But when Peter witnessed what the Holy Spirit did to the Gentiles, he realized that God did not see any difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. After all, Jesus is the Lord of all, not just the Lord of the Jews.

A. CORNELIUS' VISION

Acts 10:1-8 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. 6 He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do." 7 And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. 8 So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Caesarea is sixty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem and thirty miles north of Joppa on the shores of the Mediterranean in Judea. It was the headquarters of the Roman governor of the province of Judea. Do not be confused with Caesarea Philippi which is located almost 70 miles northeast of Caesarea.

Cornelius was a centurion that was a commander of one hundred Roman soldiers. Though he was a Roman, he deserted his pagan religion that was filled with myths and empty religious rituals. He had turned to Judaism in hopes that he could find salvation. He was a God-fearing, being obedient to God's law, fasting, and praying man. But he was not saved.

In many ways, Cornelius and modern day religious people have similarities. They are both equally lost in spite of their devotion to their religions. But the difference is that while Cornelius was not satisfied with his religion, many religious people were happily lost and don't see a reason they should be saved.

God sent an angel to instruct Cornelius and, in true military fashion, Cornelius immediately obeyed.

B. PETER'S VISION

Acts 10:9-23 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. 17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. 18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. 19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." 21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

God works on both ends to bring His purposes to pass. While He was working in the heart of Cornelius, He was working in the heart of Peter as well. This is what we call "confirmation". When the Lord is preparing you to do something, He will bring someone or something to confirm you that you are doing what He wants you to do, for your sake, to assure you.

I heard a silly story. There was a Christian woman who was afraid of flying and need to make a flight that required a long overseas flight in a Boeing 747. One morning she woke up, the first thing she saw was her alarm clock that says 7:47 am. She thought that she got a confirmation. No, that's not it. That would be a superstition.

God had to work on Peter's heart as well. Peter as a Jew lived within the wall of the Law of Moses that separated the Jews and the Gentiles and this wall had been broken down at the cross.

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

But now, all of that would change, and God would declare that there is no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. The only difference is made by individual – either eternal condemnation or eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

Peter saw all sorts of kosher and non-kosher animals and he was told to kill and eat. Do you wonder why God used a vision of food to teach Peter that the Gentiles were not unclean? For two reasons:

1) It is because in the Jewish mindset “clean and unclean foods” was and still is a major problem. God was using this centuries -old regulation to teach Peter an important spiritual lesson.

Even modern day Israel restaurants cannot set up their menu without an approval from a rabbi who makes sure that none of their foods is non-kosher .

2) The Jew was not “clean” and the Gentile “unclean,” but both Jew and Gentile were “unclean” before God. This meant that a Gentile did not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

Mark 7:18 So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” 20 And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Did you notice how Peter answered to the Lord in v14? “Not so, Lord!” We cannot call Jesus Lord and say, “No” to Him at the same time. If He is truly our Lord and Master, our answer should be always “Yes” and obey His commands.

After the vision repeating three times, Peter got it. Please note that he welcomed the visitors including a Roman soldier to Simon the tanner’s home and took care of them and departed with them the next day without hesitation.

C. MR. PETER MEETS MR. CORNELIUS

Acts 10:24-33 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” 30 So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ 33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

I wouldn’t be surprised that if Cornelius thought that Peter was God’s special messenger who was above the human level. That is why he fell down at Peter’s feet and worshiped him.

I love the way Peter handled the situation. He didn’t say, “Cornelius, you can kiss my ring since I am the first pope.” Whenever in the Bible worship is offered to men or to angels as in Revelation 19:10, it is refused. But Jesus received such worship freely . This proves that Jesus is more than a man, and greater than any angel.

In the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, there is a statue of Peter, where people come and kiss or touch the toe of the statue in reverence. This is inappropriate reverence towards any man or angel. We might almost wish that Peter would visit the cathedral named after him and kindly correct such people. No human is worthy of our worship.

I am sure that you've heard some misinformed people's comments, such as, "All religions lead to the same God." That comment couldn't be any more further from the truth. There is only one way to get to one true God, it is through Jesus Christ.

Cornelius was a case in point. He had piety through his previous empty religion of following many gods and morality being a good, respected, and generous person. Yet he was not saved and he knew it. Cornelius was longing for the true God and he was seeking Him. Whenever there is a searching heart, God always responds.

Jeremiah 29:13-14a And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord

D. THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON THE GENTILES

Acts 10:34-48 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all-- 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. 40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

There can be no faith apart from the Word of God, and Peter preached that Word. When it comes to sin and salvation, there is no difference of the background of humans. Everyone has the same Creator, and all men need the same Savior.

As Peter summarized the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when you witness to others, talk about Jesus, not how bad you were before Christ saved you. Peter made it clear that Israel was God's instrument for accomplishing His work, but that Jesus is "Lord of all," and not just Lord of Israel.

As these Roman people were listening to Peter's teaching of Jesus, the people started to receive Jesus into their hearts. This is a dream moment for any preacher to have.

The people were getting saved left and right and the Holy Spirit came upon them. Don't you get the Holy Spirit goose-bumps? Then, the Holy Spirit interrupted Peter's teaching.

God the Father interrupted Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration when he was aimlessly rambling; and now, God the Spirit interrupted him – and Peter never was able to finish his sermon. Would I love to have interruptions of this kind by the Holy Spirit Himself!

The Holy Spirit was giving a clear lesson to Peter and the six Jews who came with him that these Gentiles were truly saved and God gave an equal footing at the cross for the Jews and the Gentiles.

One more thing we must notice is that these Gentiles were not saved by being baptized; rather they were baptized because they gave evidence of being saved.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) There is no sinner Jesus cannot save; and there is no self-righteous person who doesn't need Him.

2) Don't ever think that a certain type of person is beyond God's salvation. Corrie ten Boom, a Holocaust survivor said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love not deeper still."